

UNIT 1 DEFINITION AND NATURE OF EPISTEMOLOGY

Contents

- 1.0. Objectives
- 1.1. Introduction
- 1.2. Explaining the Concept of Knowledge
- 1.3. Traditional Definition of Knowledge
- 1.4. Role of the Intellect and the Senses in Human Knowing
- 1.5. Scope of Epistemology
- 1.6. Importance of Epistemology
- 1.7. Let Us Sum Up
- 1.8. Key Words
- 1.9. Further Readings and References
- 1.10. Answers to Check Your Progress

1.0. OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this Unit is to introduce you to epistemology and to determine its nature and scope. We will explore what it means to say that someone knows, or fails to know something and how much do we, or can we know. We will see both an etymological and traditional definition of knowledge, together with a general understanding of the term 'to know'. We shall also briefly cover different attitudes with regard to our ability to know reality. Finally, we will conclude with the importance of epistemology in human life.

Thus by the end of this Unit you should be able:

- To give a definition of knowledge;
- To differentiate between knowledge and belief;
- To know the role of scepticism as an adversary to knowledge;
- To know the role of reason and the senses in acquiring knowledge;

- To know the scope of epistemology;
- To know the importance of epistemology in comprehending the world we live in.

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Aristotle begins his work *Metaphysics* with the observation ‘All men by nature desire ‘to know.’ Kant raises the question ‘What can I know?’ The drive to know is fundamental to being human. Epistemology tries to fulfil this desire. Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that deals with the nature, origin and scope of knowledge. Epistemology focuses on our means of acquiring knowledge and how we can differentiate between truth and falsehood. The term ‘epistemology’ was coined by the Scottish Philosopher James Fredrick Ferrier (1808-64). It comes from the Greek word ‘episteme’ (knowledge) and ‘logos’ (theory or science).

It addresses the following questions:

What is knowledge?

What can we know?

How can we know it?

How is knowledge acquired?

Can knowledge be certain?

Is there a distinction between knowledge and belief?

What is the scope of knowledge?

Why do we believe certain claims and not others?

1.2. EXPLAINING THE CONCEPT OF KNOWLEDGE

Before we go into the traditional definition of knowledge we should know what ‘to know’ means. An analysis of the concept of knowledge has to be done to see how this term is used in everyday language. Expressions such as ‘know that,’ ‘know how,’ ‘know why,’ ‘know him,’ ‘know where,’ and ‘know whether,’ needed to be examined in detail. In the English language the word ‘knowledge’ is used in a variety of senses. It is used in the sense of ‘being acquainted with’ or ‘being familiar with’. We commonly speak of ‘knowing’ a person, place or a thing in this sense. We also use it in the sense of ‘being aware’ of something. Sometimes it is used as an

expression of 'psychological conviction'. Philosophers give multiple senses of knowledge such as: i. 'knowing that,' ii. 'Knowing which,' iii. 'Knowing how,' iv. 'Knowing what,' v. 'knowing what it is like.' Plato, used the term *techne* or skill for 'knowing how' (to do something), and the term *episteme* for a more forceful kind of knowledge in which claims can be true or false. There is a difference between 'knowing that' and 'knowing how'. 'Know how' is used to refer to a kind of skill or ability, such as knowing how to swim. Here even if one knows what it is, he may not be able to explain the rules or laws of a skill. However, the expression, 'know that,' in contrast, seems to denote the possession of a specific piece of information, and the person who has knowledge of this sort generally is able to convey this knowledge to others. Philosophers are mainly concerned with 'knowing that' something is the case and it is in this sense of the word that a claim is either true or false. This meaning of 'to know' is called 'propositional knowledge'. Epistemologists from ancient Greeks to the present have focused on propositional knowledge—that is, the 'knowing that' kind of knowledge. Propositional knowledge encompasses ordinary perceptual knowledge, scientific knowledge, geographical knowledge, ethical knowledge, mathematical knowledge, religious knowledge, self-knowledge, and knowledge about any field of study whatever.

A proposition is a declarative sentence which purports to describe a fact or a state of affairs, such as 'Dogs are mammals,' ' $2+2=7$.' A proposition may be true or false; that is, it need not actually express a fact. Propositional knowledge, then, can be called 'knowing-that.' Statements of propositional knowledge are properly expressed using 'that'-clauses, such as 'He knows that Delhi is in India.' Not all sentences are propositions. For example, 'what is the time?' This sentence is not a proposition because one cannot ask whether what the sentence expresses is true. Propositions can be doubted and believed. They are to be either true or false. Hence, they can be asserted or denied and such an assertion or denial is called a judgment. On this level the question of truth and certitude arises and the question of knowledge is posed.

