

# Philosophy in Wivenhoe Park

## Session summaries

### **I Spy ... Ideology!**

Dr Lorna Finlayson

'Ideology' is one of those words that gets used in a number of different ways. It often just means someone's political world-view. But it can also refer to a particularly interesting kind of illusion. This is not just any old illusion or error, but a kind that is useful or convenient for some section of society. For example, the economic theory that wealth will 'trickle down' if you let the rich get richer and richer is terribly convenient for... the rich. And maybe that's why it's such an influential and well-promoted idea. In other words, ideology is a kind of sacrifice of truth to power. But ideology, by its very nature, is not always easy to spot. What forms does it take in our time and society? How important is ideology in shaping what happens in politics? What does it mean for democracy? And what, if anything, can we do about it?

### **Sick Normality**

Prof Fabian Freyenhagen

Can societies be ill? Is our contemporary society pathological? The focus of this talk will be on mental distress and its social context. More and more people are diagnosed with mental illness, and an ever-rising number take psychiatric medication. One recently published study found that by the time people had reached the age of 45, 86% met the criteria for at least one mental disorder, and, in most cases, more than one disorder. Already by the early 20s, a majority met the criteria for at least one mental disorder. Being diagnosed with mental illness has become the statistical norm. Why and how does the society's functioning produce what it considers "pathological"? Does it make us ill? Is the normality it asks of us sick?

### **Is Life too competitive?**

Prof Timo Jütten

Modern life can be very competitive. We compete in education and for good jobs, but also in sports and games, and perhaps for success in life in general. Are all of these competitions the same, or do they differ? And if they differ, how so? What does fairness in competition require? Are their different requirements of fairness in different types of competition? Does competition make us competitive? We will discuss your experiences of competition and look at some well-known discussions of competition in the history of philosophy in order to find answers to some of these questions.

### **Are there True Contradictions?**

Prof Wayne Martin

At least since Aristotle, logic has been built on a principle known as *The Law of Non-Contradiction*. According to that so-called Law, a proposition (such as 'God exists' or '2+2=4') is either true or not true. It cannot be both. But is the Law of Non-Contradiction really a law at all? The thesis that there are some true contradictions is known in philosophy as *dialethism*, and has in recent years been vigorously defended. But what would it be like to recognise true contradictions, and how would our practices of reasoning and debate have to adapt?

### **Could Something Unethical Ever be the Right Thing to Do?**

Dr Dan Watts

In 1891, Paul Gauguin abandoned his wife and family to travel to French Polynesia to pursue his interests as an artist. According to a story in the Bible that is important to the major monotheistic religions, Abraham showed his obedience to God by setting out for Mount Moriah where he expected to sacrifice Isaac, his own beloved son. These seem to be cases in which individuals value something higher than their ethical obligations: in the one case, their own artistic creativity; in the other, their religious devotion. But could it ever really be justified for a person to override their ethical duties for the sake of some higher end?