

Knowledge Issues, Knowers, and Knowing



“THE TIME HAS COME,” THE WALRUS SAID,
TO TALK OF MANY THINGS: OF SHOES—AND
SHIPS—AND SEALING-WAX—
OF CABBAGES—AND KINGS. . .”

LEWIS CARROLL

Introduction



- People know many things—what are some of the things we know?
- People rarely stop to think about the processes by which knowledge is produced, obtained or achieved, nor about why, under what circumstances, and in what ways knowledge is renewed or reshaped by different individuals and groups at different times or from different perspectives or approaches.



Knowledge Issues



- Knowledge issues are questions that directly refer to our understanding of the world, ourselves and others, in connection with the acquisition, search for, production, shaping and acceptance of knowledge.
- These issues are intended to open inquiry and exploration not only problems but also the strengths of knowledge.
- Knowledge issues can reveal how knowledge can be a benefit, a gift, a pleasure and a basis for further thought and action, just as they can uncover the possible uncertainties, biases in approach, or limitations relating to knowledge, ways of knowing, and the methods of verification and justification appropriate in different areas of knowledge.

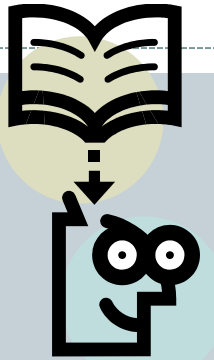
First Examples



- Consider the question, “What is the value of distinguishing between what we know and what we don’t know?”
- In the context of problems of knowledge, the emphasis is likely to be on the good reasons we have for doubting whether the lines we draw between the two are as clear as we sometimes suppose them to be
- In contrast, in the context of knowledge issues, the reasons we have to maintain the legitimacy and usefulness of the distinction are likely to come to the fore.



Second Example



- Consider the question, “Is there one way of knowing that is best for acquiring knowledge?”
- In the context of problems of knowledge, the emphasis is likely to be on why over-reliance on or confidence in each way of knowing would be unwise.
- In the context of knowledge issues, reasons for relying on or trusting ways of knowing should also be considered.

Nature of Knowing



- In English there is one word “know,” while in French and Spanish, for example, each has two (savoir/connaitre and saber/conocer). In what ways do various languages classify the concepts associated with “to know”?



Nature of Knowing



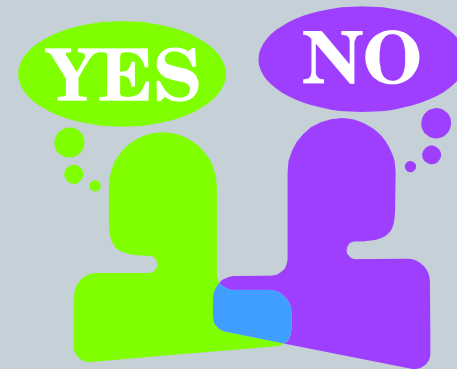
- In English, French, Spanish or Chinese, for example, what is the relationship between the different ways of expressing “know”: “they know of it,” “they know about it,” “they really know it,” “they know that person,” “they know that this is so,” “they know how to accomplish it”? Are there other ways of using the verb “to know”?



Nature of Knowing



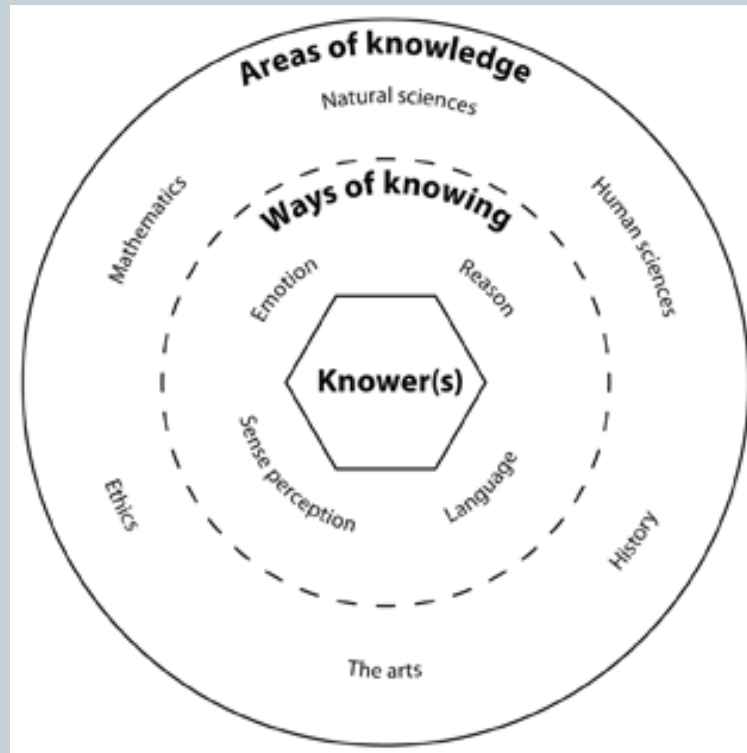
- How do “believing that” and “believing in” differ?
- How does belief differ from knowledge?
- What are the differences among the following: information, data, belief, faith, opinion, knowledge and wisdom?



