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KNOWING “KNOWLEDGE” AND “TO KNOW”: AN OVERVIEW OF CONCEPTS

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Abstract

Knowledge is a topic, widely discussed both in philosophy and in everyday life of a common man who is not aware of its principles and existing connotations. This paper attempts to explain “knowledge”, significance of “Knowing” by incorporating diverse interdisciplinary, multicultural perspectives on understanding of “Knowledge” and its concepts that we experience “knowingly or unknowingly”. It involves a discussion on wisdom-knowledge interaction, their differences and interdependence; reality and its manifestations in various aspects that talks about the nature of reality in general as a concept; and a brief essay on unexplained mystery of “Sampurna gyana” (meaning complete knowledge) and “Sarwagya” (person who knows everything) trying to understand it’s possibility in a world of infinite possibilities.

Keywords: Knowledge; Epistemology; Philosophy.

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1. Introduction

1.1. An Introduction To Knowledge

All of us hear and use the word "knowledge", but do we actually "know" what "knowledge" is? Can you define "knowledge"? Are you thinking of a "statement" or a "sentence" to describe "knowledge"? However, did you know that According to Hintikka (1962), "a statement is the act of uttering, writing, or otherwise expressing a declarative sentence; a sentence is the form of words which is uttered or written when a statement is made". So, if you are trying to explain "knowledge" with your "knowledge" of words or the ability to express, isn't it a paradox or some sort of circular argument? Is it not similar to describe the whole concept of mathematics with a few numbers or digits? Have you asked yourself that is it the fact of you "knowing" a proposition is "knowledge" or the proposition itself is the "knowledge", or is it that "fact" of you "knowing" it, is the knowledge? Here arises a complex loop with varied answers where all seem to be correct. But then what is knowledge actually?

In the book "Epistemology or Theory of Knowledge" (P. Coffey) knowledge is said to be "sui generis" meaning it cannot be defined properly/sufficiently/adequately/convincingly by anything other than itself. "Knowledge" after decades of researches and debates in the same [since the time of Plato (423/428 BC-438/437 BC) till present day including contribution of, Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592), Rene Descartes (1596-1650), B. Pascal (1623-1662), D. Hume (1711-1776), I. Kant (1724-1804), F. W. Nietzsche (1844-1900), E. Gettier (1927) etc. and the postulates, teachings of the great spiritual leaders and philosophers such as Buddha, Confucius (etc.) were of immense importance to explain the same] has been explained as "justified true belief". Knowledge is the "awareness" and "understanding" of particular aspects of "reality", the approach is that knowledge requires three necessary and sufficient conditions, so that knowledge can then be defined as "justified true belief":

Truth: since false propositions cannot be known - for something to count as knowledge, it must actually be true. As famously Aristotle (but rather confusingly) expressed it: "To say of something which is that it is not, or to say something which is not that it is, is false. However, to say something which is that it is, or of something which is not that it is not, is true. "

Belief: because one cannot know something that one doesn't even believe in, the statement "I know x, but I don't believe that x is true" is contradictory.

Justification: as opposed to believing in something purely as a matter of luck.

The knowledge yielding conditions manifest both externally (as in knowledge of objects, subjects, environment, semantics etc.) and internally (as in spiritual knowledge, knowing emotions, thoughts, etc.) (By "Externalism" and "internalism") i.e. in the facts existing outside the mental ability of an individual that justifies/possesses the evidence of a proposition and also that are within the psychological states of those who gain knowledge, validations of reliable cognitive processes. For example, after returning from a fair you tell your mother that you saw an old friend at a stall; this is your "knowledge" of the fact that your old friend was at the fair. The external manifestations were your cues from the surroundings, the aspects of fair, appearance of your old friend, and the exposure for him/her to be seen; and the internal conditions were, your ability to identify your friend as in by paying attention (psychological) your memory that was triggered by the sight to label him as "old friend" and the emotional aspects towards the event (possibly flash bulb memory) that made you focus and crave for more pieces of evidence for surety which were self-triggering and spontaneous. Now consider a case, you are walking towards your home and you are unsure that your watch is working properly and you take a look at the big public watch (say the Big Ben) and it shows the same time (say 6:00 pm), and you "know" your watch is working properly because it is justified (by the fact that the big watch shows the same time), it is true, and you definitely believe it too right! So you have the knowledge of the time, but what you don't know is that the big watch hasn't been working for some time, so is your knowledge actually knowledge? Can it be true and false at the same time? Such a case is called a "Gettier problem".

