

Introduction to the *Philosophy of Knowledge Module*

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MRes Induction Week

(slides available on web
address at end)

Introduction(s)

- **Me** - Bruce Edmonds
- **You** - Please briefly introduce yourselves, your “rough area of study”, plus (optionally) one thing that a friend might say about you
- Purpose of this session:
 - To introduce you to the purpose and form of the Philosophy of Knowledge module
 - To get you thinking about what you have let yourself in for!
 - To start you thinking!

A Thesis is...

- ...a (novel, sound, sufficiently significant) *contribution to knowledge*
- That is, your “job” is to learn how to discover new significant knowledge in a sound way and write this up for anyone to read!
- So what *is* this “knowledge” stuff that you will be producing for society?
 - *Can* we rely on it?
 - *How* can we rely on it?
 - Are there *different kinds* of knowledge?
 - etc. etc.

To make it “easier” ...

- Academics disagree about everything, including:
 - the nature of knowledge
 - whether this is relative to culture?
 - whether this is a reflection of an independent reality?
 - etc. etc.
- Each (sub-)field has its own disputes and answers about these questions...
- ...indeed they don't only differ as to what the answers are but even what the questions are!
- It is a complex mess!

Why is this?

- Partly it is due to clever “under-cutting” moves by academics...
- ...partly due to the different natures of what they are studying...
- ...and partly due to the different traditions and histories of different academic fields
- but (in my opinion) it is mostly due to the fact that anything social is very **very** difficult to understand and study!
- This, of course, is your task

The Purpose of the PoK Module is...

- To get you thinking about these issues
- To make you aware of some of the difficulties underlying knowledge
- To get you reading relevant literature with philosophical leanings...
- ...and to understand it (or some of it)
- To prepare you for some of the questions and objections you may encounter
- To produce better knowledge
- ...whatever *that* means! 😊

Philosophy is...

- About thinking about such issues
- and, crucially, *arguing* about them (at least in the Western Tradition)
- It will not tell you the answers
- but will make you aware of some of the possibilities, traditions and arguments
- Will hopefully get you thinking *critically* about your own arguments and assumptions
- *Anticipating* possible objections

Example: *Argument*

- An argument attempts to persuade other of the truth of a conclusion
- Or otherwise justify such statements
- It is what you might say in response to:
 - How do you know *that*?
 - I don't believe *that*
 - Why should I belief *that*?
 - I disagree
- Usually, taking the other to the conclusion you are defending in a series of steps

Exercise 1: Judging arguments

- In groups of two or three
- Look at some of the arguments on the sheet, and decide for each :
 1. If you think it is a **good** or **bad** argument
 2. Whether you agree with its conclusion
 3. Whether you agree with the steps leading to the conclusion

Conclusion

- It is a necessary part of becoming a PhD student that you learn to judge whether arguments presented to you are good or bad
- The Goodness of an argument is separate from whether one agrees with its conclusion
- These are not simple things to determine!
- We will come back to the Western Tradition of Argument in the First Full PoK Session

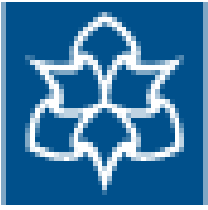
The PoK Module

Is in two parts:

1. An introduction to the Western Tradition of Academic Thought, Argument and Critical Thinking (2 sessions)
2. An introduction to some of the main disputes in the philosophy of knowledge:
 - Rationalism vs. Empiricism
 - Realism vs. Constructivism
 - Positivism vs. Pragmatism
 - The Linguistic Turn

The Assessment is...

- An 5000 word Essay
- Which is basically a prototype of that part of your thesis that justifies your approach to knowledge and the assumptions behind this
- This is due in the summer after the second set of PoK sessions
- Do not worry about it before then!



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The End



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