

Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction

By Jennifer Nagel

Questions for Thought and Discussion

- Describe a moment in your own life when you were convinced that you knew something, and later found out that you were wrong about it.
- Can you explain why some people might be attracted to relativism, and resistant to the idea of objective truth? Do you find relativism appealing?
- If you had to be a sceptic, would you rather be an Academic Sceptic or a Pyrrhonian Sceptic? Why?
- Do you have any evidence that you are awake right now, and not dreaming? Does it matter?
- Would you be deeply disturbed to discover that you are living in a computer-generated virtual reality, rather than an ordinary physical reality?
- Do you side with Descartes or with Locke on the question of innate ideas?
- Develop your own example of a situation in which someone has a true belief which doesn't amount to knowledge, despite being reasonable or justified.
- Does it make sense to think of knowing as a simpler or more basic state than believing?
- Think of some random trivial fact that you'd ordinarily describe yourself as knowing. What kind of evidence, if any, could you offer in support of your claim to know that fact?
- Do you think it's possible to know something while having no idea how it is that you know it?
- How much would it limit your body of knowledge if you couldn't get knowledge second-hand, through the testimony of other people?
- When, if ever, does Wikipedia succeed in transmitting knowledge to its users?
- Are the standards for knowledge higher in a court of law than in a casual street encounter?
- Imagine that it's suddenly a life-or-death matter whether your front door at home is locked right now. Do the high stakes make it harder for you to count as knowing that your door is locked?
- What kind of signals do you think we pick up on when we get an intuitive sense that someone knows something?
- To what extent do you expect other people to share your intuitions about knowledge?

Further reading

Ian Apperly, *Mindreaders: The Cognitive Basis of "Theory of Mind"* (Psychology Press, 2011)

Tamar Gendler, *Intuition, Imagination, and Philosophical Methodology* (Oxford University Press, 2013)

Stephen Philips, *Epistemology in Classical India* (Routledge 2012)

Duncan Pritchard, *What is this Thing Called Knowledge?* (Routledge 2009)

Matthias Steup, John Turri and Ernest Sosa (editors), *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2014)

Timothy Williamson, *Tetralogue: I'm Right, You're Wrong* (Oxford University Press, 2015)