Knowledge is itself complete, but what a person "knows" depends upon "justification". This, in turn, is dependent upon our ability to accept and agree to things around. The process of "knowing" is not an entity or a label in our brain/mind but it is meaning and description, a detailed compilation of conscious –unconscious information, of what relation does a

fact/event/object has with things in our contact so as to justify it. (Similar was described by Hilary Putnam.) For example: "water" when heard will create few or more images/meanings/attributes in our minds and magically all of them are the parts of our "knowledge" of water.

"WATER" To a child may be- something to drink, may trigger a memory of swimming etc. To a peasant or farmer may be- a necessity for agriculture, nature of water suitable for cultivation of a particular crop etc. To a scientist may be- 2 molecules of hydrogen and one molecule of oxygen, have a boiling point of 373 Kelvin, having properties like anomalous expansion, universal coolant etc. The latter categories, however, most probably have the similar ideas about water as the prior ones depending upon their experiences and interests. Hence, what we know is a result of our experience.

No matter how adequately we try to define knowledge and its relativity but there might still remain something yet to be said, maybe because the domain of knowledge is vast and it is important to recognize that the human mind has its limits, that there are many questions which it may raise indeed but cannot adequately answer or understand their solutions, while at the same time it can discover and hold firmly to all the truths that are requisite for the realization of the supreme purpose of man's existence in the universe.

2. Knowledge and Wisdom

Wisdom or sapience is the ability to think and act using knowledge, common sense, and insight. This implies a possession of knowledge or the seeking of knowledge to apply to the given circumstance/ proposition.

Wisdom and Knowledge are two different, what you may call "entities" or "term". Knowledge is existential and also that will be gained, the "prior" and the "post" to Wisdom. Wisdom is the process that judges an event by the available books/ records of experiences and "be-ings" to acquire new and strengthen the existing ones. For example, when we solve a mathematic sum we use our knowledge of the subject to analyze the sum and solve it to know the possible answer. Therefore it is comprehensible that the process of solving the sum is what is called "Wisdom". By this example we can allow the differences to be explored:

Constancy: Knowledge is a constant existence, it speaks; where-as Wisdom is fluid and subjective. From the above example we can explain; for doing a sum of trigonometry or calculus, the formulae are same, same in all books and same for everyone which is the knowledge of subject, and we need an answer to the sum, which is to be known, the way different people go about the sum is different, the way they use the available knowledge is different, i.e. the thought is different since wisdom is subjective.

Nature: Knowledge is vast yet selective but also interdisciplinary where-as wisdom is intangible and comprehensive. For example, the formulae of trigonometry can't be used to solve a multiplication problem but how-ever used in architecture, where-as wisdom, is the tendency on the part of an individual to habitually take the same approach (typical/peculiar) to an event, situation or problem.

Fluidity: Knowledge is like a vast ocean, it has all aspects, concepts, determinants, partition etc. It is self-sufficient and self-sustainable, but unlike it, wisdom is like a river, it flows through every bank, in the forms of streams, become brooks, waterfalls has to get its strength tested by rocks it hits, get loaded up with gravel and eventually forms a delta (i.e. diverges in various probable refined stream) in order to reach its desired goal, the ocean.

State: Knowledge is always in a progressive state, and gradual (however in some cases it may be instantaneous as in case of people with high intuitive power/abilities), knowledge is somewhat related to time (as in for example: academic knowledge which may also be called referred to as scientific knowledge which needs grade to pass through, spiritual knowledge which take few to more lifetimes to attain etc. {With exception}), where-as wisdom is timeless, it is the judgment that is not governed by the time but by one's potential (including all possible abilities where every quality is taken into consideration).

Some differences between knowledge and wisdom are:

KNOWLEDGE	WISDOM
1. Understanding	1. Judgement
2. Learning something	2. Using what is learned
3. Exploring	3. Travelling
4. Ink/ color	4. Pen/paintbrush
5. "What to say"	5. "When to say"
6. Gain	6. Sustain and abstain
7. Tomato is a fruit	7. Not to put tomato in fruit salad

For better understanding consider this.... "Knowledge", knowing how to use a gun, "wisdom" is, understanding when to use it/ however try not shooting someone because it's written in the essay.

3. The Manifestation of Reality

As discussed earlier in the Gettier case, the "justified true belief" may not be that very "true". Then what is "reality"? Consider walking down an abandoned road, you will have multiple thought about the silence, about where the road will lead to, what happens if something springs up! Etc. when nothing actually may be present. You can see, the situation is like an empty canvas and you can paint your own things, here your knowledge (consider experience here) is the color, the brush is the resources available (the ones present involving objects, people) and the hand to use this brush is our "perception".

