UNIT-3: WAYS OF KNOWING

UNIT STRUCTURE

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3.1. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the concept of epistemology
- discuss the problem of JTB definition
- explain the theories of epistemic justification
- illustrate the theories of origin of knowledge

3.2. INTRODUCTION: EPISTEMOLOGY

The word epistemology has been derived from two Greek words: Episteme and logos. The word ;episteme' means knowledge and 'logos' means science. Epistemology is the study of the origin, nature, methods and limits of knowledge. Epistemology deals with certain questions. Those are - what is the meaning of knowledge? What are the sources of knowledge? Can we have knowledge of the ultimate reality? What are the conditions of validity of knowledge? Is there any limit of knowledge? So epistemology or theory of knowledge enquires into the nature of human

knowledge, as to how it develops and how far it is able to grasp reality. For the first time, John Locke, in his book, “An Essay Concerning Human Understanding” made an attempt to discuss seriously about epistemology. There he mentions about the importance of enquiring into nature, conditions and limits of knowledge. Like John Locke, Immanuel Kant, in one of his books discussed about epistemology and he regarded philosophy as the science and criticism of knowledge. According to Kant’s view philosophy is identical with epistemology.

There are several approaches to the study of processes that contribute to knowing; the history of science and the sociology of knowledge are two closely related fields. Methodology is one aspect of epistemology. Methodology is generally seen as the system of values, beliefs, principles and rules that guide analysis within a given discipline. The methodology(ies) that prevails within a discipline plays a major role in the nature of questions that are asked as well as the answers that are offered.

The problem concerning the origin of knowledge is the main problem of epistemology. There are some theories of knowledge offered by different philosophers- Rationalism, Empiricism, skepticism.

3.3. KNOWLEDGE

There are various kinds of knowledge: knowing how to do something (for example, how to swim), knowing someone in person, and knowing a place or a city. Although such knowledge is of epistemological interest as well, we shall focus on knowledge of propositions as the epistemologists typically do not focus on technical or acquaintance knowledge, however, instead preferring to focus on propositional knowledge. A proposition is something which can be expressed by a declarative sentence, and which asserts to describe a fact or a state of affairs, such as “Socrates is a philosopher.”

3.4. THE JTB DEFINITION OF KNOWLEDGE

One of the most widely held definition of knowledge is that it is justified true belief. This definition contains the idea of 'epistemic justification.' The term epistemic justification signifies a property ascribed to belief in virtue of satisfying certain evaluative norms concerning what a person ought to believe. A distinction may be drawn between what a person ought to belive and what a person ought not believe. Certain norms of evaluation are to be satisfied by a belief and when these norms are satisfied then the belief becomes knowledge. When these norms are satisfied then the belief is epistemically justified as true. Such a belief is considered to be knowledge.

Edmund Gettier, a distinguished American philosopher is primarily known for a paper titled " Is justified true belief knowledge?" that he published in Abalysis in which by using counter example he criticized the JTB definition of knowledge. In this definition propositional knowledge is defined as justified true belief. Edmund Gettier very successfully and strongly criticed the JTB definition of knowledge. The JTB definition of knowledge states that S knows , if and only if

1. P is true
2. S believes P
3. S is justified in believing P

An interesting counter example given by Gettier may be presented here. Let us suppose there is a clock. Normally the clock gives accurate time but the clock has stopped working last night, and has yet to be repaired. But accidently when someone looks at the clock exactly twelve hours later and that indicates the very time which actually is. There we have a true belief regarding the time. And our belief is justified, as we have no reason to doubt that the clock is working, and we cannot be blamed for basing beliefs about the time on what the clock says. All the three conditions of knowledge, namely the belief condition, the justification condition and the truth condition are fulfilled. But still it cannot be said that there is knowledge.

Another counter example may be given to criticize the JTB definition of knowledge. This counter example has not actually been given by Gettier. But it closely follows the line shown by Gettier. Scott Sturgeon gave this counter example.

