
The party-goers guide to philosophy

Philosophy students are expected to sound philosophical, for example at parties. There follow some tips for creating a good impression—all beginning with A.

Abelard: Famous as the only philosopher to have suffered castration in the line of duty.

And for his affair with Heloise. Now you know everything about Abelard.

Abortion: Change the topic immediately.

Absolute: a danger sign in others. If someone mentions 'absolute truth' or, worse, 'the absolute', move away fast. They think they have philosophical opinions.

Absurd, the: Chatting-up vocabulary, only works with rather dim and impressionable victims. Anything outrageous you do can be based on your vision of the absurd, and your truly profound insight that life is absurd can explain whatever you've done or intend to do.

Action theory: NEVER refer to this. Not exotic-sounding enough to impress non-philosophers, and too outmoded to impress philosophers.

Alexander of Aphrodisia: I haven't the faintest idea who he was and what he said, but its a great name and you can be sure that whoever you're talking to will be equally ignorant. Sounds sexy too.

Alienation: people are alienated in modern society and wouldn't be if they were living in caves or in Utopia. That's why you are grumpy and ill-mannered tonight.

Analytic philosophy: A bogeyman. Analytical philosophers run around showing no respect for tradition or decent emotions or the true depth and absurdity of the human condition

(q.v.). On the other hand they are terribly sharp and intimidating.

Analytic/synthetic distinction: There's no such thing, but on the other hand the sign of a philosopher is that when you're not sure something's right you preface it with 'It's analytic that...'

Animals: Very good move to allude to the importance of issues about the moral status of animals (don't say 'animal rights'). But at all costs don't state any actual opinions, unless they are very bland or very extreme.

Anscombe: Useful for deflecting attention from your ignorance of philosophy; just tell Elizabeth Anscombe stories. Standard technique when discussing Wittgenstein (q.v.). Get them from the grapevine or just make them up.

Appearance and reality: An obviously superficial distinction, so look down on it. But an obviously important distinction, which your interlocutor cannot quite understand.

A priori/a posteriori: No one knows what these are either, so they're always safe to use, but you have to decide which is which.

Aristotle: No one has read Aristotle, and those who say they have disagree about what he meant. So you can describe a view as 'rather Aristotelian, really' with complete confidence.

Artificial intelligence: This is why philosophy is a good thing and should have millions of pounds poured into it. We can't have better computers unless we understand about artificial intelligence and only philosophers can tell us what it is. Then change the topic.

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