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**Epistemology** ([Template:IPAc-en](/wiki/Template:IPAc-en); [Template:Ety](/wiki/Template:Ety)) is the [branch](/wiki/List_of_academic_disciplines_and_sub-disciplines#Philosophy) of [philosophy](/wiki/Philosophy) concerned with the theory of [knowledge](/wiki/Knowledge).[[1]](#cite_note-1) Epistemology studies the nature of knowledge, the rationality of belief, and justification. Much of the debate in epistemology centers on four areas: (1) the [philosophical analysis](/wiki/Philosophical_analysis) of the nature of knowledge and how it relates to such concepts as [truth](/wiki/Truth), [belief](/wiki/Belief), and [justification](/wiki/Theory_of_justification),[[2]](#cite_note-2)[[3]](#cite_note-3) (2) various problems of [skepticism](/wiki/Skepticism), (3) the sources and scope of knowledge and justified belief, and (4) the criteria for knowledge and justification.

The term was first used by Scottish philosopher [James Frederick Ferrier](/wiki/James_Frederick_Ferrier) in 1854.[Template:Efn](/wiki/Template:Efn)

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## Etymology[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=1)]

The word *epistemology* is derived from the ancient Greek *epistēmē* meaning "[scientific knowledge](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0057%3Aentry%3De)pisth%2Fmh)" and *logos* meaning "speech" or "word", in this context denoting "codified knowledge of". [J.F. Ferrier](/wiki/James_Frederick_Ferrier) coined *epistemology* on the model of '[ontology'](/wiki/Ontology), to designate that branch of philosophy which aims to discover the meaning of knowledge, and called it the 'true beginning' of philosophy. The word is equivalent to the concept [*Wissenschaftslehre*](/wiki/Wissenschaftslehre), which was used by German philosophers [Johann Fichte](/wiki/Johann_Fichte) and [Bernard Bolzano](/wiki/Bernard_Bolzano) for different projects before it was taken up again by [Husserl](/wiki/Edmund_Husserl). French philosophers then gave the term *épistémologie* a narrower meaning as 'theory of knowledge *[théorie de la connaissance]*.' E.g., [Émile Meyerson](/wiki/Émile_Meyerson) opened his *Identity and Reality*, written in 1908, with the remark that the word 'is becoming current' as equivalent to 'the philosophy of the sciences.'[[4]](#cite_note-4)

## Knowledge[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=2)]

[Template:Certainty](/wiki/Template:Certainty)

In mathematics, it is known *that* 2 + 2 = 4, but there is also knowing *how* to add two numbers, and knowing a *person* (e.g., oneself), *place* (e.g., one's hometown), *thing* (e.g., cars), or *activity* (e.g., addition). Some philosophers think there is an important distinction between ["knowing that,"](/wiki/Propositional_knowledge) ["knowing how,"](/wiki/Know-how) and ["acquaintance-knowledge,"](/wiki/Knowledge_by_acquaintance) with epistemology being primarily concerned with the first of these.[[5]](#cite_note-5) While these distinctions are not explicit in English, they are defined explicitly in other languages (N.B. some languages related to English have been said to retain these verbs, e.g. [Scots](/wiki/Scots_language): "wit" and "[ken](/wiki/Wikt:ken#Scots)"). In French, Portuguese and Spanish, *to know (a person)* is translated using *connaître,* *conhecer,* and *conocer,* respectively, whereas *to know (how to do something)* is translated using *savoir*, *saber*, and *saber*. Modern Greek has the verbs *γνωρίζω* (gnorízo) and *ξέρω* (kséro). Italian has the verbs *conoscere* and *sapere* and the nouns for *knowledge* are *conoscenza* and *sapienza.* German has the verbs *kennen* and *wissen.* *Wissen* implies knowing a fact, *kennen* implies knowing in the sense of being acquainted with and having a working knowledge of; there is also a noun derived from *kennen,* namely *Erkennen,* which has been said to imply knowledge in the form of recognition or acknowledgment. The verb itself implies a process: you have to go from one state to another, from a state of "not-*erkennen*" to a state of true *erkennen.* This verb seems to be the most appropriate in terms of describing the "episteme" in one of the modern European languages, hence the German name "[Erkenntnistheorie](/wiki/De:Erkenntnistheorie)." The theoretical interpretation and significance of these linguistic issues remains controversial.

