Wortley Hall, November 2014

PiPs and other Pub Discussion Methodologies

As at *WHall* May 2012 and *The Adelphi* November 2012 with modifications and now as facilitated by Paul Doran and Arthur Adlen taking PiPs as the primary example. Participants are recommended to visit www.philosophyinpubs.com reading the Home and About pages. Not essential because Paul and Arthur will outline these issues.

Pub discussion – we're taking this to mean any informal discussion circle/group activities, which may take place in pubs, bars, cafes, church halls or wherever. Informal, but organized with a theme.

1. A brief review of current developments: Philosophy in Pubs (PiPs); café philosophique; Discussion in Pubs (DiPs); Scibars; Salons stimulated by the *Battle of Ideas*, noting new additions to our list in 2014… with a brief up-date on 2-6 below….

2. There's nothing new in this - from Socrates to Co-op Circles, WEA discussion circles, Teach-ins; History work-shops..

3. Historian EP Thompson quoted this at the head of a long Marxist polemical Open Letter in 1974:

   ` "On a huge hill,

   Cragged and steep, Truth stands, and hee that will

   Reach her, about must and about must goe;

   And what the hills suddennes resists, winne so." *Satyre III*, John Donne

   The idea of circling round big issues to get nearer the truth through debate and discussion has a long radical history…

4. The WEA was founded very much within that tradition: 'Education by collision' was an early WEA slogan, and Mansbridge, the founder of the WEA, used to quote a Persian proverb: 'The Lecture is One, Discussion is One Thousand'.

5. Discuss Lectures… each who wishes can give an example of an outstanding Lecture they have heard and remember well. How well though do we remember lectures?

6. *The Institute for Learning* (IfL) magazine, Winter 2011/12 quotes from a recent American research project 'The Learning Pyramid' on average retention rates:

   The Lecture 5%; Reading 10%; Group discussion 50%; Teaching others 90%

   Why then do lectures then remain so extraordinarily popular? Note the contemporary phenomenon of Literary Festivals, which attract huge audiences for authors of every kind of book talking about their work and ideas…

7. Pub discussion methodology is a good way – even one of the best ways - of learning, the IfL evidence suggests? It is also very cost-effective and even free-of-charge.

8. But what are the problems with discussion groups and circles? Lack of information, authority and focus? Dominance by confident individual/s? Manipulation by the leader, facilitator, chair? Can they work, using experts at a distance, including scientists?

9. How are the problems best resolved? Using contemporary media for expert information from authorities? Guidelines and techniques to assist participation and to avoid dominance and manipulation?

10. Ways ahead for our project/s?