

Knowledge and Reality A: Lecture Four

1. Lectures

The Wrong Model

You turn up; do the lecture; and then represent information given to you in lectures in your own words.

The Right Model

Lectures are the beginning of your research. It is as far from the end as one could get without just staying in bed. Instead a lecture is equipping you with some basic information. Some of the stuff you are looking at it quick complex. You need *some* idea of what's going on. You need to know your Tripartite from your Conceptual Analysis; your Foundationalism from your Agrippa's Trilemma. Lectures serve a purpose, but that purpose is only *sketching* the topic and giving you some basic tools to get on with. What you need to do is go *beyond* what is given you in lectures. Go *beyond* what myself and the tutors feed you.

2. Wider/Further Reading

Wider reading would be to read widely around the topic. So to read a book on Epistemology generally, or flick through a few random articles. Wider reading isn't a bad thing. You should do some. But our modules are already pretty broad ranging – it's not essential to read *yet more topics* and *yet more broadly*. So *some* wider reading should be done, but if you just read everything for every week's seminar for every module, you'll have a pretty broad base of knowledge.

Broader would be nice, but not what I'm going to concentrate on here. *Further* reading is concentrating on one topic and reading into that. This is good because your essay is on one topic, and reading more about that one topic is what we want you to do. So we want you, as part of writing essays, to identify material that will help you develop your understanding *of that specific topic*.

3. Where from?

So how do you go beyond? Well, you could start with a textbook. But that's only going to be a beginning as well. Reading a textbook is not often going to give you a *deeper* understanding of what's going on – it'll just say the same thing but differently

Reading lists

You can start with a reading list. Don't read *everything*. Remember you're meant to be focusing in on a topic. But it's only a beginning.

Footnotes

There are lots of ways. I'll enumerate some. You might 'follow the footnotes'. If you find a paper by Philosopher Bob saying 'such and such says X' and you're writing about X then the references Bob gives (often in the footnotes) will be invaluable research. And those papers will reference other papers. You can go and read them! Effectively, you're building your own reading list out of the footnotes and references from other papers.

Google Scholar

The internet is now an amazing and wondrous device. Try Google Scholar (*not* regular Google). If I want to know about Clark, I might type it into Google. Notice the direct link to the JSTOR document. Also note the bit where those who cited it are linked to.

Book Index

Remember, don't read through a whole book when writing your essay! You want *specific* things. BE SELECTIVE! Use the index!

Sit there and flick

You can also just go to the library and flick through journals and books. The books are arranged in topic order. Go to that topic, pull them off one by one when they look relevant and *see* if they're relevant. Go to the journals and flick through the contents page looking at the title of articles and *see* if they're relevant.

4. Internet

The internet is full of cranks. When it comes to 'Philosophy' it's full of *lots* of cranks. *Serious philosophy is published philosophy!*

Wikipedia

Wikipedia functions by getting lots of people with time on their hands to collectively act to get correct knowledge. With, say, mathematics, there are a lot of people who do maths. With mathematics, it's easy to see when someone's cocked up and said something wrong. With philosophy, there are far fewer skilled philosophers who know a lot about a topic and have time on their hands, such that they're willing to do research for free and give it to Wikipedia. When a philosophy article contains falsehoods and nonsense (i) less people are going to bother to try and change it (ii) the fight to change it will be long and hard (iii) who's going to put the effort in? Wikipedia is bad for a lot of philosophy.

What's good

- eBooks/JSTOR
- Stanford
- Blogs of a professional philosophers
- Webpages with unpublished articles of professional philosophers (Probably not that useful until third year)

5. What to do with it?

Getting the material is one part. Understanding it is another. Read things *carefully*. Read things *slowly*. Use what you've learnt as a springboard for understanding the articles/books. Don't read it all if you don't have to! You want the maximum result for the minimum effort. When you come to something you don't understand decide whether

- You can skip it and still understand what's going on (i.e. ignore the tangents)
- Go off and try and understand what's going on.
- Read something else – some stuff is too hard!

Take notes. But sparingly. If you just write notes on *everything*, without focus, you're just rewriting the article! You're doing something that takes time and makes you *think* you're working when you're not. Write notes only on things you (i) need for your essay (ii) think are difficult to understand and you want to explain your understanding of it. The rest of the time, you can always go back and *reread the article*.

6. And you!

But philosophy isn't just about books, it's also about your own ideas. They are *equally legitimate* ways. We're looking for *independence*, which can be different from originality. But a lot of research involves just talking and thinking. Sitting there thinking about something hard and what you want to say about it counts too!

Talk to one another. Talk to your lecturer/tutor. Use office hours! Talk in Seminars! Seminars are research too! That's why failing to prepare is so naff - you're blowing the chance to get to grips with ideas *and come up with responses to the material*.