

EPISTEMOLOGY AND KNOWLEDGE

Epistemology is the philosophical study of the nature, origin, and limits of human knowledge. The term is derived from the Greek *epistēmē* (“knowledge”) and *logos* (“reason”), and accordingly the field is sometimes referred to as the theory of knowledge – especially with regard to its methods, validity, and scope.

Epistemology studies the nature of knowledge, the rationality of belief, and justification, centering on four areas:

- The philosophical analysis of the nature of knowledge and how it relates to such concepts of truth, belief, and justification.
- Various problems of skepticism.
- The sources and scope of knowledge and justified belief
- The criteria for knowledge and justification.

(Epistemology is the **investigation** of what distinguishes justified belief from opinion, the nature of knowledge and the rationality of belief, and how do we know what we claim to know.)

Theorists have different **epistemological assumptions**:

- Knowledge is out there waiting to be discovered.
- People develop knowledge based on our perceptions and experiences.
- All knowledge is relative, a mere social construction. It’s whatever we say it is – no universal or absolute truth.

KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge is the primary subject of the field of epistemology. It aims to answer questions such as:

- What do we know?
- What does it mean to say that we know something?
- What makes justified beliefs justified?
- How do we know that we know?

Knowledge is a familiarity, awareness, or understanding of someone or something, such as facts (propositional knowledge), skills (procedural knowledge), or objects (acquaintance knowledge). By most accounts, knowledge can be **acquired** in many different ways and from many different sources, including but not limited to **perception, reason, memory, testimony, scientific inquiry, education, and practice.**

Types of knowledge include:

- **A Posteriori Knowledge:** knowledge that is known by experience (that is, it is empirical, or arrived at afterward). To really know you have to experience something for yourself – first-hand (best way to know).
- **A Priori Knowledge:** knowledge that is known independently of experience (it is non-empirical, or arrived at beforehand, usually by reason). The idea of A Priori knowledge is that it is based on intuition or rational insights. The theory of the intrinsic A Priori asserts that the basic principles of logic, mathematics, natural sciences and philosophy are self-evident truths recognizable by such intrinsic traits as clarity and distinctness of ideas.
- **Situated Knowledge:** knowledge specific to a particular situation. Some methods of generating knowledge, such as trial and error, or learning from experience, tend to create highly situational knowledge. Situational knowledge is often embedded in language, culture, or traditions.
- **Scientific Knowledge:** If you ask the right questions, you can get reliable and valid answers. There is an objective reality out there – it can be identified and measured, can get snapshots of it.

The development of the scientific method has made a significant contribution to how knowledge of the physical world and its phenomena is acquired. To be termed scientific, a method of inquiry must be based on gathering observable and measurable evidence subject to specific principles of reasoning and experimentation, and the formulation and testing of hypotheses. Sir Francis Bacon established and popularized an inductive methodology for scientific inquiry. His famous aphorism, "**knowledge is power**", is found in the *Meditations Sacrae* (1597).

Those who use the phrase "scientific knowledge" don't necessary claim to **certainty**, since scientists will never be absolutely certain when they are correct and when they are not. It is thus an irony of proper scientific method that one **must doubt** even when correct, in the hopes that this practice will lead to greater convergence on the truth in general.

The philosopher Plato famously pointed out the need for a **distinction** between knowledge and true belief in the *Theaetetus*, leading many to attribute to him a definition of knowledge as "**justified true belief**." The classical definition, described but not ultimately endorsed by Plato, specifies that a statement must meet three criteria in order to be considered knowledge: it must be **justified, true, and believed**.

There are a number of alternative definitions which have been proposed, including Robert Nozick's proposal that all instances of knowledge must '**track the truth**' and Simon Blackburn's proposal that those who have a justified true belief 'through a defect, flaw, or failure' **fail** to

have knowledge. Richard Kirkham suggests that our definition of knowledge requires that the evidence for the belief **necessitates** its truth.

One can say: "He believes it, but it isn't so," but not "He knows it, but it isn't so (guesses, conjectures, and opinions are not acceptable as true knowledge).

One discipline of epistemology focuses on **partial knowledge**. In most cases, it is not possible to understand an information domain exhaustively; our knowledge is always incomplete or partial. Most real problems have to be solved by taking advantage of a partial understanding of the problem.

TRUTH

Truth: a fact or belief that is accepted as true - that which is in accordance with **fact or reality**.

In everyday language, truth is typically ascribed to things that aim to **represent reality** or otherwise correspond to it, such as beliefs, propositions, and declarative sentences.

Truth is usually held to be the **opposite** of falsity. The concept of truth is discussed and debated in various contexts, including philosophy, art, theology, and science. Most human activities depend upon the concept, where its nature as a concept is assumed rather than being a subject of discussion; these include most of the sciences, law, journalism, and everyday life. Some philosophers view the concept of truth as basic, and unable to be explained in any terms that are more easily understood than the concept of truth itself. Most commonly, truth is viewed as the correspondence of language or thought to a mind-independent world. This is called the **correspondence theory of truth**. (Correspondence theory centers heavily around the assumption that truth is a matter of accurately copying what is known as "**objective reality**" and then representing it in thoughts, words and other symbols.) – Wikipedia

If there is something that gives some measure of nobility to the human enterprise' I would say it is our search for truth. Some understanding of where we are, who we are, what we do, some understanding of what has happened and what hasn't happened. Truth is central to the human enterprise. – Errol Morris