1.3. TRADITIONAL DEFINITION OF KNOWLEDGE

Plato suggested that to 'know' something is to believe it and to provide an adequate account of its essential features. Knowledge is therefore belief plus understanding. The definition is based on Plato's *Theaetetus*, and holds that there are three essential components of knowledge. They

are: *justification, truth and belief*. Hence, propositional knowledge is 'justified true belief'. One implication of this definition is that just because one believes something and it turns out to be true, it does not mean that one 'knew' it, because belief lacks justification.

BELIEF

Beliefs crowd our minds. We have various types of beliefs like perceptual, scientific, moral, political, and theological beliefs. Belief is defined as a conviction of the truth of a proposition without its verification. There are two different meanings of belief that must be distinguished. In the first sense it is to 'believe in', that is 'to trust'. I might believe in my cousin while lending a loan. That is I trust that he will pay it back. Often, statements of 'belief' in this sense predict that something will prove to be useful or successful in some sense. In the second sense, to believe something means to think that it is true. To believe P is to believe that P is the case. Here the cognitive content is held as true. For example, to believe that the sky is blue is to think that the proposition 'The sky is blue' is true. It is this sort of belief that is discussed with regard to knowledge.

However, merely true belief is not sufficient for knowledge. Many true beliefs obviously do not qualify for knowledge. If you believe that your uncle will come to see you this evening and this turns out to be true, it does not become knowledge. The belief turned out to be true coincidentally but lacked supporting reasons. If one has to have knowledge of something one has to have true justified belief about it. Knowledge is distinct from belief and opinion. We can be mistaken about our beliefs but in knowledge there is no place for falsehood. With regard to opinion there is room for falsehood, as it is a hesitant assent. For something to count as knowledge, it must be true. Hence, mere belief is not sufficient for knowledge, because many beliefs turn out to be false. Hence, a second condition for knowledge is truth, that is, 'We know that P only if P is True.'

TRUTH

As we saw above, knowledge requires belief but not all beliefs constitute knowledge because sometimes we are mistaken in what we believe. In short, some of our beliefs are true and some

are false. In the process of acquiring knowledge we get rid of false beliefs and increase the number of our true beliefs. The purpose of belief in acquiring knowledge is to describe reality as it is. However, some of our beliefs fail to do this role of representing the world accurately and turn out to be false and those that represent the world accurately are true or factual. Here we are assuming an objective truth. Hence it is possible for beliefs to match or fail to match with reality. Truth is a condition of knowledge and if belief fails to be true then it cannot constitute knowledge. However, merely belief and truth do not as yet constitute knowledge. For that we need one more criterion to be involved, that is, justification

JUSTIFICATION

Merely true belief does not constitute knowledge. The satisfaction of our belief condition has to be appropriately related to the satisfaction of the truth condition. Genuine knowledge requires that a knower has an adequate indication that a believed proposition is true. Hence, only those true beliefs that are arrived in a right way constitute knowledge. The right way is a way of *sound reasoning and solid evidence* to acquire knowledge. A lucky guess, even if it turns out to be right on certain occasions, cannot constitute knowledge. A belief is justified if it is based on sound reasoning and rock-solid evidence. This kind of justification is called epistemic justification. The justification of belief does not mean that knowledge requires absolute certainty. Such a demand would lead to absolute scepticism.

The requirement of the condition of justification is to ensure that knowledge is based on solid evidence rather than on luck or misinformation. It is interesting to note that an unjustified belief can be true because of luck, but a justified belief can be false because of human fallibility. For example, the astronomers before Copernicus were justified in holding their geocentric model of the universe even though it was false. The way the world actually is need not agree with what our best evidence indicates. This goes to show that truth and justification are two independent conditions of belief. True belief does not tell us whether it is justified or not, similarly a justified belief does not tell us whether it is true or false. However, a justified belief is more likely to be true than to be false.

In summary, what we see in these conditions is that thought passes from belief to knowledge. One first believes and only then arrives at knowledge. So only when belief is confirmed by

justification can it become knowledge. Therefore, for a belief to become knowledge it must correspond to reality and must be derived from valid evidence and argumentation.

