

*"Humankind cannot bear too much reality."*  
[T. S. Eliot, 1888-1965]

## Workshop Description

The focus of the Theory of Knowledge course is the question "How do you know?", but we might also ask why we pursue knowledge in the first place. Aristotle believed that all human beings "by their nature feel the urge to know" and the quest for knowledge has traditionally been seen as a "good thing". However, since we are now in possession of knowledge which could be used to destroy the planet or rewrite our genetic code we might begin to wonder how far this is true.

## Topics Covered

1. **Why Seek Knowledge?** We begin by laying out the case for "cognitive optimism": truth is good, we are capable of knowing the truth and we naturally seek the truth. We then explore each of these assumptions, and look at various myths which suggest that rather than seeking the truth at any cost, we would do better to be "lowly wise."
2. **Forbidden Science** The rapid growth of scientific knowledge raises some disturbing questions about its direction. With particular reference to genetic engineering, we ask: Should some scientific research be stopped? Can it be stopped? Who should decide?
3. **Torture & Censorship** The focus of this session is on the acquisition and distribution of knowledge. With reference to acquisition, we ask whether there are any circumstances in which one could justify the use of torture to acquire information. With reference to distribution, we ask to what extent people have a right to privacy and when, if at all, censorship is justified.
4. **Truth vs. Happiness** The final session looks at the trade-off between truth and happiness. To what extent should we tell people the truth if we know that it will make them unhappy? Should we conclude that the unexamined life is not worth living, or should we say instead that, there is some truth in the saying that ignorance is bliss?

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