

## **Epistemological Ramblings**

### **A thinking exercise for everyone.**

My first problems with epistemology came about with a popular definition. I had heard similar definitions a great many times over the years however; it was not until philosophy piqued my interest that I actually began to question the meanings and implications of how my language was arranged, utilized, interpreted and defined. Studies of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Noam Chomsky force one to examine meaning with more scrutiny, particularly how meanings are defined, facts are represented, information is shared from person to person and how that influences our knowledge.

The epistemology definition that I tripped over contained phrasing along the lines of "...branch of philosophy responsible for the study...". In similar fashion biology was responsible; physics was responsible and so on. These definitions I had, without thought understood the intent of conveyed in the collectively accepted interpretation of the day and within my environment. Now however, I find myself questioning how a field of study could, in and of itself have a responsibility.

Can responsibility be attributed to ideas or inanimate concepts and objects? Is it the responsibility of the traffic light to change colours so as to ration traffic flows? When we stop ourselves long enough to consider such thoughts, we recognize that traffic flows are programmed by people and the object is not exercising any thought towards its function. We can then apply similar thought to the responsibility of ideas and recognize that practitioners of philosophy can have responsibility but not the philosophy itself. If only it were simple enough to stop there. Practitioners of any study, profession, craft or routine task may be thought of as having responsibility however this cannot be relied upon.

Without spending a chapter on the Hippocratic Oath that doctors swear and its' ethical and moral implications and evolution through centuries of application; we note that doctors make a choice

regarding the acceptance of degrees of responsibility in their practices. So rooted in medicine is the importance, that the acceptance is ceremonial within the profession and self-governing bodies of overseers exist to ensure practitioners do not violate imposed ethical and moral standards they are obligated to follow.

To what degree then can we expect our local convenience store clerk to have knowingly accepted responsibility for the ethical and moral performance of their duties? Perhaps more importantly is where do you feel conscious choices regarding the acceptance of responsibilities should stop?

The point of responsibility and its' acceptance, stop lights verses their programmers and so on is to question knowledge and more specifically how and why we think the way we do. Are conceptual definitions that would seem to apply responsibility to concepts simply lazy language or are we actually trying to evade some knowledge of obligation even on a subconscious level? What profession, trade, career, or tasks do you perform in your daily life? How much responsibility do you have in their practice or performance? Perhaps a better self-examination question would be: How does your understanding of your own responsibilities possibly differ from the responsibilities expected of you by others? This will be delved into further in ethical exploration but for now the focus is knowledge.

Early in life I acquired knowledge imparted to me via definitions. I observed these in textbooks and written for me on boards and displays. I rationally accepted them and moved forward to other exploration based upon them. I did not afford them emotional energy or stop at the time to contemplate the exactness of the language or intent of behavioral expectations applied to non-living things.

Knowledge is acquired both individually and collectively. In early childhood we learn the stove is hot either by being told, touching it and finding out the hard way or by drawing near to test the hypothesis. The last way is the application of reasoning to validate concepts and observations. But there exists

much more too how we accept knowledge in this simple example. Likely our mothers were the ones who first told us of the stove being hot and if this was tested or experienced then we acquired evidence of the knowledge and rationally accepted the concept as factual.

What also occurred in this scenario was the experience of the informational transfer from our mothers to us and the truthfulness of it. This is the start of our evidence acceptance from sources outside personal observation. We accept the truth of others based on our assessment of the reasonableness of the other knowing the truth. In childhood, trust of information dominates questioning and experimentation the world over. By the time we enter school, we have learned that elders are smart, don't lie and can be trusted etc.... For the most part we are aware of how violations of such trusts can harm the psyche but in philosophical terms we should not ignore how far into the foundations of an individual's reasoning and logic abilities such violations can travel. Few adults are aware of how their reasoning abilities developed and I would state fewer if any children.

The knowledge we acquire therefore seems at least only equally or perhaps less important than how we acquire it or why we choose to accept it into our acquired knowledge. Like science, much of philosophy is borne from observation and the observational interpretations become the rational for further philosophical exploration. But how much can we trust observation?

I came to philosophy via science and thusly have a great deal of personal knowledge acceptance acquisition and rational acceptance from evidence collection and observational methodology. I find that philosophical exploration calls much of that into question especially when the evidence presented is only observation.

Consider our understanding of dimensions. The best explanation of dimension I have ever heard (and would credit if I knew the source) puts it like this;

- A point on a sheet of paper can be thought of as the non-dimensional shadow of a one-dimensional line.
- The line in turn can then be used to represent the shadow of a 2-dimensional square.
- The square is then used as a shadow representing a 3-dimensional cube.
- The cube...

It does get a bit more complex at this point but, in essence when time is considered as the fourth dimension then the cube as a representative shadow can only apply to that specific point in time during its observation. Even if you stare at it constantly you are in theory observing a series of 3 dimensional shadows of an object in constant motion through time. We actually do need some degree of understanding of a fourth dimensional concept in drawing dimensional comparisons to philosophy as three are not enough.

We information gather through observation utilizing our senses (dimension1); things smell, feel, look, sound and taste in ways that are both similar to all and unique to ourselves. The unique aspect becomes increasingly important when attempting definitions or developments based on collectivism. We apply reason to observation in order to gain knowledge (dimension 2). We utilize logic to expand knowledge and apply constants within that knowledge (dimension 3).

Traveling back to the hot stove lesson of childhood; we likely heard and felt that the stove is hot. We linked informational transfer and observations by way of rational reasoning. We further apply logic in concluding that all stoves are hot. In more detail what we actual do is apply a set of cautious behaviors in our dealing with all stoves and take precautions dependent on the conditions before we touch a stove should we actually need to in a given set of circumstances.

What then becomes the fourth dimension in epistemology? Like time when applied to the more tradition dimensions, objectivity requires consideration as the fourth dimension of epistemology. Objectivity becomes the tool in our philosophical explorations with which we continually compare our knowledge to our reality. Obviously, those who advocated for a round earth had to have applied objectivity to previously held beliefs and in concluding those false, choose to fight for a new paradigm.