

Exchange On Knowledge From January 2020

Post by "Cassius" of January 1, 2020 at 1:40 PM

[Quote from Oscar](#)

This touches on Epistemology. My view is in line with the scientific understanding that objective reality exists independent of our sensations. That if life ceased to exist, reality remains. I do not subscribe to the salesperson's mantra that perception is reality, if you perceive yourself to be the Jesus Christ, I have bad news to tell you. I think objective reality can be understood through sensations and reason.

I completely agree with this very important point. A tree that falls in the forest with no one around to hear it does indeed make a sound. I think the issue is more that if one is coming up with a list of statements that are intended to be helpful philosophically, then it makes sense to address the point that is in philosophical contention, which in this case is that even though the vibrations created by the falling tree are of a particular "atomic" nature, different people are going to perceive those vibrations, or fail to perceive them, in different ways. So what we are trying to point out is that there are definitely things going on regardless of our perception of them, but at the same our own personal knowledge of those events arises through our perceptions.

Possibly the whole issue is being obscured, or not revealed clearly enough, by affixing the terms "objective" or "subjective" to "reality," without really stating what "objective" and "subjective" are intended to mean.

[Quote from Oscar](#)

I agree with most of the above, though there's also quantum effects that new research, I don't really yet understand fully, suggests there may be more to say on this. I think this is no longer to be considered a philosophical matter since it's now, I think for sometime already, a scientific matter.

Definitely the issues develop over time as we gain new instruments and new observations to consider. However I suspect that there is always going to be a philosophic aspect to this, as the developments of science never stand still, and new discoveries are made. So we are probably always going to be confronted with issues of what attitude to take toward "ultimate questions" which seem to be a moving target against new scientific discoveries. I suspect that Epicurus would say that this ultimate issue is much the same as what he himself confronted in considering the claims of the mathematicians of his own day.

Post by “Elayne” of January 1, 2020 at 5:05 PM

Oscar, the objective/ subjective issue-- yes, there is a reality independent of us-- but-- we can only perceive it subjectively, through our senses, feelings, and intuitions. We have no way of perceiving reality without filtering it through our subjectivity-- it's literally impossible. Even if you are using an instrument, you must still use your eyes, ears, or I guess Braille, touch, to obtain the readout.

This is really, really important to get a handle on for anyone studying this philosophy, because most philosophies consider what they call "objective" reality to be somehow better or more "real" than subjective. But all we can perceive is through subjective experience. Epicurus judged that to be real and sufficient evidence of how things are, and I do as well.

In some cases, as when we are doing science, we will obtain measurements which are highly replicated by different labs/ researchers, and we can rely on this data as likely accurate. However, that replication does not remove the fact that subjective perception was used.

Post by “Elayne” of January 1, 2020 at 7:17 PM

Oscar, I am confused. How do you propose we can have "knowledge" that isn't subjective? We know what is real through our subjective senses, feelings, and prolepses. Sometimes by comparing notes. No other way to know anything.

Although sense organs and instruments can malfunction, as in hallucinations, we use multiple senses and reconcile the information from all of them together-- plus we can talk to each other.

Post by “Elayne” of January 2, 2020 at 7:05 AM

Ah, ok Oscar-- this is actually my area, because of my career, both the MD and PhD in medicine. What you are talking about is levels of evidence, from anecdotal (lowest level) to highly replicated evidence from double blinded, controlled prospective trials, which attempt to remove

confounders and determine if two events are definitely associated, then if the association is causal. The kind of thing I was addressing with Hiram in the links he gave for mindfulness.

However, this information was still obtained subjectively. We "know" it only because we have replicated it stringently-- it's not a different type of knowledge.

A baby who drops objects off the high chair over and over is doing the same thing. That's their rudimentary physics experimenting.

Reason is involved in processing the subjective data, for sure. But reason isn't objective either, because it doesn't bring `_new_ data` in. It's a tool to use when processing data. And it has its own glitches.

Post by "Cassius" of January 2, 2020 at 8:45 AM

Good points Oscar, especially as to the popular associations of the word "dogmatism."