Knowledge Communities



- In the TOK diagram, the center is represented as both an individual and a group.



Knowledge Communities



- To what extent can we distinguish between knowing as an individual and knowing as a group or community enterprise?
- How much of one's knowledge depends on interaction with other knowers?
- Are there types of knowledge that are specifically linked to particular communities of knowers?

Knowledge Communities



- To what extent can we act individually in creating new knowledge? What are the strengths of working in a knowledge community? What are the dangers?
- Is common sense just what is taken for granted in a community? How can we decide when to question common sense?

Knowledge Communities

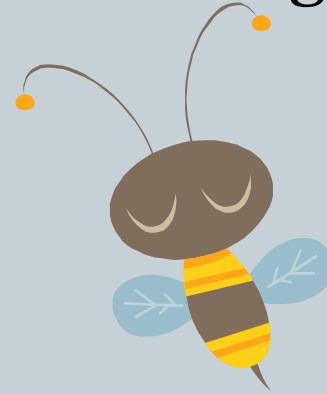


- Presented with the belief system of a community of knowers, how can we decide what we personally believe?
- How can we decide which beliefs we ought to check further?
- In the end does it just amount to a question of trust?
- If so, how can we decide who to trust, and on which issues?

Knowledge Communities



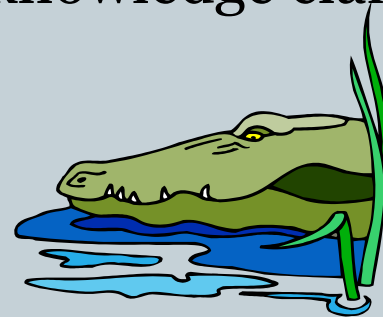
- In what sense is a community of knowers like bees constructing the labyrinths of their hive or a group of builders constructing a building?
- Draw a picture of the knowledge community as bees or as builders. How would you label each of the various players and parts?



Justification of Knowledge Claims



- “If the frog tells you that the crocodile is dead, do not doubt it.” what might this Ghanaian proverb suggest about who it is that provides the justification for a knowledge claim?



- What is the difference between “I am certain” and “It is certain”?
- Is conviction sufficient for a knowledge claim to be validated?
- What are the implications of accepting passionate, personal belief as knowledge?

Justification of Knowledge Claims



- How are knowledge claims justified?
- Are the following types of justification all equally reliable: intuition, sense perception, evidence, reasoning, memory, authority, group consensus and divine revelation?
- Why should time be taken to assess critically the nature of knowledge claims?

Linking Questions

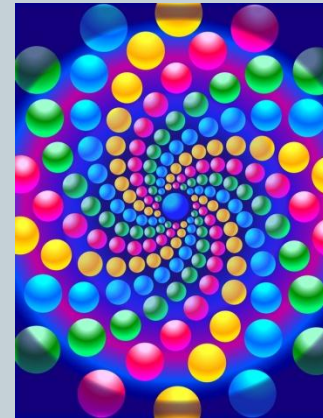


- Do knowledge claims transcend different communities or cultures?
- What differences exist between public and private justifications?
- To what extent might this distinction between private knowledge and public knowledge be culturally dependent?

Linking Questions



- Do the images of a web, building blocks, concentric circles, a spiral, or a grid make a convincing description of the interconnections in the ways of knowing and areas of knowledge?



- In what ways might these metaphors be useful?

Linking Questions



- To what extent is knowledge about the past different in kind from other kinds of knowledge?
- Does making a knowledge claim carry any particular obligation or responsibility for the knower?

