

What Is Knowledge

The morbid logician seeks to make everything lucid, and succeeds in making everything mysterious. The mystic allows one thing to be mysterious, and everything else becomes lucid.
-GK Chesterton

This is going to be a little unique for me, as I will not be addressing what is normally considered a theological matter. But a common understanding of "knowledge" is important to any discussion one can have. Knowledge has many meanings, but it only seems to be in dealing with religious matters where one's knowledge is questioned. The questions "How do you know that?" and "Where is your proof?" are frequently brought up when one talks about God.

If I were to say "I believe this team is going to win the championship," I might be told "You're crazy," or "I disagree," but I don't think I've ever been asked, "How do you know that?" And in the case of being called crazy, I would only expect this if I made a truly outlandish claim. If I say, "I believe that new universes exist inside of black holes," there are likewise a number of responses I'm prepared to hear (such as "Wouldn't that be awesome!"), but I do not expect to hear "Where is your proof?" But if I say "I believe God led me here" to a skeptic, there is a very good chance I'm going to be asked "How do you know that?" If I say, "I believe God exists" to another skeptic, I am prepared to hear "Where is your proof?"

Why is it that no one seriously questions my ability to predict a reasonable future (such as a good team winning a championship), but I am questioned when a series of events leads me to a greater purpose? Why is it that no one seriously questions a belief that a universe exists beyond any means for us to find it, but we do get questioned for contemplating the origin of the universe we live in? I'm sure there are as many reasons as there are examples for this double standard, but I believe it ultimately comes down to the equivocalness of words such as "knowledge" and "proof."

When one makes a prediction about who will win a game, or what lies beyond a black hole, the other person rarely has much at stake in it. Therefore, "knowledge" is taken rather loosely. When talking about God, *everyone* has a tremendous stake in it. Indeed, recognition of what is at stake is probably better understood by the atheist than the Christian, as proof of God requires their entire life outlook to be radically changed.

For the evangelist and apologist, a firm understanding of what words like "knowledge," "proof" and "credibility" mean is essential. When having a conversation with a known skeptic, it might be best to first establish some common ground on what these terms mean. And since these words are so common as to be taken for granted, it will likely be easy to shape their meaning to the apologist's benefit. This is called "snucking the premise," (introducing a contended point as a given, with "snuck" being contemporary slang for the word "sneaked.") By taking the initiative on the seemingly innocuous matter of eliminating the equivocalness of a word, one can often get the other to agree to the meaning that best suits oneself. Once they accept the given meaning, one can now hold them to being consistent in how the different words are used.

Trying to qualify or define knowledge is as old as philosophy itself, and there is a jab against philosophers because they "find a thing to be impossible" which the practical man "does on a daily basis." Of all the philosophers I have studied to any degree, I think Immanuel Kant has been the most grounded. He ultimately decided it was the philosopher's job to try to explain why things work, and the

practical man's job to judge how well the philosopher did (this was actually quite a radical approach at the time, as traditionally people thought the roles were to be reversed). Kant essentially valued knowledge only when it served a practical purpose.

What has struck me as interesting about all the other attempts to understand knowledge is that they invariably seek to identify truth first, and then call it knowledge. This seems reasonable at first glance, because if knowledge is not truthful, then it is not useful. But the efforts to identify "truth" invariably lead to disappointment. Although George Berkeley's (for whom the University of California, Berkeley is named) theories of idealism are very much hated by philosophers and scientists, they are impossible to disprove. Almost everything we commonly claim as knowledge was discovered through our senses, and therefore "perceived." But our senses can easily be fooled, so any knowledge we claim from sensory observation is to some degree suspicious. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel decided that truth and untruth are one in the same, and only a matter of how one thinks about it. Sadly, his theories are present (but disguised) in all the social justice efforts made since at least the 19th century. This is how the socialists are able to "liberate" mankind by starving mankind to death; how women can be "made equal" by preventing them from doing things only women can do; how "peaceful protests" can involve threats, property damage, injury and even killing; how "free speech" can be made possible through censorship; etc. But this paper is not a political platform; I only bring these up to show just how dangerous the problem really is when Hegel is accepted over Kant. G.K. Chesterton's observation about the logican has been proven time and time again.

For the rest of my work, I am only going to present two more theories that actually influenced my thoughts here. The first is Rene Descartes, when he wrote "cogito, ergo sum" ("I think, therefore I am.") I hold this to be *almost* the only truth one can know with absolute certainty, a truth that does not need sensory validation, a truth that can be held as self-proving (*a priori*). I can try to build on this by saying "I am, therefore I do," or "I am, therefore I feel," but things get fuzzy fast. What I am doing or what I am feeling is dependent on the reality I am perceiving, and I want to try to avoid the mistake Hegel and all his followers made. So instead, I take Chesterton at his word and make one assumption in an effort to make everything else lucid. And this assumption is that consistent perceptions are credible evidence of the truth. Note the subtle but critical difference between what I am doing and what most other philosophers have done. I am trying to find a better way to discover truth, I am *not* claiming truth can be known with absolute certainty. There will obviously be times when my assumption is shown to be false, but that is not the point. I am seeking to be right *most* of the time, not *all* the time.