Suppose John has driven his car to work. He has parked his car in his usual parking place. Unknown to John someone breaks into his car. The thief takes the car far a drive and co-incidentally parks the car again back in the original place. Let us suppose John wants to allow Joseph to drive his car for a purpose. John tells Joseph where his car is. Naturally John is right. The car is in the usual parking place. John believes that the car is in the parking place is justified. But does it mean that John knows that his car is in the parking place? It is certainly not. It is just an accident that John's car is in the usual parking place. The three conditions of knowledge as presented by the JTB definition are not adequate.

The two counter examples that we have mentioned indicate that an element of accident or luck is present in both the cases. In the first counter example we accidently glance at the clock whose hands indicated precisely the time at which we looked at the clock. This element of accident is present in the second case also. By such counter example Edmund Gettier wanted to establish that knowledge cannot be defined simply in terms of justified true belief.

The damage done by Gettier's criticism was very severe. Some philosophers attempted to defend the JTB definition by whatever means they could. Some other philosopher looked for a forth condition of knowledge. The forth condition of knowledge was suggested by some philosophers as follows-

"S's grounds for believing P do not include any false belief."

This fourth condition of knowledge has not satisfied all philosophers. The forth condition actually implies that there be no true defeaters. The conception of defeater may be illustrated by an example given by Keith

Lehrer. The counter example given by Keith Lehrer refers to defeater and also defeater's defeater. The counter example given by Keith Lehrer in first person language as follows-

I go to the library and see a man removing a book from the shelf and concealing it under his coat. I am sure that the thief is Tom Grabit because he often attends my classes. I know that Tom Grabit has stolen the book and I report it to the library stuff. But subsequently the library stuff meets Tom's mother Mrs. Grabit. Mrs Grabit states that Tom Grabit is actually in another place at that time. He has a twin brother name John Grabit who actually is in the library. Mrs Grabit's statement is a defeater. It defeats the justification that I have for my belief. But in a further suppose that we come to know that Mrs. Grabit is a habitual liar. She always tells lies about her having twins. This is a defeater's defeater.

But we neednot stop the couner example at this point. We may say that the neighbor who tells that Mrs. Grabit is a liar has some old quarrel with her and therefore the neighbour's view is not reliable. It is a defeater of the defeater's defeater. The process is theoretically an endless process. Such counter examples show that Edmund Gettier was rather successful in demonstrating that the JTB definition of knowledge is not adequate. We may find cases in which all the three conditions of knowledge are accidentally fulfilled. The mere fulfillment of these three conditions cannot give us knowledge. Gettier successfully established this point. After the appearance of Gettier's criticism philosophers are looking for a fourth condition of knowledge (propositional knowledge). But it cannot be said that there is a general consensus among philosophers regarding the fourth condition of knowledge.

3.5. THEORIES OF EPISTEMIC JUSTIFICATION:

In the classical epistemological conception of knowledge justification is necessary for knowledge. Justification is seen as a matter of adequacy of evidence one has for a given belief. A significant question is raised

here- under what conditions are a person's reason for some belief good enough that the belief is justified? Three theories are brought forth by philosopher in this connection.They are the theories of epistemic justification. They are- 1. Foundationalism 2. Coherntism 3. Reliabilism

Foundationalism is the theory of epistemic justification according to which our beliefs are classified into two types- foundational beliefs and non-foundational beliefs. The foundational beliefs are justified without being based upon other beliefs. The function of the foundational beliefs is to provide justification to the other beliefs which are non-foundational. According to foundationalism justified non foundational beliefs are based upon the foundational beliefs through good inferences or reasoning.

The second theory of epistemic justification is coherentism. This theory denies that some beliefs are foundational. A belief derives its justification, according to coherentism, not by being based on one or more other beliefs, but by virtue of its membership in a set of beliefs that all fit together in the right way. According to coherentism a belief is always justified within a system. Outside of or independently of a system a belief cannot be justified.

Reliabilism is the third theoru of epistemic justification. Reliabilism states that a belief is justified when it is the product of a reliable or a permissible process or method.

3.6. SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE

Beliefs arise in people for a wide variety of causes. Among them, we must list psychological factors such as desires, emotional needs, prejudice, and biases of various kinds. For true beliefs to count as knowledge, it is necessary that they originate in sources we have good reason to consider reliable. These are perception, introspection, memory, reason, and testimony. Let us briefly consider each of these.