Do you have thoughts that would be helpful to cover as to the proper meaning we should give to the word "know" as to what it means "to know something?"

I presume we are talking at least in part about level of confidence that we place in a particular opinion.

Post by "Cassius" of January 2, 2020 at 9:33 AM

Yes this is a huge topic. I am thinking that one of the major issues here is that people have been browbeat into thinking that because they are not "god," because they do not have "perfect" knowledge, because there are facts that have not come to their attention (they aren't eternal or omnipotent themselves) then their "knowledge" is necessarily worthless and contemptible.

It seems obvious that this is a false standard of comparison, and that holding our knowledge up against a theoretical god's omnipotent and omnipresent knowledge is itself a contemptible exercise in stupidity. However, as always in an effort to make things easily understandable to average people, it would be very helpful to have an understandable description of "knowledge"

that makes clear why the false perspectives on knowledge, at both extremes (religious and nihilist) are so "wrong."

Post by "Elayne" of January 2, 2020 at 10:54 AM

I still maintain that nothing about knowledge requires removal of the subjective.

I understand Epicurus' dogmatism and the reasons for it. For myself, the philosophy of reality is more compatible with pragmatism, which is very different from skepticism. It allows me as a scientist to be open to new data but still accept facts-- I forget who said it, maybe Feynman, but facts are knowledge so well replicated that it would be "perverse to say otherwise." Practically speaking, it's close enough to dogmatism that I'm not bothered by dogmatism. Whereas skepticism annoys the stew out of me. ☐

Post by "Cassius" of January 2, 2020 at 2:34 PM

Elayne when you get a chance I'd like to see if you have a definition of "knowledge" that Oscar agrees with.

A lot of this is circular below. What are "facts"? What are "truths"?

noun

- 1 acquaintance with facts, truths, or principles, as from study or investigation; general erudition:
knowledge of many things.
- 2 familiarity or conversance, as with a particular subject or branch of learning:
A knowledge of accounting was necessary for the job.
- 3 acquaintance or familiarity gained by sight, experience, or report:
a knowledge of human nature.
- 4 the fact or state of knowing; the perception of fact or truth; clear and certain mental apprehension.
- 5 awareness, as of a fact or circumstance:
He had knowledge of her good fortune.

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Post by “Elayne” of January 2, 2020 at 7:20 PM

I would say knowledge is awareness of information (obtained through senses, feelings and/or prolepses) which a person feels sufficiently sure about to say "I know x thing". "Sufficiently" often in a subjective way. But in science, according more to accepted requirements for independent replication.

I read quite some time ago about a "sense of knowing " which could be triggered by stimulating the brain directly. Without any content-- the person would be suddenly struck with a feeling of

certainty but not knowing about what! Very weird. I'll see if I can find it. My intuition is that there is a sensation of knowing, or at least I myself experience that (although always with a topic).

I think of it as a prolepsis. Some kind of pattern recognition in the brain that kicks off when a piece of information has satisfied whatever criteria the pattern needs. And of course unless you are going by statistical rules, this will vary from one person to another. Some people require a lot more input before they feel "sure" and others leap right to it.

Right now, I "know" the street that is always outside my condo is there. This is my "fast brain", also sometimes called system 1-- I'm not thinking hard about it, but if someone said "hey, do you think the street is still there?" I would immediately say "what? Of course it is" and have no feeling of doubt. If you pushed me on it, I'd eventually say ok, whatever, maybe a silent bulldozer just came by and removed it-- I'm not looking at it, after all. But that's so far-fetched as to not be worth bothering with. I know, pragmatically speaking, and that's good enough.

Words are easier to define for me like that, with examples, in context. I think everyone here knows what knowledge means, lol. I would avoid getting wrapped up in one of those definition things that goes into recursive absurdity.

Post by “Elayne” of January 2, 2020 at 7:26 PM

I think it was mentioned in this book, which I no longer have, so I can't say anything about the quality of the research. But I sure have had the feeling of knowing.
http://www.rburton.com/i_on_being_ce...e_not_63166.htm