I chose this assumption because it seems to solve all the dilemmas raised by the great philosophers. Why do I call a certain memory a dream? Because things happened in it that are inconsistent with what I expect to see in "the real world." Why do I say another memory came from "the real world?" Because there is consistency between it and other memories I believe to be part of the real world. Has there ever been a time I couldn't tell the two apart? Yes, but very rarely. In those few cases, I can read my journal or talk to a friend and see if there is consistency between the memory and their testimony. In another famous example from the deep thinkers, do I expect my table to get angry at me and walk away? No! Why? Because the only time I ever see that happening is in stories I believe to be fantasy. Note that consistency is not the same as "unchanging" for me. If the table ever did disappear, I would be inclined to think someone came in and took it while I was gone, because that explanation is consistent with other experiences I have had in "the real world." Likewise, I do not expect the same number to come up on a standard six-sided die every time I roll it, but neither do I expect the number seven to show up on it no matter how many rolls I make.

The second theory I am using came from the Theory of Knowledge school of thought, and in particular the concept that knowledge is a justified true belief. But unlike Descartes, I find that theory flawed (and it was intentionally made to be flawed, as we will see soon). *Prima facie* (at face value), we see a self-contradiction within it: if we know something to be true, where does belief come in? But this failed example was deliberate. It was meant to be a straw man argument so its creators could easily destroy it for an ulterior purpose. Nonetheless, it contains a "diamond in the rough." They demonstrated this idea with a venn diagram. One circle was "truth" and the other was "belief." Where the two overlapped was what was "justified." The problem with this explanation, of course, is that there is no way of knowing whether what one believes overlaps with truth or not, nor does it give any insight on how to approach this problem. Sill, it gave me the missing piece I needed to finally put my thoughts together.

I define knowledge as **a concept that one believes to either be true or untrue**. I define "concept" as an idea or thought. I prove my own existence by thinking, and what I am thinking of are concepts. Notice how knowledge here requires both a concept *and* a belief, and that our knowledge might be right or wrong. If one has no concept of something, then no belief can be had on it one way or the other, so we can quickly leave this dead end alone. If one has a concept, but no belief as to its truthfulness, then one still does not have knowledge. Instead, one is agnostic (Greek for "without knowledge"). This means one can claim not to have knowledge about a concept they are aware of, and this might seem odd. But not really. I might know that something was stolen, and I might know that some particular person was in the vicinity of the theft during that time. I recognize the possibility that this person might have stolen the item, but I would want more evidence before I actually claim I know that they are guilty or innocent. I'm agnostic to their guilt until additional evidence is presented to me.

But if all I do is leave this definition alone, then it is not much better than "justified true belief;" we need a way to judge just how good one's knowledge is. This is where credibility comes into play (which, in turn, is based on how consistent the given evidence is). I want to make a final point on the definition before I move on: the word "proof" has no meaning in the literal sense with my definition. Unfortunately, the limits of language makes it almost impossible to avoid using this word, at least not without being quite awkward in our speech and writing. In polite company, I do find myself using the word, but I do so with a mental reservation that it means "extreme confidence" as opposed to "absolute confidence." In a theological debate, however, "proof" is the one word that the theist does not want to hear, and the whole purpose of this paper is to "snuck the premise" so that this word becomes meaningless in debate.

The "proof trap" is where someone claims they accept science because science proves things, but they don't believe in religion because religious people can't prove God. Christians can't argue against this. Everything the Bible tells us emphasizes belief and faith in God, not proof (and I believe this is for good reason, but that argument is outside the scope of this paper). The skeptic has an almost unlimited ability to make a prediction based on scientific discovery at his or her fingertips. But Christians obey God, not the other way around. We cannot simply ask God for fire to come out of the sky like Elijah did. I'm not saying it can't happen, but it would be foolish to try this in a debate unless one is a prophet and has already been told by God to do such a thing beforehand.

Fortunately, both science and philosophy are on the side of those who deny "proof" in the absolute sense, although one does need to do some research to find it. I have already written many articles on this and won't spend more time on it here. If one is able to successfully snuck this premise, the skeptic will often either be at a loss for words when they can't use "proof" against the theist, or begin to rant in a way that will demonstrate just how little they actually thought about their own

argument. Even if the skeptic recognizes the snuck premise for what it is, they still have to disprove it. Since most skeptics are relatively lazy (they demand proof of the theist and then nitpick anything said, secure that the theist will never use the word "proof"), this alone can unravel them, as now the roles are reversed. Now they have to do all the explaining while the theist can nitpick the counterargument. It takes a little quick thinking and a little understanding of what science really is about, but it is worth the effort. So many skeptics think they have foolproof defenses that in reality are really absurd. These defenses only exist because they are never called out for being the absurdities that they are.