It is appropriate to end this section with a reference to the ‘the Gettier problem.’ In 1963, Edmund Gettier in a short article criticised Plato’s definition of knowledge by pointing out situations in which a believer has a true belief justified to a reasonable degree, but not to a certainty, and yet in the situations in question, everyone would agree that the believer does not have knowledge. After this article some epistemologists revised the traditional definition of knowledge and added a fourth condition. They held that the three conditions are not sufficient for knowledge and a fourth condition needed to be added, namely, ‘no false beliefs be essentially involved in the reasoning that led to the belief’. However, for our introductory purposes, we may define knowledge for the most part as ‘justified true belief’.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) How is an epistemological understanding different from the common understanding of the term ‘to know’?

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2) How does belief become knowledge?

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1.4. THE ROLE OF THE INTELLECT AND THE SENSES IN HUMAN KNOWING

In the previous section we defined what knowledge is etymologically and traditionally. It is not enough to know what knowledge is by merely defining it. One must know how it arises, that is, what are its sources? Knowing the origin of knowledge will help us determine the nature of knowledge. Accordingly, in this section we will study the origin of knowledge. There are various sources of knowledge like perception, memory, inference, testimony, authority, intuition, etc. Some schools in Western philosophy did not believe that knowledge is possible at all. They are the 'skeptics.' But the two main schools which believe that knowledge is possible are the 'rationalists' [Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz] and the 'empiricists' [Locke, Berkeley and Hume].

SKEPTICISM

It is not only the question, 'What is knowledge?' that disturbed the human mind but also how far human knowledge can be extended. How much do we know or can we know? The very possibility of knowledge confronts every epistemologist. The problem is, 'Is genuine knowledge attainable at all?' Some philosophers held the position that humans can know everything or every truth about reality, while others held that humans can know nothing. Some rejected the possibility for knowledge on the grounds that humans are finite beings and as they are limited, their knowledge is also limited. Furthermore, conflicting views, arguments and counter arguments in philosophy led some to skepticism. Skepticism is a philosophical position which holds that the possibility of knowledge is limited either because of the limitations of the mind (of understanding reality) or because of the inaccessibility of its objects (e.g., metaphysical realities). Pyrrho founded the Skeptic school and invited people to suspend judgment in order to obtain 'peace of mind.' The term 'skepticism' is derived from the Greek word '*skeptomai*' meaning 'to look carefully,' 'to doubt,' to examine.

There are two types of skeptics: absolute skeptics and relative (or methodical) skeptics. Absolute skeptics claim that no knowledge is possible at all. However, this claim itself can be seen to be self-contradictory. For how can one *know* for sure that one cannot know anything? Furthermore, why should one believe this claim (that knowledge is not possible), if no knowledge claim is to be believed at all? Relative (or methodical) skepticism, however, can play a useful role because it cautions us about the errors that may creep into common sense

knowledge. In modern times Descartes used it as a method to arrive at the undeniable truth of *cogito ergo sum*. Descartes' methodical or tentative skepticism is based upon the fact that our senses can deceive us, and as a result, some of our beliefs may be false. But to possess justified belief we must be able to distinguish truth from falsity. In doing this he came upon the sure foundation of knowledge that at least, 'I think, therefore I am'. From this, he went on to establish many more knowledge claims of which he was certain. Later, however, Hume challenged these certain assumptions about the self, substance and causality, showing that there is no self nor substance that exists, and that the laws of causality are based on habitual expectation. Kant's critical epistemology too shows the limits of knowledge through the distinction between the *phenomenal* and the *noumenal* world. The phenomenal world is the knowable world, while the *noumenal* world is the unknowable world. A similar position is held by logical positivists who held that what is knowable [verifiable] is meaningful, and that what is unknowable [unverifiable] is meaningless. Skepticism is not to be outrightly rejected. Skepticism should be used as a purificatory process in obtaining knowledge.

However, very few philosophers are absolute skeptics. While some are methodological skeptics, they often land into two primary camps, those who believe that knowledge is based more upon what the mind and its faculties give us (the rationalists) and those who believe that knowledge is based more upon what the senses and their powers reveal to us [the empiricists]. We shall briefly outline these two positions as alternatives to skepticism.

