

## Academic Study, Ecumenics and Reconciliation

### Required Reading

Weston, Anthony. *A Rulebook for Arguments*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn 2000, pp. v-xiv.

### Highly Recommended Reading

Thouless, Robert H.. *Straight and Crooked Thinking*. London: Pan Books, rev edn. 1953, pp. 176-76.

### Further Reading

Flew, Anthony. *Thinking about Thinking*. London: Fontana/Collins, 1975.

Hurley, Michael (ed). *The Irish School of Ecumenics: 1970–2007*. Dublin: Columba Press, 2007.

### AV Resources

*Athens: The Truth About Democracy*. BBC (2007) 60 mins and 60 mins. A two-part documentary on the achievements and limitations of the democratic experiment in ancient Athens and the role of philosophy in the democratic process.

*Elizabeth* (1999). 197 mins. Presented by David Starkey. Four-part Channel 4 documentary on the life of Elizabeth I [founder of TCD].

*Socrates*. BBC Radio 4 In Our Time with Melvyn Bragg (27 September 2007). 42 mins. A discussion of the life and thought of the Greek philosopher Socrates.

*The One Inhabited Earth: The Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College Dublin*. (2007). 13 mins. A short DVD introduction to the life and work of ISE, [www.tcd.ie/ise](http://www.tcd.ie/ise)

### Possible Films

*Rashomon* (1950). Directed by Akira Kurosawa. 88 mins. A Japanese film that explores the subjectivity of different perspectives on a violent event.

### Some Light Entertainment

*Educating Rita*. (1983). 110 mins. Written by Willy Russell. A young woman from a working class background decides to take a course at the Open University. This film touches on the opportunities and the challenges of academic study, and was shot at Trinity College Dublin.

*Elizabeth* (1998). 119 mins. Directed by Shekhar Kapur. The early life of Elizabeth I (born 1533) and the early years of her reign after she succeeded her sister Mary in 1558.

*Elizabeth the Golden Age.* (2007). 110 mins. Directed by Shekhar Kapur. A continuation of Kapur's interpretation of Elizabeth I's reign, up to her death in 1603, during which Trinity College was founded in 1592.

*The Other Boleyn Girl.* (2008). 111 mins. Directed by Justin Chadwick. Tells the story of Boleyn sisters, Anne and Mary, and their relationships with Henry VIII in sixteenth century England. Anne Boleyn became Henry VIII's second wife, prompting the split with Rome and creation of the Church of England. Anne was later beheaded, but her daughter Elizabeth ruled 1558–1603.

---

**Introduction** [Slide 1]

This session serves as an introduction to some of the traditions and values that shape academic study in western societies. It also offers some background on the ISE's values and its work in Ecumenics, and the place that Reconciliation Studies has in the work of the School.

**Academia and the Academic Work***Plato's 'Academy'* [Slide 2]

Plato founded his 'Academy' [*Akademeia*] in the early fourth century BCE just outside Athens. The school was in a sacred olive grove that had been dedicated to Athene, who was the Goddess of Wisdom and the patron of Athens. The name *Akademeia* derives from the site of the olive grove, which legend associated with the Greek hero 'Akademos'.

The purpose of Plato's *Akademeia* was the study of philosophy. To speak of the *Akademeia* [the place/institution] was to speak of philosophy [the activity/subject], and to a large extent the opposite was also true, since the *Akademeia* was the most significant but not the only school of philosophy. Philosophy has held a central position in the western academic tradition ever since Plato's *Akademeia*. The centrality of philosophy within 'the Academy' has been transformed over time, however, the historical legacies of the Academy's origins as a philosophical school remain influential (the 'Academy' used here in a sense of the academic world, its institutions and traditions). There are now many other subjects that are studied 'academically', but even though philosophy is now only one subject amongst others it still has an influential role in shaping the ethos and expectations of academic study across many subjects.