For the rest of this paper, I will try to explain the given diagram, and hope that it is beneficial in understanding all that was said above.

To begin with, I accepted as *a priori* Descartes' idea that I exist. If I exist, then I am real, and for this paper I will use "truth" and "real" interchangeably for the sake of smooth reading. Therefore, truth must exist in some form because I exist. But I don't know what truth looks like in its entirety. If only I exist, then truth is limited by my consciousness. If something outside myself also exists, then truth is that much bigger for it. Here is where I insert my one assumption that continuity is credible evidence for truth outside oneself. So I do not know how extensive the truth is, but I do know I am but one part, and most likely an infinitesimally small part at that.

I will build on Descartes by saying "I exist, therefore I have value," and then look to C.S. Lewis and agree that for truth to have any value, there must needs be un-value with which to contrast it. I can observe the obvious *lack* of consistency in all forms of thought that found their roots in Hegel (who, if one remembers, claimed there was no difference between truth and untruth), so I can use that as evidence with a high degree of credibility. And since I am refuting Hegel's idea that truth and untruth are the same, it must follow that truth and untruth must be "aware" of each other (see next paragraph). Therefore, we see on the diagram an area representing truth and an adjoining area representing untruth.

Neither truth nor untruth can contradict themselves, but for different reasons. A "lie" is clearly an untruth, yet it is not contradictory for a truthful man to call a liar, "a liar." It is not that a "lie" made its way into the truth with this statement, but rather that truth recognized that a lie is not part of itself. The untruth likewise cannot contradict itself, but for a very different reason. As truth is real and untruth is not real, we find nothing exists in untruth, so there is nothing to self-contradict. A liar may call a truthful man almost anything he wants: a fellow liar, a horse, a rose, an ocean, a galaxy. None of these vastly different concepts contradict each other because, when a liar speaks of a truthful man, each concept is equally unreal to each other. The one thing the liar cannot call the truthful man is a "truthful man," because at that point the liar is no longer a liar. Note that this apparent self-awareness truth has, even if it seems a bit odd at first, actually points to Jehovah, as He can legitimately be described as truth with sentience.

I will now claim a second *a priori* that one can believe a concept to either be true, untrue, or uncertain of its truthfulness. I already defined the uncertainty of truth as being agnostic, and so it does not belong on a chart representing knowledge. I will therefore represent knowledge as a parallelogram (for reasons I will get to in a moment). Since I have already concluded that I am but a small part of a bigger truth, it should follow that any knowledge I have needs be a small part of truth, with much truth outside my knowledge. And since I am aware of untruth, it also follows that my knowledge has a similar presence on untruth.

And now to discuss why I chose a parallelogram. My consistency assumption implies that the more evidence I have for believing in any given concept, the more likely it is to actually be truth. As

we can never (at least in this life) know truth in the absolute sense, some sense of probability must exist in any belief. As can be seen, the parallelogram changes color from top to bottom in various gradations. This represents a range from absolute confidence in truth to simply "making things up." Also, over the truth part, we see that the more credibility we have for the belief, the more of the parallelogram is over truth, and *vice versa* for untruth. But even at our most confident, a little bit still rests in untruth while even our most groundless arguments have a bit in truth.

Again, in keeping with consistency, we find plenty examples in what we perceive with our senses. Let us return to an upcoming championship. There is a truth that one team or the other will win, but it is impossible for us to know in the absolute sense who it is before the game is played. If one friend chooses a team to win the championship because they have the best looking uniforms, we tend to place very little confidence in this expected outcome. But sometimes it happens anyway. In contrast, if another friend did player-to-player and coach-to-coach comparisons, and then looked at every game leading up to the championship to see how they all worked together as a team, then we would likely place a great deal of confidence in his prediction. But sometimes the other team wins anyway.

Other philosophers have actually talked about this idea as well, but with a different slant. To form a belief with little or no credible evidence is called "bad faith," while beliefs that are reasoned and well thought out are called "good faith." However, philosophers are human just like everyone else. Once the labels are pinned, it becomes easy to accept or disregard ideas based only on the label. I agree one should be cautious when talking to someone acting in bad faith, but that does not by necessity mean that they are wrong. Likewise, simply accepting a highly rational man at his word may be necessary at times, but that does not by necessity mean he is right. This is known as the Genesis Fallacy, and is actually quite common at all intellectual levels. One should always do their own research on matters that are important to oneself, and find knowledge on one's own.

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