Perception: Perception is a fundamental concern in epistemology. It is a way where knowledge can be perceived through the experiences of

the senses. The view that experience is the primary source of knowledge is called empiricism (about which we discuss later). At root, all our empirical knowledge is grounded in how we see, hear, touch, smell and taste the world around us. perception is the process by which we acquire information about the world around us using our five senses. Consider the nature of this information. There are differences between the views of direct and indirect realists about the structure of perceptual knowledge. Indirect realists states that we acquire perceptual knowledge of external objects by virtue of perceiving sense data that represent external objects. By sense data Sense data, we mean a species of mental states, enjoy a special status. So indirect realists think that, when perceptual knowledge is foundational, it is knowledge of sense data and other mental states. According to them Knowledge of external objects is indirect and it is derived from our knowledge of sense data. Direct realists can be regarded as more moderate about the foundation of our knowledge of external objects. Because they hold that it possible for perceptual experiences to make us in direct contact with external objects, they can say that such experiences can give you foundational knowledge of external objects. Most of the time we take our perceptual sense to be reliable. But how can we be so sure that they are reliable? For externalists, if the use of reliable sources is sufficient for knowledge, and if by using reliable sources we get the belief that our sources are reliable, then we come to know that our sources are reliable. But even externalists might wonder how they can they be so reliable just based on arguments. The problem is this. It would seem the only way of acquiring knowledge about the reliability of our perceptual sources is through memory, through remembering whether they served us well in the past. But should we trust our memory, and should we think that the episodes of perceptual success that we seem to recall were in fact episodes of perceptual success? If we can answer these questions with ‘yes’, then we need to have reason to view our memory and our perceptual experiences as reliable. So in the conclusion it seems like there is no non-circular way of arguing for the reliability of one’s perceptual sources.

Introspection: knowledge of one's self that can be found through internal self-evalution. This is generally considered to be a sort of perception. (For example, I know I am hungry or tired.) It is the capacity to inspect the, metaphorically speaking, "inside" of one's mind. Through introspection, one knows what mental states one is in: whether one is thirsty, tired, excited, or depressed. Compared with perception, introspection appears to have a special status. It is easy to see how a perceptual seeming can go wrong

Memory: Memory is the storage of knowledge that was learned in the past — whether it be past events or current information. Some philosophers maintain that memory only retains or preserves knowledge but doesn't produce new knowledge. Others insist that there are cases where a person first comes to know by remembering. It is the capacity to retain knowledge acquired in the past. What one remembers, though, need not be a past event. It may be a present fact, such as one's telephone number, or a future event, such as the date of the next elections. Memory is, of course, imperfect. Sometime it happens that what you remember does not entail the truth of that incident or thing.

Testimony: It is the knowledge from reliable sources. Testimony relies on others to acquire knowledge and communicate it to us. Some deny that testimony can be a source of knowledge, and insist that beliefs gained through testimony must be verified in order to be knowledge. In this regard an externalist might say that testimony is a source of knowledge if and only if it comes from a reliable source. But internalists will not find that answer satisfactory. But if the reliability of a testimonial source is not sufficient for making it a source of knowledge, what else is needed? Thomas Reid suggested that, by our very nature, we accept testimonial sources as reliable and tend to attribute credibility to them unless we encounter special contrary reasons. But that's merely a statement of the attitude we in fact take toward testimony. What is it that makes that attitude reasonable? It could be argued that, in one's own personal experiences with testimonial sources, one has accumulated a long track record that can be taken as a sign of reliability.

Reason:. Reason can be defined in two ways. First reason is that thing that makes a fact, theory, or principle comprehensible and secondly it is the power of comprehending and inferring in rational ways. Some beliefs would appear to be justified solely by the use of reason. Justification of that kind is said to be a priori: prior to any kind of experiences. So,in other words reason can be considered a source of knowledge, either by deducing truths from existing knowledge, or by learning things a priori, discovering necessary truths (such as mathematical truths) through pure reason. The view that reason is the primary source of knowledge is called rationalism.

3.7. THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE (RATIONALISM, EMPIRICISM AND SKEPTICISM)

Different philosophers have offered different theories regarding the origin of knowledge. Among them rationalism and empiricism are significant.