RATIONALISM

Rationalism is the theory which maintains that valid knowledge has its origin in reason alone. Etymologically, the word is derived from the Latin noun *ratio* meaning reason. Philosophers who stress the role of reason as opposed to the senses in the acquisition of knowledge are called rationalists. According to the rationalists our sense experiences are always elusive. They deceive us on many occasions because the objects given to the senses are always changing and fleeting. If we are deceived on some occasion then there is no guarantee that we cannot be deceived on other occasions. Remember the famous example from Indian philosophy of mistaking the rope for the snake. Hence, truth learned from sense perception cannot be relied upon, and is thus open to correction. Consequently, such truths cannot be taken as universal and necessary.

Philosophical knowledge cannot be based on such propositions. Rather, knowledge needs propositions which are universal, necessary and absolutely valid.

Thus, one major epistemological debate concerning the sources of knowledge is the role of sense experience in our acquisition of knowledge. Common sense holds that all our knowledge is gained through sense perception. You see things, touch them, smell some of them, you hear about some of them and you say you know the particular thing through these senses. However, all knowledge is not derived from *sense experience*. Some knowledge is derived from *reason*. Epistemologists call these two types of knowledge *a posteriori* and *a priori* respectively. The difference between propositions of these two types are, empirical propositions can be knowable but not believable, like the *a priori* propositions of mathematics, for example, '2+2=4.' Here one need not engage in any factual or empirical inquiry in order to obtain this knowledge. Secondly, there is a difference in our mode of establishing them. With regard to *a priori* proposition, once we grasp the truth of it, we do not search for further evidence. But with regard to empirical propositions we need more evidence to establish their truth. We learn empirical generalizations and validate them through induction. For example, 'All crows are black'. The more black crows we observe, the more strongly the truth of an empirical proposition will be established. Our confidence in the truth of an empirical generalization is increased by the addition of further instances of it. Here mere understanding of the words is not enough. Rather, knowledge can be obtained only through certain kinds of experience.

However, one must not forget that the rationalist does not deny the possibility of getting knowledge from experience. His basic objection is that knowledge obtained *a posteriori* (that is, from or after experience) is not free from error or doubt. Therefore, it cannot give us valid judgments. In brief, *a posteriori* knowledge cannot give us true knowledge of reality. As soon as philosophy rejects the common sense view or the popular view of the universe, rationalistic theories of knowledge arise. Some rationalists distrusted, suspected the senses as unreliable and consequently they either diminished or dismissed the role of senses in human knowing. While others conceded that sensory experience is in some sense necessary for the development of knowledge but not sufficient. All rationalists maintained the possibility of *a priori* knowledge, with reason being superior to the senses in obtaining knowledge. They considered the senses as an occasion for the rise of an innate idea in the consciousness but never the cause of it. Rationalist held that 'ideas' are innate, that is, inborn. Scientific knowledge cannot come from

the senses, because universality and necessity are essential to it. Thus, knowledge according to them is the product of understanding. They held that reason is the faculty of man which evolves certain principles and notions from within, and not from experience. These are products of pure thought and so *a priori*, that is, given independently of and prior to all external experience. Rationalists considered these principles to be general conditions and concepts of knowledge, and therefore universal. Every human mind is equipped with these general conditions and concepts, and so these are necessarily valid. Their validity cannot be doubted and reasonably contradicted.

EMPIRICISM

This is a doctrine named after Sextus Empiricus [C200 AD], who advocated its main principles. It is a view that all knowledge and all understanding have their roots in experience—particularly in the experience we obtain through the senses. It is in sharp contrast to rationalism. Empiricists reject *a priori* possibilities of knowledge, such as the knowledge claim that, ‘every event has a cause.’ Instead, they held the view that, ‘there is nothing in the intellect that was not first in the senses.’ Hence, prior to experience, the mind was a blank slate, and whatever ideas we have are obtained from our contact with nature. Thus, obtaining factual knowledge by *a priori* reasoning is impossible. Experience gives us factual knowledge but not logically certain knowledge. Ideas are received through sensation and reflection. Sensations give us ideas of colours, tastes, smells, etc., whereas reflection gives us information with regard to the inner states of mind. All our knowledge can be traced back to experience.

Empiricism as theory became popular with the British philosopher John Locke who is considered the father of empiricism. He began by rejecting the Cartesian theory of innate ideas. He declared that the mind at birth is a ‘tabula rasa’, that is to say a clean slate. He held that if ever there were innate ideas in the mind, then every mind would have been conscious of them. But we find that children, idiots and uneducated people have no idea about such ideas. According to him it makes no sense to say that someone could have a thought without having access to its contents. Hence, it is wrong to say that certain principles are present in the mind from birth.