*Philosophy as the Exercise of Reason and Critical Analysis* [Slide 3]

The etymology of the word philosophy [*Philosophia*] is '*philo*' and '*sophia*', which translates as 'love of wisdom'. It is a term that has both a broader sense, in terms of any and every pursuit of wisdom and understanding; and a narrower sense, in terms of a distinctively 'philosophical inquiry' into matters. Since classical times, distinctively philosophical inquiry has valued *reason*, *logic* and *evidence-based argument*. Philosophical inquiry seeks to find the truth behind appearances and questions conventional assumptions and beliefs. A central process in philosophical inquiry [*inquisitio*] is the posing of a question [*quaestio*], the suggestion of a possible answer [*thesis*], and the testing of the answer with a potential rebuttal [*antithesis*]. This process of *inquisitio* encourages critical examinations of any claim or argument as a path for true understanding.

A classic technique is the ‘Socratic method’ found in Plato’s writings. Plato developed arguments as dialogues between Socrates and a conversation partner. In a typical Socratic dialogue, Socrates asks a question to which the answer at first seems straightforward but careful questioning soon shows that things are more complicated than first appears. As a master of philosophy Socrates did not always know the answers to his questions, but he was very skilled in asking insightful questions and was always way ahead of his conversation partner in appreciating why conventional answers were not satisfactory.

#### *The M.Phil. as an Academic Degree* [Slide 4]

Trinity’s title for many of its taught Masters degrees is Master in Philosophy (M.Phil.). This reflects the fact that although these degrees are not in the taught subject of Philosophy—since the *taught courses* are in Ecumenical Studies, International Peace Studies and Reconciliation Studies (and other Schools in the College offer Irish Art History, Medieval History, Modern Irish History, Music and Media Technologies, Psychoanalytic Studies, Reformation and Enlightenment Studies, Women’s Studies, Anglo-Irish Literature, Popular Literature, Creative Writing, etc, etc)—nonetheless all of the courses are underpinned by the values of academia, and these academic values have shaped the western philosophical tradition. The title ‘M.Phil.’ is appropriate for this broad range of degrees because there is both an historical link between philosophy and academia and an ongoing philosophical foundation for the *critical analysis* and *sound argument* that constitutes distinctively academic work.<sup>1</sup>

#### *Typical Tasks of Academic Work* [Slide 5]

In this tradition, academic work seeks to:

---

<sup>1</sup> At many Universities these taught Masters degrees would be called Masters of Arts (MA). In the same way, it is the degree that is being recognized as Mastery of an Art. An MA does not necessarily mean that the course is in Art(s), it could be in almost any subject that involves some element of the academic arts. Trinity’s terminology of M.Phil. as opposed to MA is largely historical coincidence, since the term MA was already in use for a different type of award. Historically the MA was the basic type of award in a system that Trinity shares with other ancient Universities including Oxford and Cambridge. In this system, which predates the widespread adoption of the BA degree, the MA recognized mastery of a subject and qualified one to teach it. Trinity, Oxford and Cambridge now teach the BA as their basic degree but continue to offer MAs to all their BA graduates. The historic Scottish Universities still don’t teach BAs and offer MAs as their basic degree but at the end of a four year course.

- Reflect on problems
- Ask constructive and insightful questions
- Summarise what others think about an issue
- Develop conceptual clarity
- Define terms carefully
- Scrutinise coherence in reasoning
- Question received opinions
- Problematised assumptions
- Investigate relevant sources
- Test and assesses evidence
- Critique the logic of arguments
- Create new ways of looking at something
- Nuance conclusions
- Identify new lines of inquiry

The readings for this week introduce some of the skills of critical analysis and argument as they are used in academic work. During the course of the year, it is well worth reading not just the prescribed chapters but the whole books. Reading a whole books rather than just a chapter is not just a matter of reading more material, it also means getting a fuller sense of the particular *line of argument* that runs through the book. Appreciating the particular line of argument is as important as understanding the immediate material.