In his paper *On Denoting* and his later book *Problems of Philosophy* [Bertrand Russell](/wiki/Bertrand_Russell) stressed the distinction between "[knowledge by description](/wiki/Knowledge_by_description)" and "[knowledge by acquaintance](/wiki/Knowledge_by_acquaintance)". [Gilbert Ryle](/wiki/Gilbert_Ryle) is also credited with stressing the distinction between knowing how and knowing that in [*The Concept of Mind*](/wiki/The_Concept_of_Mind)*.* In *Personal Knowledge,* [Michael Polanyi](/wiki/Michael_Polanyi) argues for the epistemological relevance of knowledge how and knowledge that; using the example of the act of balance involved in riding a [bicycle](/wiki/Bicycle), he suggests that the theoretical knowledge of the [physics](/wiki/Physics) involved in maintaining a state of [balance](/wiki/Bicycle_and_motorcycle_dynamics#Balance) cannot substitute for the practical knowledge of how to ride, and that it is important to understand how both are established and grounded. This position is essentially Ryle's, who argued that a failure to acknowledge the distinction between knowledge that and knowledge how leads to [infinite regress](/wiki/Infinite_regress).

In recent times, epistemologists including ([Sosa](/wiki/Ernest_Sosa), [Greco](/wiki/John_Greco_(philosopher)), [Kvanvig](/wiki/Jonathan_Kvanvig), [Zagzebski](/wiki/Linda_Trinkaus_Zagzebski)) and Duncan Pritchard have argued that epistemology should evaluate people's "properties" (i.e., intellectual virtues) and not just the properties of propositions or of propositional mental attitudes.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed)

### Belief[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=3)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) In common speech, a "statement of belief" is typically an expression of faith and/or trust in a person, power or other entity — while it includes such traditional views, epistemology is also concerned with what we believe. This includes 'the' truth, and everything else we accept as 'true' for ourselves from a cognitive point of view.

### Truth[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=4)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) Whether someone's belief is true is not a prerequisite for (its) belief. On the other hand, if something is actually *known*, then it categorically cannot be false. For example, if a person believes that a bridge is safe enough to support him, and attempts to cross it, but the bridge then collapses under his weight, it could be said that he *believed* that the bridge was safe but that his belief was mistaken. It would *not* be accurate to say that he *knew* that the bridge was safe, because plainly it was not. By contrast, if the bridge actually supported his weight, then he might say that he had believed that the bridge was safe, whereas now, after proving it to himself (by crossing it), he *knows* it was safe.

Epistemologists argue over whether belief is the proper [truth-bearer](/wiki/Truth-bearer). Some would rather describe knowledge as a system of justified true [propositions](/wiki/Propositions), and others as a system of justified true sentences. Plato, in his [Gorgias](/wiki/Gorgias), argues that belief is the most commonly invoked truth-bearer.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed)[Template:Qn](/wiki/Template:Qn) [Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also)

### Justification[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=5)]

In many of [Plato's](/wiki/Plato) dialogues, such as the [*Meno*](/wiki/Meno) and, in particular, the [*Theaetetus*](/wiki/Theaetetus_(dialogue)), [Socrates](/wiki/Socrates) considers a number of theories as to what knowledge is, the last being that knowledge is true belief that has been "given an account of" (meaning explained or defined in some way). According to the theory that knowledge is justified true belief, in order to know that a given proposition is true, one must not only believe the relevant true proposition, but one must also have a good reason for doing so. One implication of this would be that no one would gain knowledge just by believing something that happened to be true. For example, an ill person with no medical training, but with a generally optimistic attitude, might believe that he will recover from his illness quickly. Nevertheless, even if this belief turned out to be true, the patient would not have *known* that he would get well since his belief lacked justification.