After Locke another British empiricist was David Hume for whom all knowledge is constituted by sense impressions. We can go no further than sensations. He distinguished between impressions and ideas and held that ideas are dependent on the former. It is from these

impressions that all knowledge is obtained. Hume's theory of impression leads to skepticism which is the direct outcome of Locke's empiricism. This is the reason why the Logical Positivists of the 'Vienna Circle' claimed Hume as one of their forerunners. This is because Hume's extreme empiricism questioned the meaningfulness of concepts which do not have a foundation in experience.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) What is skepticism?

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2) Explain the controversy between rationalism and empiricism.

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1.5. THE SCOPE OF EPISTEMOLOGY

Epistemology illustrates all potential domains of knowledge, whether it be religious, political, mathematical, logic, scientific, ethical, or psychological. Here we deal with the scope of epistemology in relation to metaphysics, logic, ethics, psychology and sociology.

Speculative philosophy embraces metaphysics and epistemology as its two branches. Metaphysics studies what entities exist whereas epistemology studies what knowledge is and

how it is possible. There has been controversy with regard to the priority of epistemology over metaphysics. Descartes, Locke and Kant held that epistemology is prior to metaphysics because investigation of the nature and limits of knowledge is necessary for metaphysical speculations regarding the nature of ultimate reality. Whereas Spinoza and Hegel have first attacked metaphysical problems and thought of knowledge to be in conformity with their metaphysical conclusions. Whatever the controversy, epistemology and metaphysics are logically interdependent.

Secondly, we see scope of epistemology in the field of logic. Logic is the formal science of the principles governing valid reasoning whereas epistemology is a philosophical science of the nature of knowledge. For example, whether a given process of reasoning is valid or not is a logical question, but the inquiry into the nature of validity is an epistemological question.

Bertrand Russell wrote, 'the two great engines in the progress of human society are the desire to *understand* the world and to *improve* it.' These words of Russell seem very appropriate in today's world. We find that epistemology studies whether a belief is true or false, reasonable or unreasonable, justified or unjustified. In epistemology cognitive acts of human beings are evaluated and general principles are laid down for epistemic evaluations. A similar language is used in ethics. Ethics inquires into the nature of rightness and appropriateness of human conduct and lays down general principles for good human behaviour. Hence, it evaluates moral or immoral, right or wrong actions, etc. There are various areas in which one can explore similarities and differences between ethics and epistemology. Epistemology and ethics help us to understand and improve the world by giving us guiding principles in understanding the world and improving it.

When it comes to the relation between epistemology and psychology, a question arises in the mind, 'Where does the first end and the second begin?' However, in modern times psychology is establishing its independence. Psychology is a study of the mind and its processes, and how these work. Hence, psychologists study phenomena such as perception, cognition, emotion, etc. The subject matter of psychology is *how* minds work, whereas epistemology deals with *what* the mind works on. However, the relation between the two is an intimate one because the subject matter of psychology (that is, the cognitive processes of perception, memory, and imagination) are the very processes involved, although in a different context, in the subject matter of epistemology. Psychology is an investigation into all mental states (including the subconscious),

whereas epistemology investigates only cognitive states in relation to their cognitive meaning. In spite of partial differences we find a partial identity of the subject matter, which makes them interdependent sciences.

Similarly, epistemology is related to sociology. In fact, there is a special field in sociology called the 'sociology of knowledge,' in which the social conditions which lead to knowledge claims are studied. However, while sociology deals with these larger conditions of the social origins of knowledge, epistemology is more concerned with the cognitive status (that is, the validity) of the actual claims themselves.

1.6. IMPORTANCE OF EPISTEMOLOGY

We quoted Aristotle at the beginning of this Unit saying, 'All men by their nature desire to know.' This is because people understand the importance and power of knowledge in human life. We know from very ancient times human beings have tried to *know* themselves and even the many natural and supernatural forces which confront them. Very often, the common person takes for granted that what he or she perceives to be true is true. However, closer examination often shows that it is not so. Epistemology makes us aware of the power of the human mind and the limits of the human mind. It challenges the way we think.