One big difference between academic life today and Plato's *Akademeia* is that there is now much more onus on learning what others think by reading the debates and arguments in the scholarly literature rather than having all the debates in person. Ever since the first Medieval Universities were founded, the library (*bibliotheca*) has been the repository for academic literature and has had a central place in University life alongside the classroom or lecture hall.<sup>2</sup> It is hard to overestimate the importance of reading in academic study, especially in the Humanities subjects. Whilst much has changed over the years, Universities like Oxford and Cambridge would still not describe degree study as 'taking a degree' or 'doing a degree' but 'reading for a degree'. As a general rule, you should plan to spend at least as much time reading (either in the library, or at home, or in a convenient coffee shop) as you spend in class. Ideally you should spend significantly more time reading than you do in class. For a full-time student this should mean

---

<sup>2</sup> More recently the internet has meant that some of at least some of this no longer need to be collected in a single physical place and can be accessed online, along a wealth of multi-media and other learning resources. Nonetheless, the library is likely to remain the centre point for academic life

about three days reading a week, on top of your two days of class. For a part-time student this should mean between one and two days reading a week, on top of your day in class.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Academic work and degrees [Slide 6]*

Academic work in Universities is organised into a progression of different degrees. When Trinity was first founded by Elizabeth I (1592) the hierarchy of ‘degrees’ at Universities reflected not just a different level of achievement but also a different type of academic skill. A Bachelor was expected to answer questions, whereas a Master was expected to both answer and ask questions. A Doctor was expected to chair discussions and adjudicate in the asking and answering of academic questions. With the widespread extension of education to primary and secondary school level during the last century, and with the much greater role that a Bachelor’s degree has in University life, this strict hierarchy of academic skills is much less clear today. The notion that determining the question for investigation was restricted to a Masters degree and above has largely disappeared. Coursework in schools means that children usually have experience of asking and investigating their own questions. Likewise, most undergraduate programmes allow for—or even require—an undergraduate dissertation that involves such work. Nonetheless, it remains true that at Masters level the freedom and responsibility of setting your own question, conducting your own investigation into it, and arguing your own answer to it, are central components of the degree and necessary requirements for success. Hence the important role that your dissertation has as the formal demonstration of your ability to do this. Without the dissertation the degree cannot be awarded. The coursework essays that you write in the earlier part of the course are intended to help you prepare for this task by working on questions that are not your own.

#### *Detached Academic Work [Slide 7]*

The ‘groves of Academia’ or ‘groves of sacred Academe’ are expressions that recall the ancient olive groves of Plato’s *Akademeia* as a place of quiet and detachment behind the stone walls that separated the *Akademeia* from the everyday life of the city (*polis*) that went on outside it.<sup>4</sup> This ideal of academic tranquility has always been a powerful determinant on the shape of

---

<sup>3</sup> Many part-time students find it easier to take one of these days at weekends and then do the rest on one or two evenings during the week.

<sup>4</sup> The modern term ‘political’ is derived from the Greek *polis* and originally had a rather broader reference to include anything to do with the social affairs of the city.

academic work. There is much to be gained by distancing oneself from the distractions and difficulties that abound in everyday life to make space for contemplation, reflection and deeper thought.

In their location and architecture ancient Universities often reflected this sense of academic detachment. They were frequently located slightly outside city centres and/or at smaller ‘University towns’ rather than the centre of big cities, and they were often enclosed by a wall or railing. When Trinity College was established in 1592 it was to be the ‘mother of a University’ *next to Dublin*.<sup>5</sup> In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries the college was a short distance from the city centre (which at that time had Christchurch as its centre, and extended east only as far as Dublin Castle). This is shown in John Speed’s map from 1610 [see handout].

*Trinity College next to Dublin* [Slide 8]

The College crest still speaks of the ‘College of the Holy Persons of the Trinity, of Queen Elizabeth, Near to Dublin’ [*iuxta Dublin*].<sup>6</sup>



*Trinity College and the City* [Slide 9]

---

<sup>5</sup> The original idea may have been that Trinity would be joined by other colleges to constitute the University of Dublin in the same way that a collection of colleges constitute the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford. Instead, Trinity College just kept growing as a single college and remains the only constituent college of the University of Dublin. Nowadays the College and the University are more or less synonymous, however, as a general distinction the College prepares students for degrees and the University awards them.

<sup>6</sup> Likewise, Milltown Park is also a relatively short distance (3 miles) from the city centre, though Dublin had changed a great deal by the time teaching at Milltown began in the nineteenth century.