The definition of knowledge as justified true belief was widely accepted until the 1960s. At this time, a paper written by the American philosopher [Edmund Gettier](/wiki/Edmund_Gettier) provoked major widespread discussion. (See [theories of justification](/wiki/Theory_of_justification) for other views on the idea.)

### Gettier problem[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=6)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [thumb|](/wiki/File:Classical_definition_of_Kno.svg)[Euler diagram](/wiki/Euler_diagram) representing a definition of knowledge. [Edmund Gettier](/wiki/Edmund_Gettier) is best known for a short paper entitled 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?' published in 1963, which called into question the theory of knowledge that had been dominant among philosophers for thousands of years.<ref name=gettier> [Template:Cite journal](/wiki/Template:Cite_journal)</ref> In a few pages, Gettier argued that there are situations in which one's belief may be justified and true, yet fail to count as knowledge. That is, Gettier contended that while justified belief in a true proposition is necessary for that proposition to be known, it is not sufficient. As in the diagram, a true proposition can be believed by an individual (purple region) but still not fall within the "knowledge" category (yellow region).

According to Gettier, there are certain circumstances in which one does not have knowledge, even when all of the above conditions are met. Gettier proposed two [thought experiments](/wiki/Thought_experiment), which have come to be known as "Gettier cases," as [counterexamples](/wiki/Counterexample) to the classical account of knowledge. One of the cases involves two men, Smith and Jones, who are awaiting the results of their applications for the same job. Each man has ten coins in his pocket. Smith has excellent reasons to believe that Jones will get the job and, furthermore, knows that Jones has ten coins in his pocket (he recently counted them). From this Smith infers, "the man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket." However, Smith is unaware that he also has ten coins in his own pocket. Furthermore, Smith, not Jones, is going to get the job. While Smith has strong evidence to believe that Jones will get the job, he is wrong. Smith has a justified true belief that a man with ten coins in his pocket will get the job; however, according to Gettier, Smith does not *know* that a man with ten coins in his pocket will get the job, because Smith's belief is "...true by virtue of the number of coins in *Jones's* pocket, while Smith does not know how many coins are in Smith's pocket, and bases his belief...on a count of the coins in Jones's pocket, whom he falsely believes to be the man who will get the job." (see<ref name = gettier/> p. 122.) These cases fail to be knowledge because the subject's belief is justified, but only happens to be true by virtue of luck. In other words, he made the correct choice (in this case predicting an outcome) for the wrong reasons. This example is similar to those often given when discussing belief and truth, wherein a person's belief of what will happen can coincidentally be correct without his or her having the actual knowledge to base it on.

#### Responses to Gettier[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=7)]

[Template:Unreferenced section](/wiki/Template:Unreferenced_section) The responses to Gettier have been varied. Usually, they have involved substantial attempts to provide a definition of knowledge different from the classical one, either by recasting knowledge as justified true belief with some additional fourth condition, or proposing a completely new set of conditions, disregarding the classical ones entirely.

##### Infallibilism, indefeasibility[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=8)]

In one response to Gettier, the American philosopher [Richard Kirkham](/wiki/Richard_Kirkham) has argued that the only definition of knowledge that could ever be immune to all counterexamples is the [infallibilist](/wiki/Infallibilism) one.[[6]](#cite_note-6) To qualify as an item of knowledge, goes the theory, a belief must not only be true and justified, the justification of the belief must *necessitate* its truth. In other words, the justification for the belief must be infallible.

Yet another possible candidate for the fourth condition of knowledge is *indefeasibility.* [Defeasibility](/wiki/Defeasibility) theory maintains that there should be no overriding or defeating truths for the reasons that justify one's belief. For example, suppose that person *S* believes he saw Tom Grabit steal a book from the library and uses this to justify the claim that Tom Grabit stole a book from the library. A possible defeater or overriding proposition for such a claim could be a true proposition like, "Tom Grabit's identical twin Sam is currently in the same town as Tom." When no defeaters of one's justification exist, a subject would be epistemelogically justified.

