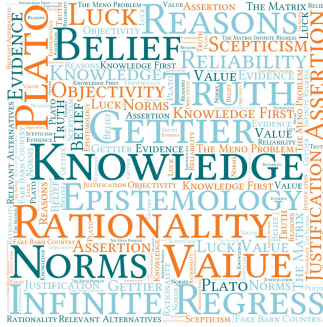




Knowledge, Information & Society

JAKE CHANDLER

Subject Overview



Epistemology (ctd.)

- Such reflection can be
 - **semantic** ('What does it mean to say something is a reason to believe something else?') or **ontological** ('What is the essence of knowledge?')
 - **logical** ('Does it follow, from the fact that I know that A and know that A implies B, that I know that B?')
 - **axiological** ('Is knowledge good in itself?') or **deontic** ('Ought one's beliefs be motivated by practical considerations?')
 - **alethic** ('Is it true that we know that we aren't in the Matrix?')

(We'll see that these questions are related: some answers to some questions preclude some answers to others)

Epistemology

- Philosophical reflection on a cluster of concepts connected with the appraisal of belief and related mental states
- Examples:
 - knowledge
 - justification
 - wisdom
 - probability
 - rationality
 - information
 - evidence
 - reasonable doubt
 - proof

This stuff matters

- Epistemological questions are both (a) interesting in themselves (I reckon!) and (b) relevant to practical matters
- Legal deliberation:
 - **Standards of proof**: What does it mean to say that something has been established beyond reasonable doubt?
 - **Responsibility**: When should we say that someone is culpably ignorant of the law?
- Science and industry:
 - **Statistical testing**: Is it rational to reject a hypothesis on the basis that it renders the data very improbable?
 - **Database management**: When altering the value of an item in a database, which potential repercussions on the remainder of the database should this change be permitted to have?

This stuff matters (ctd)

- Group decision-making:
 - **Expert opinion pooling**: How should we aggregate into a group-level judgment the opinions of a panel of experts?

Knowledge (ctd.)

Universal	Not Universal
Know , think, see, want, hear, say	eat, drink, stop, hit, go, sit
I, you	she, he, they
not, maybe, because, if, true, before, after	plant, tree, animal, bird, cold, hot

Knowledge

- We will cover a *minute* portion of the subject, focusing largely on the nature, value and extent of **knowledge**
- The concept is fundamental in understanding other key notions (to remember, to see,...)
- It is central to our everyday lives: "know" is the 8th most frequently used verb in English and is an unusual linguistic universal
 - "there's a word for it in all of the world's 6,000+ human languages...This status is surprisingly rare: an educated person has a vocabulary of about 20,000 words, but fewer than 100 of these are thought to have precise translations in every other language. Common words you might expect to find in every language (like "eat" and "drink") don't always have equivalents...Elsewhere, other languages make finer rather than rougher distinctions." (Nagel 2014)

Overview

- The first 8 weeks will largely focus on the individual
 - Varieties of knowledge (W1)
 - The nature of knowledge (W2–W3)
 - The value of knowledge (W4)
 - Rational belief and practical interests (W5–W6)
 - Scepticism and the limits of knowledge (W6–W7)
 - Survey data and epistemological intuitions (W8)

Overview (ctd.)

- W8 provides a bridge to the subsequent 3 lectures, which focus on topics connected with social aspects of epistemology
 - How to aggregate opinions (W9)
 - The value of cognitive diversity (W10)
 - Credit and the social organisation of inquiry (W11)
- We finish off the subject with a fun topic in applied epistemology:
 - Evidence and the Law (W12)

References

- Nagel, J. 2014. *Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.