However, academic detachment has drawbacks as well as strengths. In more recent times the benefits of academic separation have needed to be set against the dangers that detached academic work can seem removed from life's urgent concerns and avoid life's real problems. In some contexts the term 'academic' is a euphemism for something that is purely hypothetical or entirely irrelevant, as in the expressions 'That's academic' or 'That is just academic'.<sup>7</sup> To counter the dangers of 'ivory tower' isolation it has become more common to locate Universities in the centre of large cities and to design them to be more open to the world.<sup>8</sup>

In Trinity's case the city quickly enclosed the college and for many people today Trinity College would be the very heart of the city centre.<sup>9</sup> This 'relocation' of the University offers many positive benefits in terms of the interaction between academic life and the life of the city ('political life'). Yet although location, architecture and subject provision all make important differences to academic work, one of the most important factor that shapes academic work is whether academics see themselves as needing to engage social issues and social needs at a fairly close level or at a much more distant level. It should be remembered that it is not just the geographical location but also a psychological and cultural attitude that decides whether a University is in touch with the life of the city and society or not. This might involve changes to the curriculum (to include subjects that focus on practical concerns and life problems) and changes to the way an institution works (to promote part-time study or service learning).

As an academic programme Reconciliation Studies seeks a middle course between two opposite tendencies. It does not set out to give comprehensive practical answers to immediate questions in the way that a hands-on training programme might offer; but nor is it satisfied with purely abstract and theoretical answers to questions that ignore the social realities of conflict.

---

<sup>7</sup> NB using the word 'academic' in your essays to express irrelevance in this way is likely to attract the wrath of your academic examiners.

<sup>8</sup> 'Ivory tower' has come to refer to anything that might look very good and have a great deal of status but has no practical use. It is most often used as a barbed comment on academia.

<sup>9</sup> As the Mayor of Dublin put it in his address at the College's tri-centenary celebrations in 1892, 'the City has flung around you her hospitable arms, and converted your outlying acres into a site, which, for extent and convenience, is not equallied by any university site in the populous cities of Euroe'; J.V. Luce, *Trinity College Dublin: The First 400 Years*. Dublin: Trinity College Dublin Press, 1992, p. 110.

Instead it seeks an ‘engaged academic’ approach, which applies academic research to a grounded study of conflict and responses to conflict. Reconciliation Studies as an academic study is intended to work at a slight distance from the world’s conflict situations but not too far removed from them.<sup>10</sup> It brings academic perspectives to bear on contemporary challenges in post-conflict reconciliation work and vice-versa, with a view to a constructive and critical encounter between theory and practice. It is intentionally ‘grounded’ in Belfast, but its outlook is not limited to Belfast or to Northern Ireland. Reconciliation Studies looks out from Belfast to the whole inhabited world, and to situations of conflict and challenges of reconciliation in all parts of the world.

### ***Ecumenics and Study at the ISE***

The field of ‘Ecumenics’ studies the challenges arising from shared human existence, and in particular the shared quest for meaning, values, peace, truth and justice in human relationships.

#### *The ‘oikos’ and Ecumenics [Slide 10]*

The name ‘Ecumenics’ is a new word that builds on an very old idea. Ecumenics is derived from the Greek words *oikos* (‘house’, ‘household’ or ‘habitation’) and *oikoumene* (in the Greek expression *he oikoumene ge* ‘the household of the whole world’).<sup>11</sup> In ancient Greek, this term ‘household of the whole world’ was used to mean ‘the whole inhabited earth’ or ‘the one

---

<sup>10</sup> The building is in a beautiful part of the city with a large and peaceful garden, yet it is within walking distance of places that have been deeply scarred by conflict, and continue to suffer from sectarian violence. Reconciliation Studies is the only Trinity degree that is not taught in Dublin. It operates cross-border between Dublin and Belfast so that it can actively engage with the history and politics of Northern Ireland.