The Indian philosopher [B K Matilal](/wiki/B_K_Matilal) has drawn on the [Navya-Nyāya](/wiki/Navya-Nyāya) [fallibilism](/wiki/Fallibilism) tradition to respond to the Gettier problem. Nyaya theory distinguishes between *know p* and *know that one knows p* – these are different events, with different causal conditions. The second level is a sort of implicit inference that usually follows immediately the episode of knowing p (knowledge *simpliciter*). The Gettier case is examined by referring to a view of [Gangesha Upadhyaya](/wiki/Gangesha_Upadhyaya) (late 12th century), who takes any true belief to be knowledge; thus a true belief acquired through a wrong route may just be regarded as knowledge simpliciter on this view. The question of justification arises only at the second level, when one considers the knowledgehood of the acquired belief. Initially, there is lack of uncertainty, so it becomes a true belief. But at the very next moment, when the hearer is about to embark upon the venture of *knowing whether he knows p*, doubts may arise. "If, in some Gettier-like cases, I am wrong in my inference about the knowledgehood of the given occurrent belief (for the evidence may be pseudo-evidence), then I am mistaken about the truth of my belief – and this is in accordance with Nyaya fallibilism: not all knowledge-claims can be sustained."<ref name=Matilal> [Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book) The Gettier problem is dealt with in Chapter 4, *Knowledge as a mental episode*. The thread continues in the next chapter *Knowing that one knows*. It is also discussed in Matilal's *Word and the World* p. 71-72.</ref>

##### Reliabilism[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=9)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) Reliabilism has been a significant line of response to the Gettier problem among philosophers, originating with work by [Alvin Goldman](/wiki/Alvin_Goldman) in the 1960s. According to reliabilism, a belief is justified (or otherwise supported in such a way as to count towards knowledge) only if it is produced by processes that typically yield a sufficiently high ratio of true to false beliefs. In other words, this theory states that a true belief counts as knowledge only if it is produced by a reliable belief-forming process. Examples of reliable processes include: standard perceptual processes, remembering, good reasoning, and introspection.[[7]](#cite_note-7) Reliabilism has been challenged by Gettier cases. Another argument that challenges reliabilism, like the Gettier cases (although it was not presented in the same short article as the Gettier cases), is the case of Henry and the barn façades. In the thought experiment, a man, Henry, is driving along and sees a number of buildings that resemble barns. Based on his perception of one of these, he concludes that he has just seen barns. While he has seen one, and the perception he based his belief that the one he saw was of a real barn, all the other [barn](/wiki/Barn)-like buildings he saw were façades. Theoretically, Henry does not know that he has seen a barn, despite both his belief that he has seen one being true and his belief being formed on the basis of a reliable process (i.e. his vision), since he only acquired his true belief by accident.[[8]](#cite_note-8)

##### Other responses[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=10)]

[Robert Nozick](/wiki/Robert_Nozick) has offered the following definition of knowledge: *S* knows that *P* if and only if:

* *P*;
* *S* believes that *P*;
* if *P* were false, *S* would not believe that *P*;
* if *P* is true, *S* will believe that *P*.<ref name=Nozick>

[Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)[Philosophical Explanations](/wiki/Philosophical_Explanations) Chapter 3 "Knowledge and Skepticism" I. Knowledge *Conditions for Knowledge* p. 172-178.</ref> Nozick argues that the third of these conditions serves to address cases of the sort described by Gettier. Nozick further claims this condition addresses a case of the sort described by [D. M. Armstrong](/wiki/D._M._Armstrong):<ref name=Armstrong> [Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book) </ref> A father believes his daughter innocent of committing a particular crime, both because of faith in his baby girl and (now) because he has seen presented in the courtroom a conclusive demonstration of his daughter's innocence. His belief via the method of the courtroom satisfies the four subjunctive conditions, but his faith-based belief does not. If his daughter were guilty, he would still believe her innocent, on the basis of faith in his daughter; this would violate the third condition.

