

# History of Philosophy A: Lecture One

## 1. Seminars

*What are seminars for?*

Seminars are **not** example classes; **not** places to ensure that you've done your 'homework'; **not** lectures; **not** intended to solely be for you to clarify a small number of issues you have with the readings.

Seminars are instead a place for you to come and discuss philosophy. That is, a chance for you to practise one of the *necessary* Learning Skills. They are not 'tutor led', whereby your tutor starts lecturing you and giving you more information.

Instead, you – the students – are meant to debate the issues raised in the readings/course. You – the students – are meant to be evaluating whether a given argument is good or not. You won't learn *anything* if your tutor just explained where the weak points in an argument were – you have to find them yourselves. You won't produce good work if your tutor just explained to you one way the debate can progress – that won't give you the chance to explore the topic yourself and do your *own* research.

*How do you prepare for seminars?*

**ALL** students **MUST** prepare for their seminars. **ALL** students must come to the seminar with answers to the seminar questions. **WRITTEN** answers. One side of typed A4, or equivalent. You **WILL** be kicked out if you fail to do this, or bring some miserable excuse of 'yes and no's' written next to the questions.

'Preparation' requires more than just managing to not get kicked out. **The questions are not 'homework'**. You can probably quite easily do the minimum to not get ejected. But the minimum won't allow you to **discuss** the issues with other students. The minimum effort won't allow you to **explore** the topic. So **do** prepare thoroughly.

Really **think** about the issues, and how to answer the questions. **Don't** think about them for ten minutes whilst watching *Eastenders*. **Do** sit somewhere quiet and **do** dedicate some serious amount of time thinking about the issues and your answers to them.

*How is a seminar successful?*

Obviously **you have to talk**. Not only do you have to think about arguments in the reading, you'll have to think about arguments your fellow students put forth in the seminar. It **isn't** the place of the tutor to sit there and explain the flaws in the argument. If that happened, there would just be lots of one-and-one conversations with the tutor and everyone waiting for their turn. We *could* do that, but that *wouldn't* give you a chance to hone your skills of **evaluation**; and your skills of **clearly** presenting arguments.

Assume every argument is flawed. This **definitely** includes your own arguments. Assume that there are a good handful of possible objections that could be put to you and that you will have to answer. Assume that the phrase 'Well I just think you're wrong' is always inappropriate. Get used to being wrong, and being told you're wrong, as well coming to believe that what you said earlier is, in fact, wrong.

## **2. St. Augustine (354-430 AD)**

Born in Algeria (well, Thagaste) His mother was a Catholic. He actually went off and joined a Gnostic religion. When he was in Rome, he gave up on his religion and became a Skeptic. His mother arranged a marriage with an eleven year old girl, and he was forced to break up with his concubine. But as the girl he was betrothed to was only 11, he ended up taking a second concubine.

In 386 he underwent a change of faith and became a committed Catholic. He gave away his money, turned his house into a monastery. He became a renowned philosopher, theologian, and, obviously, was much beloved by the Catholic Church.

He died of illness during the siege of Hippo by the Vandals.

## **3. Augustine on Lust, Sex and Adultery**

*Marriage:* Augustine didn't just think sex outside marriage was a sin. Sex *within* marriage was a sin as well. If you were married, and having sex for any reason other than procreation, Augustine thought it was a *venial sin*. That is, a sin that doesn't commit you to Hell.

*Homosexuality:* Obviously, Augustine just thought this was right out.

*Masturbation:* Also right out.

His views were wide ranging. Even...

*'[ ...] I prefer to think that Diogenes and others who reputedly did such a thing rather acted out the motions of lying together before the eyes of people who really did not know what was really done under the cloak. I do not believe that there could have been any achievement of such pleasure under the glare of human gaze'* ('On the City of God' Book XIV chapter 20)

*Erections:* Augustine had strong views on even human biology. As lust was a punishment for original sin, Adam and Eve were not subject to it before the Fall. So before the Fall, they could control such functions 'on demand' as it were. So Augustine was deeply interested in questions of sex and lust.

## **4. God**

Historical philosophy has a pre-occupation with God. *Specifically* in the medieval times, but even in modern philosophy there's a lot of God. It's just the way it is with historical philosophy – when the Catholic Church runs the show He tends to be of overwhelming interest to philosophers. So obviously a lot of the philosophy we're going to be looking at this semester is heavily influenced by religious, specifically Catholic, concerns. Even next semester, we'll see God gets more than a look-in. However, I hope that you'll be able to compare the two eras and see differences between how philosophers like Augustine wove theological matters into their texts and how the modern philosophers did otherwise.