Rationalism: The theory according to which reason is the main source of knowledge is called rationalism. Rationalists don't depend on sense experience. According to all rationalists the knowledge that we get through sense experience generally deceive us. Sense experience cannot give us universal validity as sense experience is relative to different person. For example, in the absence of proper light we sometime perceive a rope as a snake. Again what a person who has perfect eye sight can see appears blur to a person who has weak eye sight.

Some of the early rationalist philosophers are Socrates and Plato. Later Descartes (who is also regarded as the father of modern philosophy) , Spinoza, Leibnitz and Wolff join this league and gave a new form to rationalism. According to all of them mind is always active. Knowledge is actively produced by the mind out of its inner ideas with the help of reason. For Descartes reason is the source of true knowledge. He regarded the knowledge of sense perception doubtful. He divided ideas into three kinds, namely; adventitious ideas, factitious ideas and innate ideas. Adventitious ideas and factitious ideas are not clear and distinct according to Descartes.

But for him innate ideas (those ideas which are imprinted on the mind by God at the time of birth) are only clear and distinct. The ideas of causality, God, morality etc are innate ideas. Spinoza, Leibnitz and Wolff followed the same trend and regarded knowledge as a priori.

But there are some criticisms of this theory.

1. Rationalism has completely ignored the part of knowledge that we attain through sense perception. This leads rationalism towards dogmatism.
2. Descartes' idea of innate ideas has been criticized by John Locke. According to Locke there is nothing like innate ideas and if there were something like innate ideas then those ideas should be equally present in all minds and should be accepted by all. But children, mentally imbalanced, uncivilized are not aware of such ideas.
3. If we accept rationalism then knowledge means something that we deduce from innate ideas. Then we will never be able to get new information. Only through sense experience we can come into contact with new facts. So rationalism is wrong in this point.

Empiricism :

The reactionary theory against rationalism which holds the view that all our knowledge is derived from sense experience is known as empiricism. According to this theory knowledge is a posteriori (posterior to experience) which means we get knowledge through our senses only, not with innate ideas. Empiricist thus believe in the knowledge based on experience. According to them experience is of two kinds-sensation and reflection. Sensation is external perception and reflection is internal. Mind is always passive recipient of sensation. In the history of philosophy Sophist were the earlier supporter of empiricism. Later Bacon, John Locke, Berkeley, Hume became the supporter of empiricism. John Locke was the propunder of empiricism in modern philosophy. He criticized Descartes' doctrine of innate ideas in his treatise 'An Essay Concerning Human Understanding.'

According to Locke our mind at the time of birth is a tabula rasa (a blank slate). That blank slate is filled up by our experiences. For him there is no contribution from reason in the process of gaining knowledge. His famous dictum: 'There is nothing in the intellect which was not previously in the sense' leads us to accept that knowledge is a posteriori. Though Locke was an empiricist he is not free from rationalistic bias as he has accepted the existence of God, soul etc.

Berkeley and Hume also contributed for the empiricist tradition. From Berkeley's famous statement 'esse est percipi' which means to exist is to be perceived- we can sense that he accepted sense perception as the source of knowledge. Hume also developed Locke's empiricism. To him knowledge comes from ideas and impressions. The material object of knowledge is composed of ideas and impressions where they are connected with each other with the help of law of association. Hume developed Locke's empiricism to a different kind. Whereas Locke accepted the ideas of God, soul, matter, mind, Hume denied the existence of those things. According to Hume there is no absolute certainty in knowledge. Everything finally gets a probable position. Hume's form of empriricism is thus known as skepticism.

But this theory also have some drawbacks.

1. Empiricim has completely ignored the part of knowledge that we attain through reason. This leads empiricism towards dogmatism.
2. Empiricism accepts experience as the base of valid knowledge. But experience cannot give us universal knowledge all the time. From experience we can have only particular truths. Conclusion based on particular truths cannot be universally true.
3. Another part of empiricism is skepticism according to which absolute certainty in knowledge is not possible. So empiricism cannot be accepted as a proper error free theory.

