

OMPU3112

PHILOSOPHY AND CURRENT ISSUES

SELF INSTRUCTIONAL
MATERIALS

ACADEMIC YEAR 2024

**FACULTY OF BUSINESS, HUMANITIES &
HOSPITALITY**

**BACHELOR OF COMMERCE (HONS) IN
INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS**

Topic 7 ► Epistemology

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this topic, you will be able to:

1. Explain the relationship between epistemology, history, and science in the development of knowledge.
2. Analyze key philosophical questions concerning the nature and limits of knowledge.
3. Evaluate the concepts of knowledge, truth, and various sources of knowledge.

► INTRODUCTION

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy that studies the nature, sources, and limits of knowledge. It seeks to answer fundamental questions such as: What is knowledge? How do we know something is true? What are the sources of knowledge?

In everyday life, individuals constantly acquire and use knowledge to make decisions, solve problems, and understand the world. However, not all knowledge is reliable or accurate. Epistemology helps individuals critically examine what they know and how they know it, ensuring that beliefs are justified and grounded in valid reasoning or evidence.

Epistemology is closely related to history and science, as both disciplines contribute to the development and validation of knowledge. History provides insights into past knowledge and human experiences, while science offers systematic methods for discovering and verifying truths about the natural world.

This topic explores the nature of knowledge, the questions surrounding it, and the different sources from which knowledge is derived. It also examines how knowledge is shaped by historical context and scientific inquiry.

7.1 EPISTEMOLOGY, HISTORY, AND SCIENCE

7.1.1 Meaning of Epistemology

Epistemology is the study of knowledge—its definition, sources, validity, and limitations. It examines how individuals acquire knowledge and how they justify their beliefs.

7.1.2 Relationship Between Epistemology and History

History plays an important role in understanding knowledge as it provides records of past events, ideas, and developments. Through historical analysis, individuals can:

- Understand how knowledge has evolved over time
- Learn from past experiences and mistakes
- Evaluate the reliability of historical sources

However, historical knowledge may be influenced by bias, interpretation, and incomplete information. Therefore, epistemology helps assess the credibility and validity of historical claims.

Example:

Different historical accounts of the same event may present different perspectives, requiring critical evaluation.

7.1.3 Relationship Between Epistemology and Science

Science is a systematic approach to acquiring knowledge through observation, experimentation, and analysis. It emphasizes evidence, objectivity, and repeatability.

Epistemology examines:

- How scientific knowledge is justified
- The reliability of scientific methods
- The limits of scientific explanations

While science provides empirical knowledge, epistemology questions how certain or complete that knowledge is.

Example:

Scientific theories are accepted based on evidence but may change with new discoveries.

 **Epistemology helps evaluate the reliability of knowledge from history and science.**

7.2 QUESTIONS ON KNOWLEDGE

7.2.1 What is Knowledge?

Philosophically, knowledge is often defined as **justified true belief**. This means that for a belief to be considered knowledge, it must:

- Be true
 - Be believed
 - Be justified with evidence or reasoning
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7.2.2 Key Questions in Epistemology

Epistemology addresses several important questions:

- **What can we know?**
Are there limits to human knowledge?
- **How do we know what we know?**
What methods or processes lead to knowledge?
- **Can we be certain about anything?**
Is absolute certainty possible?
- **What is truth?**
How do we determine whether something is true or false?

These questions encourage critical thinking and reflection on the nature of knowledge.

7.2.3 Limits of Knowledge

Human knowledge is not absolute and may be limited by:

- Lack of information
- Bias and perception
- Technological limitations
- Changing contexts and interpretations

Example:

What was once believed to be scientifically true may later be revised or rejected based on new evidence.

 **Epistemology encourages questioning and critical evaluation of what we claim to know.**

7.3 KNOWLEDGE, TRUTH, AND SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE

7.3.1 Concept of Truth

Truth refers to the accuracy or correctness of a statement or belief. Different theories of truth include:

- **Correspondence Theory** – truth corresponds to reality
 - **Coherence Theory** – truth is consistent with a system of beliefs
 - **Pragmatic Theory** – truth is what works in practice
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7.3.2 Sources of Knowledge

Knowledge can be obtained from various sources:

- **Empiricism (Experience)**
Knowledge is gained through sensory experience and observation.
 - **Rationalism (Reason)**
Knowledge is derived from logical reasoning and intellectual processes.
 - **Authority**
Knowledge is accepted based on trusted sources such as experts or institutions.
 - **Intuition**
Knowledge is understood instinctively without conscious reasoning.
 - **Revelation**
Knowledge is received through divine or spiritual insight.
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7.3.3 Evaluation of Sources of Knowledge

Each source of knowledge has strengths and limitations:

- Empiricism provides observable evidence but may be limited by perception
- Rationalism ensures logical consistency but may lack real-world validation
- Authority can be reliable but may also be biased
- Intuition is immediate but not always accurate
- Revelation is meaningful for believers but may not be universally accepted

Example:

A scientific experiment (empiricism) combined with logical reasoning (rationalism) often produces more reliable knowledge.

7.3.4 Importance of Understanding Knowledge and Truth

Understanding knowledge and its sources enables individuals to:

- Make informed decisions
- Evaluate information critically
- Avoid misinformation and false beliefs
- Develop intellectual independence

 **Reliable knowledge requires careful evaluation of its sources, truth, and justification.**



SELF CHECK 7.1

Explain the relationship between epistemology, history, and science, and evaluate how different sources of knowledge influence our understanding of truth.

► CONCLUSION

In this topic, we learned that:

- epistemology studies the nature, sources, and limits of knowledge;
- history and science contribute to the development of knowledge but require critical evaluation;
- knowledge is often defined as justified true belief;
- human knowledge has limitations and is subject to change;
- knowledge can be derived from various sources such as experience, reason, and authority;
- understanding knowledge and truth is essential for critical thinking and informed decision-making.