The British philosopher [Simon Blackburn](/wiki/Simon_Blackburn) has criticized this formulation by suggesting that we do not want to accept as knowledge beliefs, which, while they "track the truth" (as Nozick's account requires), are not held for appropriate reasons. He says that "we do not want to award the title of knowing something to someone who is only meeting the conditions through a defect, flaw, or failure, compared with someone else who is not meeting the conditions."[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed) In addition to this, externalist accounts of knowledge, such as Nozick's, are often forced to reject closure in cases where it is intuitively valid.

[Timothy Williamson](/wiki/Timothy_Williamson) has advanced a theory of knowledge according to which knowledge is not justified true belief plus some extra condition(s), but primary. In his book [*Knowledge and its Limits*](/wiki/Knowledge_and_its_Limits)*,* Williamson argues that the concept of knowledge cannot be broken down into a set of other concepts through analysis—instead, it is [*sui generis*](/wiki/Sui_generis)*.* Thus, though knowledge requires justification, truth, and belief, the word "knowledge" can't be, according to Williamson's theory, accurately regarded as simply shorthand for "justified true belief."

[Alvin Goldman](/wiki/Alvin_Goldman) writes in his [Causal Theory of Knowing](/wiki/Causal_Theory_of_Knowledge) that in order for knowledge to truly exist there must be a [causal chain](/wiki/Causal_chain) between the proposition and the belief of that proposition.

### Externalism and internalism[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=11)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) A central debate about the nature of justification is a debate between epistemological externalists on the one hand, and epistemological internalists on the other.

Externalists hold that factors deemed "external", meaning outside of the psychological states of those who gain knowledge, can be conditions of justification. For example, an externalist response to the Gettier problem is to say that, in order for a justified true belief to count as knowledge, there must be a link or dependency between the belief and the state of the external world. Usually this is understood to be a causal link. Such causation, to the extent that it is "outside" the mind, would count as an external, knowledge-yielding condition. Internalists, on the other hand, assert that all knowledge-yielding conditions are within the psychological states of those who gain knowledge.

Though unfamiliar with the internalist/externalist debate himself, many point to [René Descartes](/wiki/René_Descartes) as an early example of the internalist path to justification. He wrote that, because the only method by which we perceive the external world is through our senses, and that, because the senses are not infallible, we should not consider our concept of knowledge to be infallible. The only way to find anything that could be described as "indubitably true," he advocates, would be to see things "clearly and distinctly".<ref name=Regulae>[Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)</ref> He argued that if there is an omnipotent, good being who made the world, then it's reasonable to believe that people are made with the ability to know. However, this does not mean that man's ability to know is perfect. God gave man the ability to know, but not omniscience. Descartes said that man must use his capacities for knowledge correctly and carefully through methodological doubt.[[9]](#cite_note-9) The dictum "Cogito ergo sum" (I think, therefore I am) is also commonly associated with Descartes' theory, because in his own methodological doubt, doubting everything he previously knew in order to start from a blank slate, the first thing that he could not logically bring himself to doubt was his own existence: "I do not exist" would be a contradiction in terms; the act of saying that one does not exist assumes that someone must be making the statement in the first place. Though Descartes could doubt his senses, his body and the world around him, he could not deny his own existence, because he was able to doubt and must exist in order to do so. Even if some "evil genius" were to be deceiving him, he would have to exist in order to be deceived. This one sure point provided him with what he would call his Archimedean point, in order to further develop his foundation for knowledge. Simply put, Descartes' epistemological justification depended upon his indubitable belief in his own existence and his clear and distinct knowledge of God.<ref name=Refutations>[Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)</ref>

