

Learning Guide Unit 6

Reading Assignment

Please start with the single page reading about Epistemology available at http://www.importanceofphilosophy.com/Epistemology_Main.html. Keep in mind that these three paragraphs are a starting point for your understanding of Epistemology. Do not be discouraged if this concept is not clear yet.

Now let's go deeper:

- Morris, G. (1877). Spinoza -- A Summary Account of His Life and Teaching. *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 11(3), p. 278-299.
Available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/25666041.pdf>

Read the selection starting on the last paragraph of page 282 (starting "Following the definitions.") through the end of the paragraph on page 287 (which ends at the top that that page with "or preserve from logical inconsistency.")

Spinoza's axioms appear to align with the four types of knowledge outlined above. His axioms of knowledge, bridge the ages and continue to remain salient in philosophical discussions. You will be asked later which of those axioms lines up with which types we've covered.

Notice on page 287 (top) where Spinoza (a devotedly religious man) separates *Divine intellect* (authoritative knowledge) from *human intellect* (intuitive knowledge). For Spinoza, the human can only be known through the Divine. To him, *truth* can only be known through (his) God. Which brings us to our next lesson.

What is *truth*? How do we find it, and how do we know it when (if) we do? Spinoza, like Descartes, started his philosophical methodology with a preference for the mathematics. When they wrote about truth and deception, life and death, human reality and spiritual reality, etc, they both believed it was all rather mathematical. That is, rather clear and distinct with logical reasoning driving the *truth* of it all.

Whatever knowledge was to be borne of philosophy, Spinoza felt it would come from logic. Morris (1877) writes, "Were it not (principally) for the existence of a science of mathematics, which has to do, not with purposed ends, but only with the natures and properties of figures, Spinoza fears that the truth would have remained eternally concealed from the human race" (p. 290). But is *math* the answer?

If you've read *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, you'll recognize that the answer to the "Ultimate Question of Life, the Universe and Everything" is mathematical... it's "42" as calculated by the supercomputer "Deep Thought" after seven and a half million years of thought. (For more info, go here

the answer to life, universe and everyth...



)

But is this what Spinoza meant? It is not what Aristotle, Socrates, Plato, Descartes, Kant, or anyone besides Douglas Adams meant. The *Truth*, as it were, is up to you. Yes, you. Yet *truth*, like *knowledge*, is surprisingly difficult to define. Like *Love*, we think we know it when we see it, but cannot quite clearly (or mathematically) define it. Yet 42 may not be so wrong either. If we do not know what it is, can we definitively say what it is not?

- Read "What is Truth?" Pardi, P. (2015). What is Truth? *Philosophynews.com*. Available at <https://www.philosophynews.com/post/2015/01/29/What-is-Truth.aspx>

Notice as you read "Perspective and Truth" from this blog you can see that Spinoza would strongly object to the author's assertion that there is no *absolute truth*. What would Spinoza say about this?

If Spinoza's assertion about Divinity is correct, isn't that an *absolute truth*? Which type of knowledge is that? Which to you, and which to Spinoza? Are they the same truth? Can there be two truths?

Re-watch (yes over again, now that you're smarter on the topic) the TED-Ed talk on *Plato's Allegory of the Cave (Book VII in The Republic)* from Unit 4. Gendler, A. (2015). Plato's Allegory of the Cave. [Video File]. Ted-Ed. Available at



Do you see *Truth* differently now? Does the Allegory make more sense? As we grow as adults and philosophers, there is value in revisiting almost everything you've learned and held "as truth" to see if it is still true based on the new facts and perspective you have.

Now read the "Community Agreement" section from the "[What is Truth?](#)" blog. The author appears to imply that truth is a democratic process. Do you feel this is a logical reasoning to discovering *truth*? If everyone believes it, it is true? You later be given the opportunity to explore this concept further in your research paper.