

Welcome to Theories of Science!

KULT8850/1

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"Advanced introduction to theories of science"

- The traditional way: Examen Philosophicum for the smartest students, taught by philosophers (of science)
- Since the 1980s: The monopoly of philosophy to have the right to think about science 'as such' as part of their job has been challenged and ultimately dissolved
- Consequence for this course: Added **"new" concerns** to theories about science: current state of science, relevance of science, uses of science, critiques of science, practices of scientific work

Plan for today

- Until 11
 - Expectation management: Why taking this course is a good idea (besides it being mandatory for PhD students at HF)
 - "Getting to know each other in academia", in theory and practice
- Rest of the day:
 - A break from me with Jonathan introducing his lecture on Objectivity, Method, and Truth (continued tomorrow)
 - We experiment with enlightenment, anti-enlightenment and romanticism

Mandatory for HF but why?

1. Faculty of Humanities (and very welcome guests): No science without **critical reflection** of the philosophical fundamentals and the socio-cultural context of research and how both affect research process and outcomes
2. Help PhD students to **navigate** their PhD projects
3. Encourage **collaboration and exchange** (in its broadest sense) across different projects and disciplines within the humanities and across faculties

What do we do in this course to achieve these goals?

3x2 days

- Day 1+2: Philosophy and research ethics
- Day 3+4: Science in context
- Day 5+6: Critique of science

	Philosophy and Ethics (1+2)	Science in context (3+4)	Critique of science (4+5)
Reflection			
Navigation			
Collaboration and Exchange			

1. Guided reflection

in lectures and group work covering

1. Philosophy and research ethics (days 1+2): what is knowledge, what types of knowledge are there, what is objectivity, what is theorising, what is allowed and frowned upon and why, ...
2. Socio-cultural context of scientific knowledge production (days 3+4): How does its context form science (and the other way around)?
3. Critical perspectives on science (days 5+6): Could it be otherwise?

2. Navigational support

1. Through helping you to find your way of dealing with thorny issues of objectivity, truth, and ethics (days 1+2)
2. By painting a map of the socio-cultural and institutional landscapes that you will have to navigate (days 3+4)
3. Helping you to redraw the map in a better way (days 5+6)

3. Collaboration and exchange

in multi-, inter, transdisciplinary discussions

1. across different approaches to knowledge, objectivity, truth, and research ethics (days 1+2)
2. as intrinsic feature of research (days 3+4)
3. to go beyond individualising and individualised complaints and competition (days 5+6)

Formalities

- Mandatory attendance
 - Important to achieve the goals
 - Life happens, I trust your judgement, just keep me updated
- Hand in a short paper (7.5 ECTS) or a paper (10 ECTS) by 31 August 2026

Questions, needs, wishes?

Getting to know each other ("as academics"-edition)

The challenge of getting to know each other in academia

- Potentially a global space with a large number of nodes that are potentially "peers" and interconnected
- Nodes: Institutions and people
- Certain hierarchies are public (e.g., university rankings) others are hidden (reputation)

The academic standard approach to getting to know each other: Elevator pitches (thesis title and affiliation)

The curse and/or game of reputation

- Reputation: How important is this "node"?
- knowing (of) each other < citing and being cited < inviting and being invited < hiring and being hired
- Particularly important when creating publication opportunities (e.g., edited books, special issues) and applying for research funding

Unintended consequences

Leads to

- over-promising and over-committing
- chronic avoidance of "invisible work" among some "successful" researchers
- outright fraudulent behaviour ("paper mills", "citation cartels")

What to do with this as PhD student I

- Everyone is an impostor and everyone struggles with navigating this fluid space
- You are often let alone with the task of finding your "allies", future colleagues, academic friends
 - Go to conferences, watch and learn
 - "Cold calls" (invitations, questions, requests) are ok (even if they are not always answered)
 - Academia is vast: find your tribe within - they all have their own quirks, rules and expectations - and some will fit your personality

What to do with this II (when presenting yourself)

- Learn about the "value" of your affiliation and use it strategically
- Focus on why your project is important (someone thought that it is, otherwise it would not be funded)
- Avoid bragging but also self-deprecation (do as I say not as i do)

A non-standard approach to getting to know each other:

Thought experiment: The day after your defence

What would you like to be able to say when looking back?

T. Ultimately, my PhD work was committed to the search for **Truth** and Knowledge about XYZ.

P. Ultimately, my PhD work has contributed to my **Personal** development.

S. Ultimately, my PhD work has contributed to finding **Solutions** to problem XYZ.

C. Ultimately, my PhD work was committed to a **Critique** of XYZ.

X. Something else (which is clearly distinct from the previous choices)

Group work

- Think about which statement matches best
- Walk to your "coordinates"
- Talk with your colleagues about
 - Why you are where you are and where you also could be and where you definitely not would like to be (in the room)
 - What are the joys of science? What motivates you?