### Value problem[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=12)]

We generally assume that knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief. If so, what is the explanation? A formulation of the value problem in epistemology first occurs in [Plato's](/wiki/Plato) Meno. Socrates points out to Meno that a man who knew the way to Larissa could lead others there correctly. But so, too, could a man who had true beliefs about how to get there, even if he had not gone there or had any knowledge of Larissa. Socrates says that it seems that both knowledge and true opinion can guide action. Meno then wonders why knowledge is valued more than true belief, and why knowledge and true belief are different. Socrates responds that knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief because it is tethered, or justified. Justification, or working out the reason for a true belief, locks down true belief.[[10]](#cite_note-10) The problem is to identify what (if anything) makes knowledge more valuable than mere true belief, or that makes knowledge more valuable than a more minimal conjunction of its components, such as justification, safety, sensitivity, statistical likelihood, and anti-Gettier conditions, on a particular analysis of knowledge that conceives of knowledge as divided into components (to which knowledge-first epistemological theories, which posit knowledge as fundamental, are notable exceptions).[[11]](#cite_note-11) The value problem reemerged in the philosophical literature on epistemology in the twenty-first century following the rise of [virtue epistemology](/wiki/Virtue_epistemology) in the 1980s, partly because of the obvious link to the concept of value in ethics.[[12]](#cite_note-12) The value problem has been presented as an argument against epistemic [reliabilism](/wiki/Reliabilism) by philosophers including [Linda Zagzebski](/wiki/Linda_Zagzebski), [Wayne Riggs](/wiki/Wayne_Riggs) and [Richard Swinburne](/wiki/Richard_Swinburne). Zagzebski analogizes the value of knowledge to the value of espresso produced by an espresso maker: “The liquid in this cup is not improved by the fact that it comes from a reliable espresso maker. If the espresso tastes good, it makes no difference if it comes from an unreliable machine.”[[13]](#cite_note-13) For Zagzebski, the value of knowledge deflates to the value of mere true belief. She assumes that reliability in itself has no value or disvalue, but Goldman and Olsson disagree. They point out that Zagzebski's conclusion rests on the assumption of veritism: all that matters is the acquisition of true belief.[[14]](#cite_note-14) To the contrary, they argue that a reliable process for acquiring a true belief adds value to the mere true belief by making it more likely that future beliefs of a similar kind will be true. By analogy, having a reliable espresso maker that produced a good cup of espresso would be more valuable than having an unreliable one that luckily produced a good cup because the reliable one would more likely produce good future cups compared to the unreliable one.

The value problem is important to assessing the adequacy of theories of knowledge that conceive of knowledge as consisting of true belief and other components. According to [Kvanvig](/wiki/Jonathan_Kvanvig), an adequate account of knowledge should resist counterexamples and allow an explanation of the value of knowledge over mere true belief. Should a theory of knowledge fail to do so, it would prove inadequate.[[15]](#cite_note-15) One of the more influential responses to the problem is that knowledge is not particularly valuable and is not what ought to be the main focus of epistemology. Instead, epistemologists ought to focus on other mental states, such as understanding.[[16]](#cite_note-16) Advocates of virtue epistemology have argued that the value of knowledge comes from an internal relationship between the knower and the mental state of believing.[[11]](#cite_note-11)

## Acquiring knowledge[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=13)]

### ''A priori'' and ''a posteriori'' knowledge[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=14)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) The nature of this distinction has been disputed by various philosophers; however, the terms may be roughly defined as follows:

* [*A priori*](/wiki/A_priori_and_a_posteriori) knowledge is knowledge that is known independently of experience (that is, it is non-empirical, or arrived at beforehand, usually by reason). It will henceforth be acquired through anything that is independent from experience.
* [*A posteriori*](/wiki/Empirical_evidence) knowledge is knowledge that is known by experience (that is, it is empirical, or arrived at afterward).

A priori knowledge is a way of gaining knowledge without the need of experience. In Bruce Russell's article "A Priori Justification and Knowledge"[[17]](#cite_note-17)