

Sort Yourself Out - What Do You Know Most Certainly?

This activity offers a whistle-stop tour of a whole range of problems drawn from traditional academic philosophy: the sorts of questions that can make the most gleefully giddy as the certainty you thought you had appears to crumble beneath you. It originated with workshops for secondary school G&T groups, and it's fun as an example to use in staff training. Eventually, I'll write a set of philosophy club enquiry plans, each jumping off from a different statement. You can see the original plans [here](#).

I usually have two or three groups, editing the cards down so that each group has the same set. The players in each group have one card each, and have to sort themselves out into a line so that the statement they can be most absolutely certain about is at one end, and the one which is most doubtful is at the other. I look for disagreements between the groups, asking questions like "John - you're pretty sure you exist. Why's that?" or "Lucy, why so doubtful about the non-existence of the dodos?"

2+2=4 - Is this certain because maths captures reality, or because we made it up?

Alien abduction - This is Descartes Meditations in miniature - if I can't trust the evidence of my senses, because I might be dreaming or being deceived by some powerful demon/alien simulation, what can I be sure of?

God exists - how does faith differ from knowledge? Are all types of certainty the same?

No computer will ever be murdered - The possibility of artificial intelligence; Turing tests.

I am the same person I was yesterday - The problem of identity Theseus ship/Trigger's broom from Only Fools and Horses

This statement is false - Paradoxes and logic

I exist - Descartes again - cogito ergo sum

No dodos exist - why is it harder to prove a negative than a positive?

Invisible gremlins - evidence, proof - is it reasonable to believe they exist?

Right and wrong are the same forever - moral relativism - when people thought slavery was right, were they wrong?

$$2+2=4$$

Last night I was not abducted by aliens who removed my brain and plugged it into a virtual reality simulator, which is currently simulating a philosophy seminar.

God exists

**No computer will ever
be murdered**

**I am the same person I
was yesterday**

This statement is false.

I exist

No dodos exist

Invisible gremlins, which play no part in our lives other than to undetectably watch us watching soap operas, do not exist

**Right and wrong are
the same forever.**

***I am looking at a piece
of paper***

***David Cameron is the
Prime Minister***

***I am thinking
something now***

***The other people in this room have
minds of their own***

***The sun will rise
tomorrow***

***The universe is more
than 10,000 years old***

Something exists

If you pick a guinea pig up by its tail, its eyes will pop out

***I can choose to hold this in my
right hand or my left***

God does not exist

There are no round squares.

Nothing can be both true and false at the same time.