Human beings desire to know the world and our place in it. This search for knowledge is not merely for an academic requirement or a drive for formal correctness. Rather this search is carried out of our existential concern to express ourselves. When we ask, 'What can I know?', we simultaneously ask, 'What is real'? Knowing the reality of the world and ourselves helps to achieve different goals of life and to make life beautiful. In epistemology our primary aim is to find truth which frees us from falsehood. Therefore, it exhorts us to pursue truth thoughtfully by giving us principles by which we may accept something as true or reject it as false. It assists us to sift between truth and falsehood. In a word, the 'uncovering of being' takes place. And such true knowledge is necessary for wisdom. Thus, as Vincent G. Potter says, 'To be wise does not require that we know everything about everything, but that we know the place of things relative to each other and to ourselves. It is to know what life as a whole is about.' Accordingly, we can say epistemology assists human beings in realizing the Socratic maxim, 'Know Thyself.'

Check Your Progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1) What is the scope of epistemology?

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2) Write your reflections on the importance of epistemology.

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1.7. LET US SUM UP

In this Unit we have attempted to give a preliminary idea of epistemology by giving etymological and traditional definitions. By discussing the traditional definition at length we have endeavoured to explain how the process of knowing takes place and made ourselves aware that it is not as easy as it ordinarily seems to us. We have concluded that to arrive at true knowledge we need justified true belief. But the definition alone will not give us an adequate idea of knowledge. That is why we have paid a great deal of attention to the two primary sources of knowledge, reason and the senses. It is the belief that we can gain valid knowledge through these two primary sources which have led human beings to resist an entirely sceptical attitude towards the process of knowledge.

The field of knowledge is related to various disciplines such as metaphysics, logic, ethics, psychology and sociology. We have seen similarities and differences in approach between epistemology and these allied fields of study. Finally, we examined a few important reasons why the study of epistemology is useful for human life.

1.8. KEY WORDS

Epistemology: from Gk. episteme ‘knowledge,’ from epistanai, ‘to stand upon’, understand: epi-upon + histanai, to stand, +logy. Hence, epistemology is the study of the nature, sources and limits of knowledge. ‘Logos’ is the root of all terms ending in ‘-ology’ – such as psychology, anthropology – and of ‘logic,’ and has many other related meanings.

Knowledge: knowledge is justified true belief. To know something is to believe it and to justify it or give an adequate account of it to prove that it is true.

Skepticism: The term ‘skepticism’ is derived from the Greek word ‘*skeptomai*’ meaning ‘to look carefully’ ‘to doubt,’ ‘to examine’.

A priori: is knowledge gained or justified by reason alone, without the direct or indirect influence of any particular experience. In short, it is a knowledge that does not depend on experience.

A posteriori: knowledge that comes ‘posterior to,’ or ‘after,’ sense experience, although the term does not really refer to ‘before’ or ‘after’. Hence, it is knowledge, the attainment or justification of which requires reference to experience.

Innate idea: inborn ideas which are not product of human experience. This theory is proposed by the rationalists.

1.9. FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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1.10. ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check your progress I

1. In everyday language we use expressions such as ‘know that,’ ‘know how,’ etc. In the English language it is used in the sense of ‘being acquainted with’ or ‘being familiar with’. We commonly speak of ‘knowing’ a person, place or a thing in this sense. We also use it in the sense of ‘being aware’ of something. Sometimes it is used as an expression of ‘psychological conviction’. There is a difference between ‘know that’ and ‘know how’. ‘Know how’ is used to refer to a kind of skill or ability, such as knowing how to swim. Here even if one knows what it is he or she may not be able to explain the rules or laws of a skill. Hence, commonly we use the term ‘to know’ in above mentioned senses. However, the expression, ‘know that,’ in contrast, seems to denote the possession of specific pieces of information, and the person who has knowledge of this sort generally is able to convey this knowledge to others. Philosophers are concerned with ‘knowing that’ something is the case and it is in this sense of the word that a claim is held to be either true or false. And this meaning of ‘to know’ is called propositional knowledge. Epistemologists from ancient Greeks to the present have focused on the validity (or truth function) of propositional knowledge—that is, the ‘knowing that’ kind of knowledge.