<sup>11</sup> The word ‘ecumenical’ was first formed in English in the sixteenth century as an ecclesial word for ‘universal’ or ‘whole’. In the twentieth century it came to be understood more in terms of ‘Ecumenism’ and the ‘Ecumenical Movement’. Ecumenism and the Ecumenical Movement are most commonly defined as ‘the movement for Christian unity’ and/or ‘the movement for religious unity’ or ‘the movement for good relations between the Churches and/or faiths’. ‘Ecclesial’ as a word for the Christian churches is itself derived from the Greek word, *ekklesia* (assembly), which was originally the democratic assembly of the *polis* and became the name for the meeting of Christians in church.

inhabited earth'. This reflects the global aspect that Ecumenics has as a contemporary field of study—Ecumenics is concerned with the shared global household of 'the one inhabited earth'.<sup>12</sup>

Whilst the word 'Ecumenics' is rooted in an ancient past, the challenges that it points to are as relevant today as they have ever been. The twentieth century witnessed an ever increasing process of globalization—in which new global relationships developed to a point that had never before been possible. In the twenty-first century, globalization is unavoidable and yet very much ambivalent – it can do good or harm. As a result, and the challenge of creating peaceful and just relationships throughout the inhabited earth will be one of the most pressing ethical and political challenges.

*Ecumenics and Relationships* [Slide 11]

Fundamental to both the immediate household and the global household is an awareness of relationships. As a household, an *oikos* is a place of relationships. In the ancient world, and still today, household relationships make us what we are and who we are. The idea of *oikoumene* links the local relationships of the household to a global reference, and also links the global back to the household.<sup>13</sup>

*Household relationships and conflict* [Slide 12]

Taking the household, or *oikos*, as a reference point for how people are to live together and handle their identities, differences and conflicts is helpful for at least three reasons.

First it affirms an insight developed by scholars of conflict resolution that some level of conflict is to be expected in human life. The unity and diversity that exists in all human relationships inevitably leads to tensions and frictions.<sup>14</sup> Within the household, or any other unit where similarities and differences come together, tension is created and some degree of conflict is to be expected.<sup>15</sup> The wisdom of seeing these conflicts in terms of some sort of 'household'

---

<sup>12</sup> See especially 'The One Inhabited Earth', a DVD introduction to the Irish School of Ecumenics (Dublin: Irish School of Ecumenics, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> The term *oikoumene* might be seen as an early version of the world 'glocal' in which the relationship between the global and the local are brought together within the word itself.

<sup>14</sup> Tensions are when objects are under pressure to be separate or apart; frictions are when objects are under pressure to be together.

<sup>15</sup> The literal etymological meaning of conflict is 'to strike together'.

becomes clearer when it is compared with the Greek sense of *kosmos*. The ‘cosmos’ was the natural world as opposed to the social world. In Greek thought the idea of *kosmos* carried a strong sense of peace, but peace in the sense of perfect order, harmony and beauty (which is why the word ‘cosmetics’ derives from *kosmos*). This vision of perfect peace is much less appropriate as a metaphor for human relationships in all their complexity — real human relationships have potential for tension, friction and conflict.

Second, relating difference and conflict back to the experiences of a household is a useful reminder that although conflict always has the capacity to be destructive this does not mean that conflict will always be destructive. The challenge is not to deny difference or suppress tensions and frictions but to deal with them in a constructive way when they generate conflict. Learning to handle difference and conflict in a constructive way is one of the things that can be learnt by living in a household. This is why households are places of creativity, growth and nurture as well as conflict. Often this creativity, growth and nurture come about because difference and conflict are handled in a constructive and positive way that strengthens rather than destroys human relationships.

Third, to frame issues in terms of a ‘household’ is to recognize that despite differences people still share things in common. At times people in a conflict need to be reminded of the importance of their common humanity and other things that they share. In at least some sense they ‘belong together’ in a world that is their common home, and the term ‘ecumenics’ can be a helpful reminder of this.

So thinking of local or global conflicts and their solutions in terms of the *oikos* recognizes the realities of difference, tension and friction, affirms the hope that positive relationships can be developed out of conflict, and reminds people that even when conflict creates divisions people still share important things together.

