

What is Epistemology?

Worksheet

Epistemology is the philosophical study of knowledge - examining what justifies belief, and how truth, evidence, and reason combine to produce genuine knowledge.

Questions

1. According to the classical JTB theory, knowledge requires:

- A) Only true belief
- B) Justified belief only
- C) Justified true belief
- D) Popular belief

2. Which philosopher is most associated with empiricism?

- A) Descartes
- B) Locke
- C) Leibniz
- D) Spinoza

3. 'All bachelors are unmarried' is known:

- A) A posteriori
- B) Through experiment
- C) A priori
- D) By luck

4. A Gettier case shows that:

- A) JTB is always sufficient for knowledge
- B) Justified true belief can still fail to be knowledge
- C) Empiricism is false
- D) Reason is unreliable

5. Analyze the classic definition: knowledge = justified true belief (JTB). Does believing something true by pure luck count as knowledge?

6. Is 'the sun will rise tomorrow' a priori or a posteriori knowledge?

7. A rationalist and an empiricist disagree about how we know '2+2=4' and 'fire burns.' Explain the divide.

8. Define: What is epistemology?

9. Define: What is JTB (justified true belief)?

10. Define: Rationalism vs empiricism?

Answer Key

1. C) Justified true belief - JTB = belief + truth + justification.
2. B) Locke - Locke argued the mind starts as a blank slate filled by experience.
3. C) A priori - It's true by definition/logic alone - a priori.
4. B) Justified true belief can still fail to be knowledge - Gettier cases show justified true belief can arise from luck, not genuine knowledge.
5. JTB requires three conditions: the belief must be true, the person must believe it, and it must be justified. A lucky guess that happens to be true lacks justification, so it fails the JTB test. Gettier cases (1963) show even justified true beliefs can fail to be 'real' knowledge if the justification is accidentally connected to the truth.
6. A priori knowledge is known independent of experience (e.g. '2+2=4'). A posteriori knowledge depends on observation and experience. Belief that the sun will rise relies on past observed patterns, so it is A POSTERIORI.
7. The rationalist says '2+2=4' is knowable by pure reason alone, without needing to count objects. The empiricist agrees math can seem this way but insists all concepts ultimately trace back to sensory experience. Both agree 'fire burns' is learned through sense experience (a posteriori), showing the debate is sharpest over abstract, non-empirical truths.
8. The branch of philosophy studying the nature, sources, and limits of knowledge.
9. The classical theory that knowledge = a belief that is true and justified.
10. Rationalism holds reason as the primary source of knowledge; empiricism holds sense experience is primary.

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