2. Belief is defined as a conviction of the truth of a proposition without its verification. There are two different meanings of belief that must be distinguished. In the first sense it is ‘believe in’, that is ‘to trust’. In the second sense to believe something means to affirm that it is true. That is,

to believe P is to believe that P is the case. Here the cognitive content is held as true. However, merely true belief is not sufficient for knowledge. Many true beliefs obviously do not qualify for knowledge. If one has to have knowledge of something, one has to have true justified belief about it. Hence, mere belief is not sufficient for knowledge because many beliefs are false. Hence, a second condition for knowledge is 'truth', that is, 'We know that P only if P is True.' Truth is a condition of knowledge and if a belief fails to be true then it cannot constitute knowledge. Furthermore (besides belief and truth), knowledge needs a third criterion to be fulfilled, namely, justification. Much of epistemology is concerned with how true beliefs might be properly justified or validated. In a nut shell, what we see in these conditions is that thought passes from belief to knowledge. One first believes and only then can one arrive at knowledge (via truth and justification). Only when a belief is confirmed or justified and found to be true can one say that one knows something for sure. Therefore, for a belief to become knowledge it must correspond to reality (be true) and must be derived from valid evidence (be justified or proved).

Check Your Progress II

1. The Skepticism is a philosophical position which holds that the possibility of knowledge is limited either because of the limitations of the mind, that is every mind has of understanding reality or because the inaccessibility of its objects, like the metaphysical realities. It is related to questioning attitude of human beings. It held this position because of the diversity of contradictory views held in philosophy. And these diverse views raise serious doubt whether humans have ability to reach an objective universal truth. Secondly, that each mind has its way of understanding reality and hence no one is qualified to prove that my view is better or correct than the view of the other. Thirdly, we make mistakes and yet we think that we are right. However, there is a possibility that we are wrong all the time.

2. Rationalism is the theory which maintains that valid knowledge has its origin in reason alone. According to rationalists our sense experiences are always elusive. They deceive us on many occasions because the objects given to the senses are always changing and fleeting. Hence, truth learned from sense perception cannot be relied upon and is open to correction. Consequently, such truths cannot be taken as universal and necessary. Philosophical knowledge cannot be based

on such propositions and needs propositions which are universal, necessary and absolutely valid. Hence, they believe in *a priori* knowledge. Rationalist held that 'ideas' are innate, that is, inborn. Thus, knowledge according to them is the product of understanding. Empiricism, on the other hand, is the view that all knowledge and all understanding have their roots in experience—particularly in the experience we obtain through our senses. Empiricists reject the *a priori* possibility of knowledge. They hold the view that, 'there is nothing in the intellect that was not first in the senses.' Hence, prior to experience the mind was like a blank slate and whatever ideas we have are obtained from our contact with nature. Thus, obtaining factual knowledge by *a priori* reasoning is impossible. Experience gives us factual knowledge which *a priori* knowledge cannot give us, because *a priori* knowledge does not refer to anything in reality. This is the conflict between rationalism and empiricism.

Check Your Progress III

1. Speculative philosophy embraces metaphysics and epistemology as its two branches. Metaphysics studies what entities exist whereas epistemology studies what knowledge is and how it is possible. Despite the controversies with regard to their priority, epistemology and metaphysics are logically interdependent. Similarly, logic sees whether reasoning is valid or not (the formal structure of inquiry) and epistemology inquires into the content of its validity (the matter to be inquired into). The scope of epistemology includes ethics too. In epistemology cognitive acts of human beings are evaluated and general principles are laid down for epistemic evaluations. Similarly ethics inquires into the nature of rightness and the appropriateness of human conduct and lays down general principles for good human behaviour. The relation between psychology and epistemology is an intimate one because the subject matter of psychology (cognitive processes of perception, memory, and imagination) are the very processes, although in a different context, which are central to the subject matter of epistemology. Psychology is an investigation into all mental states, whereas epistemology investigates only cognitive states and tries to establish their cognitive truth and meaning. Finally, while the sociology of knowledge is concerned about the social processes which lead us to believe certain claims ('how' we derive this knowledge), epistemology is more concerned with the truth value of these claims (whether 'what' we believe is true or false).

2. Epistemology makes us aware of the power and the limits of the human mind. It challenges the way we think. Human beings are able to perform verificationary processes in order to distinguish between true and false claims. Epistemology gives us guidelines (like the guidelines of ethics) on how one should acquire true beliefs and avoid false beliefs. Thus, it helps us to uncover truth which frees us from falsehood. It helps us to know the reality of the world, human reality and transcendental truths. Therefore, it exhorts us to pursue truth thoughtfully by giving us principles about when we ought to accept something as true. Accordingly, we can say epistemology assists human beings in realizing the Socratic maxim, 'Know Thyself.'