So after discussing both rationalism and empiricism we can conclude that to obtain true knowledge both reason and sense experience is essential.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1) Fill in the blanks

a) The term epistemology has been derived from two Greek words. They sare_____ and _____.

b) _____ criticized the JTB definition of knowledge.

c) _____states that a belief is justified when it is the product of a reliable or a permissible process or method.

Q 2) Find out whether the following statements are true or false

a) Foundationalism is the theory of epistemic justification.(True/ False)

b) JTB stands for Just True Belief. (True/False)

c) Perception has no relation with our senses. (True/False)

Q 3) Answer the following:

a) What is the etymological meaning of epistemology?

b) What are the main theories of epistemic justification?

c) Who is known as the father of modern philosophy?

d) What do you mean by the JTB definition?

e) Define perception and testimony



3.8. LET US SUM UP

- The etymological meaning of epistemology is the science of knowledge.

- The book where John Locke first mentions about epistemology is “An Essay Concerning Human Understanding.”
- The book where Immanuel Kant discusses about epistemology is “Critique of Pure Reason”
- Gettier gave counter examples to criticize the JTB definition and succeeded to a very extend.
- The fourth principle that the defender of JTb dentition presented is: There be no true defeater.
- The main sources of knowledg-e are: Perception, introspection, memory, testimony and reason
- The in process of knowledge the relation between the knower and the known is very important
- Hume developed Locke’s version of empiricism to a logical version where Hume denied the existence of God, mind, matter and soul and presented a different kind of empiricism namely skepticism.
- Some empiricist philosophers are- Locke, Hume, Berkeley, Russell
- Some rationalist philosophers are- Plato, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, Wolff.



3.9: FURTHER READING

1) Steup, Matthias, Epistemology(summer,2018), The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Ed. Edward N. Zalta, Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University

Url: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epistemology/

2) David A. Truncellito, Epistemology, Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy

Url: https://www.iep.utm.edu/epistemo/

3) Alston, William. 1989. *Epistemic Justification. Essays in the Theory of Knowledge*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

4) Armstrong, D.M. 1973. *Belief, Truth, and Knowledge*. Cambrdidge: Cambridge University Press.

3.10. ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: a) Episteme, Logos b) Edmund Gettier c) Reliabilism

Ans to Q No 2: a) True. b) False c) False.

Ans to Q No 3: a) The word epistemology has been derived from two Greek words: Episteme and logos. The word ;episteme' means knowledge and 'logos' means science. So the etymological meaning of epistemology is the science of knowledge.

b) The main theories of epistemic justification are- 1. Foundationalism 2. Coherntism 3. Reliabilism.

c) Descartes is known as the father of modern philosophy,

d) Edmund Gettier, a distinguished American philosopher is primarily known for a paper titled " Is justified true belief knowledge?" that he published in Abalysis in which by using counter example he criticized the JTB definition of knowledge. In this definition propositional knowledge is defined as justified true belief. The JTB definition of knowledge states that S knows , if and only if – a) P is true, b) S believes P, S is justified in believing P.

e) Perception: Perception is a way where knowledge can be perceived through the experiences of the senses. Perception is the process by which we acquire information about the world around us using our five senses(ears, tongue, skin, eyes, nose).

Testimony: It is the knowledge from reliable sources. Testimony relies on others to acquire knowledge and communicate it to us. For example: Scientist, Historian are most of the time reliable sources for knowledge.

3.11. MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Objective questions

Q 1: What is meant by knowledge?

Q 2: What is epistemology?

Q 3: What are the two Greek words from which the word 'epistemology' has been derived?

B) Short questions (Answer in about 100-150 words)

Q 1: What is knowledge? Briefly explain

Q 2: Briefly explain the theories of epistemic justification.

Q 3: Briefly explain the sources of knowledge.

Q 4: Write short notes on- a) Empiricism
b) Rationalism

C) Long questions (Answer in about 300-500 words)

Q 1: Explain the sources of knowledge.

Q 2: Explain with examples the Gettier's idea about JTB definition

Q 3: What do you mean by epistemic justification? Describe its theories.

Q 4: What is rationalism? Explain with critical points

Q 5: What is empiricism? Explain with critical points.

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