It is a common conviction of mankind that truth is distinguishable from error. It is an equally common conviction that although men easily fall into error, and easily remain in error, nevertheless, they can and do possess some true knowledge concerning themselves and the universe (sometimes we are erroneous in perceiving an event and a more fearful state of being erroneous in the interpretation of what we perceive). Example, many of us have cheated in exams, we have often marked one of four options looking at someone else's paper, such, is, a condition beginning with the acknowledgement that "I might be wrong"; we stay in doubt for

some time and then guess that the person sitting next to me must be knowing the correct answer, so it is lot more satisfying in copying that guessing on our own, we perceive that the person must have written the right answer and even interpret that answer which has a one-fourth probability of being correct, will be right). The reality, some people believe is that what exists and the attributes that make it different from those that do not exist or cannot exist; however “reality” is a process, a process of coherence between true-false, present-absent, and all available opposites, virtues of which are interdependent and they are complementary to each other. Can you explain “darkness” without using “light”, or can you understand the importance of “light” without “darkness”? Isn’t “darkness” mere absence of “light”, or isn’t light a state of “no darkness”? The “pro” is known by its “con” and vice versa. Hence this “coherence” is reality; the isthmus and the strait between real and unreal. Coherence is truth-conducive (BonJour 1985). Coherence requires the involvement of properties of judgment sets that are logical (and, in principle, determinable a priori). The human mind is recognized to be fallible in that it can adhere to error, mistaking this for truth. It is also recognized to be limited in its capacity inasmuch as no one believes that all reality falls within the experience of any individual human being, and, therefore, there is much reality of which even the wisest human being must remain in ignorance. Finally, no human individual will claim that he fully understands all the reality which does fall within his experience: he will admit that there is much he is unable to interpret, unable to reach the truth or make up his mind about, so that he must suspend his judgment in reference to it and remain in doubt; and that there is much, perhaps, too, in regard to which, while he has a more or less strong opinion that he has reached the truth, still he is not certain, not sure, not convinced that he has, and so recognizes the possibility that he may be mistaken; the magic of human nature is that we tend to even enjoy these feelings of doubt labeling them as “inevitable/unimportant/ineffective mistakes”. (For example, consider that you have gone to a restaurant for dinner and you ordered a very pleasing dish, in that dish, there is some ingredient that tastes different or new. In this case, you are not being able to get a clue what that ingredient is, you won’t be able to know it, because I don’t think chefs or cooks generally reveal those secrets honestly, and neither are you capable of potentially getting a fix on your guess. Your opinions might equivocate, uncertain and you might be doubtful to such an extent that you would ignore your curiosity to know and enjoy the unknown happily.

Doxastic states (states that involve opinion, judgment) which are very much volatile in nature will be determined by (i.e. Will supervene on) logical properties of the set of propositions that are the objects of the judgments in question. We can say that “reality” is the result of mental attitudes of doubt, surmise, opinion, conviction, certitude, uncertainty, certainty, summation, satisfaction in regards to our knowledge. There are certain things that we tend to deny, disagree or feel hesitant to accept because of our sake or lack of certain traits so the “belief” of the “justified true belief” is distorted. Sometimes we often even tend to forget the fact that there might even be the mere probability of the existence of things that we don’t want to believe that they are. There exists a mockable system of the paradox of pragmatic (both in practical and philosophical senses) nature involving a prudent fear of making errors and also principles of non-acceptance to satisfy the needs of one’s own psyche.

As there are different speculative propositions or opinions for an event, all have a chance of being retained as a “reality” or being discarded or rejected as the same; for an event to be “reality” it is determined on the basis of the “justification” and the probability of occurrence.

The way things are reasoned out and sometimes when debated or argued upon; decide the qualitative extent of it being a “reality”.

So, keep reasons very reasonable for illustrating a reality. And next time, if a “reality” pleases or hurts us; remember it’s a painting/panting of our own perception.

Reality is truth in existence, however, the capacity to know about its existence and accepting it to be true are two different questions. Another problem arises, is that the observation of the existence of any reality or truth, and itself raises a question as “observational science is a necessary precursor for a hypothesis “(Newtonian philosophy). Thus there might remain a slight doubt about a reason, but still, it’s reasonable to have doubt; to quote Rene Descartes “If you would be a real seeker after truth, it is necessary that in your life, you doubt as far as possible all things.”

