

Surely there can be no more fundamental an inquiry for a student of any discipline than how one is justified in claiming to have knowledge: if we cannot justify any claim to truth, progress and real learning becomes impossible. In this way, epistemology informs the nature of both philosophy and theology, and my interest in exploring it. I found Russell's *Problems of Philosophy* an engaging introduction to theories of knowledge, yet his eloquent but unpersuasive methodology forced me to question whether assertions about truth can be made without justification at all.

After reading Descartes' theory of knowledge in his *Meditations*, I turned to foundationalism to explore the possibility of knowledge without justification. However, on reading Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic*, I was drawn to the alternative that basic knowledge is impossible as it lacks empirical verification. Reading early Wittgenstein was an interesting exploration into whether or not knowledge and our expression of it can have meaning, but I found it to be self-refuting: in describing all philosophical language as "nonsensical", Wittgenstein rejects his own propositions.

I investigated postmodernism as an alternative to foundationalism; Lyotard's *Postmodern Condition* rejects any objective truth, reducing existence to localised interactions. Whilst it could be argued postmodernism is also self-refuting, it is in my view unfalsifiable. To reject objectivity means viewing reason as a subjective construct that is not universal; removing reason erodes the base on which logical criticisms of postmodernism are formed. I was intrigued by the possibility that postmodernism, despite its relativism, could allow for the existence of God. Having found no definitive answer on whether or not knowledge requires justification, I am excited to investigate the subject further.

I enjoyed experiencing the visible applications of philosophy in film: I found the focus of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* on the nature of the soul fascinating. I was particularly interested by the notion of the eye as the 'window to the soul', and how personal experience affects the self.

I explored the idea of suffering and its compatibility with the existence of God in Augustine's *City of God*, complementing my study of the Irenaean Theodicy at A-Level. Being at a Catholic school lets me experience religion first-hand, however I eagerly anticipate learning about other religions in depth at university, particularly Shinto, the influence of which I came into contact with during my EPQ. The course of study for said EPQ gave me first hand experience of in-depth research and the academic rigour required for extended writing.

Outside the classroom, I have been an active member of the debating society, which has helped me to formulate arguments more coherently and understand the position of those I disagree with. As well as this I took part in a philosophy 'debate chamber' course. I enjoyed experiencing the deliberative aspect of philosophy; being forced to defend my opinion developed my critical thinking and analysis skills. As Head Boy, I have learnt to lead, balance responsibilities, and be efficient with my time. I have fenced at a national level, and involvement in SVP allows me to contribute to the school life and help others.

Going to Lourdes with HCPT was transformative; I learnt the value of patience and was profoundly affected by the selfless giving I saw. I also found it to be reflective: experiencing strong faith shown through care first-hand forced me to consider the centrality of love in theology, thoughts I hope to explore further at University.

The nature and accessibility of true knowledge has drastic implications on both philosophy and theology; though I have not found definitive answers to the questions of epistemology, I hope to continue my search for them at university.