The Greek word *oikos* is also the root word for Economics, and this reflects a common interest in both ecumenics and economics for the study of *relationships*. In economics ‘the economic problem’ (ie the single problem that the whole subject can be seen as an attempt to address) is the conflict between ‘scarcity and choice’. Economics is the study of how to manage this problem at whatever level it arises (for the household, the community, a society, an international community or whatever). If there is a similar ‘fundamental problem’ in ecumenics, it is the tension between unity and diversity. Ecumenics is the study of how to respond to the

tension between unity and diversity at whatever level they might be in conflict (for faiths, ideologies, the nations of the world, ethnic groups or whatever). This echoes what was once seen as ‘the problem’ in early classical philosophy, which was how to understand the relationship of the ‘the one and the many’. In addressing these challenges, Ecumenics gives particular attention to dialogue, peace, and reconciliation.

*The Irish School of Ecumenics* [Slide 13]

The Irish School of Ecumenics (ISE) was established in 1970 by Michael Hurley SJ, and other far-sighted pioneers, for the academic study of ecumenics. The word ecumenics in the title reflected the ecclesial connotations associated with *oikoumene* dating back to the first use of the term in English in the sixteenth century. However, the ISE’s original intention was always for study of ecumenics as a broad and inclusive field, which would go beyond a narrow sense of Ecumenism and the Ecumenical Movement understood as just church relations or dialogue between world religions.<sup>16</sup> This meant that from the outset the academic approach to study extended beyond Christian theology and included the social sciences. Since then the School has continued to develop a multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary approach to applied research at the intersection of politics, theology and religion.<sup>17</sup>

The School now has three complementary Masters programmes: Ecumenical Studies; International Peace Studies; and Reconciliation Studies. Each programme is focused on a distinctive type of conflict and the ways that it might best be addressed, however, there is significant overlap of shared concerns and each programme is helpful for a fuller understanding of the bigger picture.<sup>18</sup>

*M.Phil. in Ecumenics* [Slide 14]

---

<sup>16</sup> The word ‘Ecumenics’ also reflected the fact that the mission of the School was as an academic institution for study. This distinguishes the School from Ecumenical Institutes that are primarily intended to host Ecumenical meetings or promote ecumenical relations.

<sup>17</sup> For more on the significance of multi disciplinary approaches in Ecumenics, see <http://www.tcd.ie/ise/about/ecumenics.php>

<sup>18</sup> With permission from the course co-ordinator, students from any programme can take courses from another ISE programme.

Ecumenics is the oldest programme offered by the ISE and started in the 1970s. It examines the similarities, differences and dialogue between Christian denominations, between world religions, and between religions and others committed to the study of the ethical dimensions of political engagement.<sup>19</sup>

*M.Phil.in International Peace Studies [Slide 15]*

International Peace Studies is the largest programme offered by the ISE and started in the 1980s. It examines the sources of war and armed conflict and suggests methods of preventing and resolving them through processes of peacemaking and peacebuilding. The programme combines perspectives from international relations, ethics and conflict resolution to reflect critically upon the wide range of social, political and economic issues associated with peace.

*M.Phil.in Reconciliation Studies [Slide 15]*

Reconciliation Studies is the newest programme offered by the ISE and it started in 2001. It takes an inter-disciplinary approach to the challenges of social reconciliation in the aftermath of armed conflict between groups within a state. Particular attention is given to ethnic conflicts and the role of religion in such conflicts.<sup>20</sup> Much of what Reconciliation Studies is about can be summed-up in the phrase ‘Learning to transform relationships’.

---

<sup>19</sup> Whilst Ecumenical Studies has a strong interest in Ecumenism and the Ecumenical Movement, the primary purpose of Ecumenical Studies is to study and develop an understanding of ecumenism and ecumenical affairs rather than to actively promote them

<sup>20</sup> Students with previous study in a wide variety of subjects take this course. Some of the students have a theological background and/or a personal faith commitment but the course does not presume a specific faith commitment or require any preparation in theology. Students can choose whether to write optional essays in theology and/or religious studies, or to focus on sociology, social policy and politics.