4. To Know

What is it “To know”? When do you infer that you “know”? For instance you know that “the great pyramids are in Egypt”, not just that, but you also know that pyramids are in Giza (Egypt) but also that they are not in India or U. K. or Russia or U. S. A., and you also know that U. K. , India, Russia or U. S. A. are not Egypt etc. One statement inferred so many things about what you “know” isn’t that amusing! “To know”, is a trait, rather a virtue of an individual. Just like the virtue of heart is to beat, of an ear is to hear, of wind is to blow, and of the sun is to shine similarly of the mind is “to know”.

“To know” is a combination of two things, “to be aware” and “to be able to discriminate”. Awareness is not just paying attention, or concentrating, it is much more; awareness is an organism’s perception and cognitive (understanding) reaction to a condition/situation/event. Being aware is to be keenly “alive”, being active to certain elements or whole environment or situation. When we are aware we not only pay attention to the object but we also interpret it, feel it and also submit or address to its importance at that point of time. Awareness is accompanied by reasoning, understanding, and followed by knowledge. Awareness is when we want to observe a certain thing or event when we want it to be felt or understood or even merely feel the desire of curiosity as “what is that?” There is a principle of development in psychology stating “initial development is greater than the development in later stages/ages/periods of life”, this is because, children are very curious and thus they are aware of multiple things going around and hence their development is significantly more, where as to us, we tend to be more specific and precise about being aware of subjects/event or even opinions and facts. Awareness is directly affected by our interests, capacities, condition, situation, etc. example there is hardly any chance that an auditory handicapped person (deaf) would be able to be aware of the music (completely, not just the rhythm or bass) being played; someone very sad might overlook maybe, the whole world; sometimes we get so happy that we tend to overlook the red light. Schemes (organized ways of making sense of experiences; Piaget, 1926) are basic units of experiences that directly relate to the state of awareness which give rise to mental representations (Piaget) (internal depiction of information that mind can manipulate) which forms a system in our mind and brain which includes all belief systems, reaction patterns, concepts, tendencies which further develop

our interests, curiosity nourished by themselves with the help of reinforcement, pleasure, appreciation, positive feelings and amusement.

By “discrimination” here we don’t refer to “racism” “sexism” or any other similar “.....ism” (prejudice); to “discriminate” here means to the ability with which we can distinguish between right-wrong, real-unreal, etc. In simple terms to discriminate is to understand an object/event/proposal significantly distinguishing from others (on dichotomy or a scale of variation). We can include the concept of “hierarchical-classification” (Piaget) which is the ability to organize objects into classes and subclasses on the basis of differences and similarity”; we may also consider that this system along with moral and ethical systems in us govern major decisions we take in our lives; the example of classifying ladyfinger as a vegetable and banana as fruit despite both having seeds, would be very easy; consider this that you see a blind man on the road trying to cross the road; some might directly help him out of their good nature and instantaneous decision making, but some might think the following things-1. Is he really blind? 2. Would helping him cross the road would actually help, how will he go rest of the way? 3. He might be a trickster or a con. 4. Isn’t there anyone in his house to help him? 4. How did he get blind? 5. He is blind; there would be problems, why did he leave his house in the first place? Etc. irrespective of being good or bad "thought" we think this and merely the ability to distinguish all these questions and yet understanding that they all are deeply connected is the ability to discriminate, and if one even ponders around his thoughts classifying them as good or bad is yet another level of discrimination, and yet another level of discrimination is labeling them as helpful, thoughtful, cautious under good; ignorant, over-cautious, pessimistic under bad. These were just a few thoughts and yet we have so much knowledge just by doing this. This is an endless process as we generate about 60000 thoughts a day, to this we can add the interpretation, methods, reasons for our actions and their consequences.

Every aspect of our life involves “knowing” but often ignores the facts that it is already based on something that we “know”. There is nothing as “no knowledge” of anything (except for severely mentally disabled and to lower animals; as they are constricted by their unfortunate limitations). Next time someone tells us that “you don’t know anything!” we can proudly say-“I might not know as much as you do but I know that there is nothing as (not) knowing anything”, “I am just not aware of it yet”.

5. The “Complete” Knowledge, “Sarwagya”: A Myth, Mystery or a Miracle

Sometimes we wish to know everything and all the other times we ask ourselves that can one know everything. Is “Sarwagya” “complete knowledge of everything” anyhow possible? Let me narrate a short story by some writer which I came across somewhere.

