Welcome to Theories of Science

KULT8850/1

Winter 2025

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KULT (=Dept. of Interdisciplinary Studies of Culture)

Plan for today

- Until 10
  - Expectation management: Why taking this course probably is a good idea (besides it being mandatory for PhD students at HF)
  - An introduction to "Getting to know each other in academia"
- Rest of the day:
  - Jonathan on Objectivity, Method, and Truth
  - Hannah on research ethics

Advanced introduction to theories of science

- The old fashioned way: Theories about theories
- Quality criteria: Truth, depth, comprehensiveness
- This course, "advanced":
  - adding new concerns to theories about theories: relevance, use of science, critique of science
  - addressing the practice of scientific knowledge production

Mandatory for HF but why?

1. Faculty of Humanities (and 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

LET OUR POWERS COMBINE!

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

3x2(+1) days x 3 goals

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

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, ...
2. Socio-cultural context of scientific knowledge production (days 3+4): How does this 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

LET OUR POWERS COMBINE!

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)
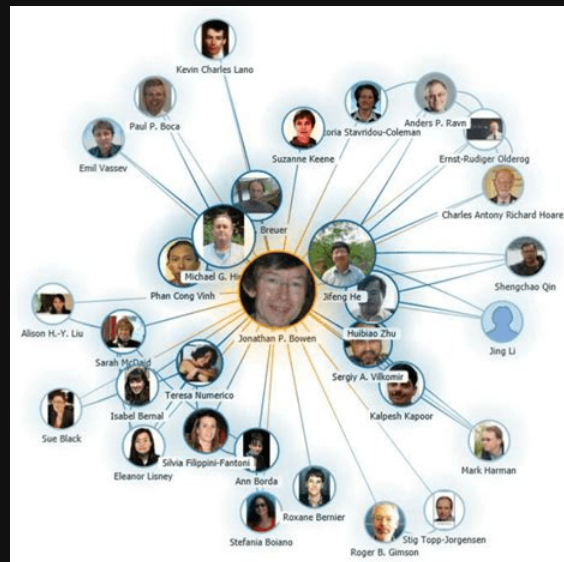
Formalities

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

Questions, needs, wishes?

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

The academic standard approach A: Through affiliation (institutional, personal)

The curse and/or game of reputation

- Individually **and** institutionally
- knowing (of) each other < citing and being cited < inviting and being invited < hiring and being hired
- Also important when creating publication opportunities and applying for research funding

Unintended consequences

Leads to

- a vast sea of scholarship which is never noticed by anyone
- chronic avoidance of "invisible work" among some "successful" researchers
- over-promising and over-committing
- outright fraudulent behaviour ("paper mills", "citation cartels")

More consequences

- Academics meet as individuals **and** as potentially useful "connection"
- Academia is not good at facilitating the social side of things: You are often let alone with the task of finding your "allies", future colleagues, academic friends
  - Go to conferences
  - "Cold" calls (invitations, questions, requests) are encouraged (even if they are not always answered)
  - Academia is vast: find your tribe within

The academic standard approach cont.d:

Your PhD projects in three sentences

- Finally! Time to do in-depth work! So much to explore, so much to learn!
- And then we are forced to present our research in very compressed form - and often already at the very beginning of the work!
- And it gets even worse after concluding the research: What have you found out (in three sentences)?

Some related questions

- Days 1+2: Philosophy
  - What do we know **before** we do our research?
  - How do we know that our research is **concluded**?
- Days 3+4: Socio-cultural context
  - What are the institutional, cultural, societal **expectations** towards our research and how do we deal with them in a way that benefits our projects?
  - And how do we deal with the fact that we compete with 1000s of people (more?) for attention
- Days 5+6: Critique
  - How does "how" and "with whom" we do our research affect the outcome?
  - What does our research actually "do"? Who is served and who is excluded?

Plan for today (day 2)

- Getting to know each other II: the joys of science
- Rune on theorising as practice
- Ståle on knowledge, body, science

What would you like to be able to say after 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 greatly to my **Personal** development.

S. Ultimately, my PhD work was committed to the search for **Solutions** to problem XYZ.

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

The options

- **Truth** and knowledge: a thesis that adds "knowledge" about XYZ, no matter how useful or affirmative/critical this knowledge is. Knowledge is valuable in itself!
- **Personal** development: a thesis as part of a "Bildung"-journey , you have "grown", satisfied your curiosity, have met inspiring people, seen beautiful places, etc.
- **Solutions**: a thesis that contributes (maybe only a little part of) a solution to an "important" contemporary problem; focus on useful knowledge
- **Critique**: a thesis in the critical tradition which assumes that the most important task of science is reveal truths that are hidden by someone/something; focus on attacking lies, misunderstandings, and/or stupidity

Group work

- Think about which statements matches best, and optionally: which matches second best (5 min)
- 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)
- Group work: What are the joys of science? Are there specific joys and maybe also fears for your group?

P

PT

pT

T

cP

Ps

cT

Ts

CT

pS

St

CT

Cs

cS

C

S