Once there was a seeker, a man thirsty for knowledge, to know everything that was existent and that was non-existent. He set out on a journey and searched for answers of his own heart, mind, perception, and destiny. Being grown up in a quite spiritual environment he set out to seek and find answers from the divine creator not being ignorant to the rational principles of science. He thought it was important for him to find the reason for which the Lord had made human beings special and what was so special about humans, what was the reason of his life. It had been 50 years now; he got answers, many of them which included mastery over fields of sciences,

astronomy, medicines, yoga, etc. but none satisfied him. Thinking of his unquenched thirst, one evening he was sitting on a beach, resting after his tiring walk. With his weary eyes as he gazed upon the drowning sun at dusk, he saw an astonishing sight of a boy. The boy was dipping his hands into the ocean bringing out water and was pouring it into a pot. The earthen vessel had already been filled up to the brim but still for hours he continued his activities. The old seeker got irritated and restlessly went to the boy. He asked the boy the purpose of his action, to which the boy from whose water holding hands the liquid was still dripping, smiled at him and answered I am trying to fill the ocean in this pot. The man enraged said “but that’s foolish, it’s in vain, you can’t put all that water in just one pot, not even in several. The boy got up and said “exactly” and went away. ”

The human mind has its capacities and it may not be able to comprehend every answer it asks for, but yes there are acts similar to the boy’s that we do to keep nourishing our lives, the soul does with the water of knowledge. There are different levels of our knowledge, every level having its own peculiarity, its own importance, and its own manifestation but all inter-related. Let’s observe an example:

- 1) Apple is a fruit
- 2) Apple grows on trees
- 3) Apple trees grow in cold regions
- 4) Apple has a good quantity of water
- 5) Apple is an ingredient of fruit salad
- 6) Apple keeps us healthy
- 7) Apple is/ is not tasty
- 8) I like/ don’t like to eat apple
- 9) An apple a day keeps the doctor away
- 10) Apple is the forbidden fruit (eaten by Eve for which the human race was cursed for the change of season where spring being cut down to one-fourth.)

These are 10 assertions (that might have been irritating to read) which are made, and you must be wondering why are these mentioned here, the reason is to emphasize on “seriation” (Piaget). This process of seriation is our ability to classify and arrange things in ascending or descending order. Similarly as in case of everything; our interests, priorities and yes knowledge of course. If you have noticed that the 10 assertion/statements made, they are true, they all are true, aren’t they! They are all believed by most of the people (mostly, and I can vouch for that) and also they are more or less justified (speculative for the tenth one). Hence they all can fall under the category of knowledge. They have everything in common then but still is there any difference that you make out? Do they differ in some way? If yes, let me tell you that it the level of knowledge/truth that makes them different. 1 to 4 display levels of scientific knowledge, the knowledge of properties of an apple. 5, 6 help us to know the qualities, nature of Apple as for how can we use it or why should we eat it. 7, 8 are the statements that give the idea of personal knowledge i.e. our own interests for apple, reasons for liking or not liking apple etc. 9, 10 are some lines related to the belief system. Is it not that the sentences, however, all are small but are gradually increasing in complexity of interpretation. Similarly, knowledge has levels, of which every level manifests in everybody’s life.

The knowledge will be presented in the form of testimonies, statements which may provide the necessity of further contemplation and speculation. One justified true belief will lead to further justifications and hence what further? Are the philosophy and concept based on concepts of enlightenment, revelation, salvation, and speculation or there are logics and rationality governing the so called knowledge; however both play their roles both being acceptable to eyes of science, philosophy, and spirituality.

Here your “Vivek” (intelligence) comes to play. Although it is a topic of epistemology and combined interdisciplinary effort of philosophy, psychology, neuroscience and maybe anthropology all together but isn’t asking for the same too much to ask for! All we can do is, wait for the great learned or the growing bright minds to discover a related concept for us and find us the probability of becoming one however effortful it may be. I wonder how it would feel to “know” it all.

6. Conclusion

On a concluding note, it is important to mention that knowledge, as described all over the paper, is a very vast topic of unfathomable dimensions, direction, and disciplines. Such topic needs a great discussion and debate in order to evolve with a comprehensible and satisfying, objective overview of the concept acceptable to all humankind in coherence with what exists and that which is to come. Hence, I would like to conclude with a call for all opinions and views along with their interactions that would contribute to the concept, better understanding of "knowledge" and relevance of "knowing" for the human race that serves not only the ignited minds of philosophers who always strive for explanation but also to attract the seekers of “gyana” the people want to know more about it.

“To know, or not to know, that is the question.”

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