

Doubt key to  
knowledge is it true  
philosophy essay



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From time immemorial man has been curious about of surroundings. This innate curiosity leads us to try to understand the workings of the world. Thus when faced with uncertainty or distrust of an alleged true belief, we would start investigations to try and obtain justified true belief. This essay shall maintain that doubt is required to obtain knowledge if there is an anomaly between the alleged truth and one's observations. The essay would thus look at how doubt is used in areas of natural sciences and religion to obtain knowledge and examine the extent doubt is required to obtain knowledge in these areas of knowing.

In the area of natural sciences, knowledge has always been seen as provisional. David Hume's approach towards induction and causation in science philosophy remains sceptical about human powers of reasoning as he argues that inductive reasoning is based on expectation and psychology, not logic and science. Hence doubting the validity of inductive reasoning leads us to search for more conclusive ways to obtain knowledge.

To bypass this supposed flaw of inductive reasoning, according to Karl Popper, science proceeds not in an inductive fashion but by making bold generalizations that falsify the statement. Hence one should doubt that the theory is true and find evidence to prove that the hypothesis is false rather than try to prove that is it true via inductive reasoning. With Popper's philosophy, it is assumed that though absolute truth may exist, it would be impossible for us to know whether or not we have attained it. During our pursuit of knowledge, we may be brought closer to the truth but we can never know if we have managed to attain absolute truth as not being able to falsify the statement now does not mean that the statement would not hold

it future. Einstein's well-known formula  $E= MC^2$  is accepted by everyone though it remains unproven. It remains to be seen if the theorem still holds in future when mass of an object can be converted into energy. Though it may be unknown if absolute truth is obtained, doubting the hypothesis and trying to falsify it narrow or even close the gap, bringing us closer to the absolute truth and subsequently enable us to obtain more knowledge.

Thomas Kuhn on the other hand, has another theory on the structure of scientific revolution which also supports the claim that doubt is the key to knowledge. Kuhn argued that science does not progress via a linear accumulation of new knowledge, but is punctuated by revolutions in which the nature of scientific inquiry within a particular field is abruptly transformed. When there is an anomaly with the existing paradigm, doubt regarding the accuracy of the paradigm develops. Hence a new theory would be put forward to resolve the anomaly, resulting in a paradigm shift and an assumed step close to the truth. When young, I was taught that Pluto was a planet. However after much scientific debate between scientists, Pluto is no longer classified as a planet. After this paradigm shift, knowledge about astronomy would maintain its linear accumulation. This doubt would spur people to try to close the gap between the absolute truth and the beliefs we have due to the continuous want to erase the doubt and close the gap.

Thus doubt is crucial in one's search for knowledge as if one rejects everything that opposes the theory then one may inadvertently reject improvements to one's knowledge. One might take an approach of confirmation bias towards the anomalies between the theory and observations instead of doubting it. One might have a tendency to search for

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or interpret information in a way that confirms one's preconceptions instead of viewing the observations objectively. The flaw of the theory would not be found and one would be unable to gain new knowledge from trying to find a reason for the flaw and erase it by coming with a new theory which is closer to the absolute truth.

On the other hand, there are other factors besides doubt that result in the discovery of new knowledge. Observations and testing of hypothesis are the fundamentals in science and doubt between the observation and hypothesis may result in new knowledge. New knowledge may also result from the accidental realisation that the theorem doesn't hold or a chance discovery. In the area of biology, many new species of plants and animals are discovered when researchers explore new places. Penicillin and Pluto was also discovered by accident, not by doubt. However, if one adopts the confirmation bias approach, one would reject the evidence and not doubt the previous findings, thus the old knowledge would still seem to hold. So although the discovery of the flaw was not due to doubt of the theorem, it was subsequent doubt that arose after the evidence that allowed us to gain new knowledge.

Philosophical scepticism of Popper's theory however argues that justification of falsifying the theory is subjective. This argument is conclusive in theory but not in practice as when there is a conflict between the hypothesis and observation, we can either reject the hypothesis or observation. Thus though the observation may falsify the hypothesis, we may still reject it as a single counter example is not enough to falsify the hypothesis. In order to prove that the false statement indeed holds, we may rely on inductive reasoning, <https://assignbuster.com/doubt-key-to-knowledge-is-it-true-philosophy-essay/>

leading us back to the flaw of inductive reasoning that Hume's argument pointed out. Doubting the both creditability of the falsification and the hypothesis may end up leading us away from knowledge as we would be unsure which to believe it.

In the area of religion, doubt as the key to knowledge as mere faith alone might not be enough for some people to believe in a higher-being. Hence doubt in religion leads to theology and use of reason to prove religion. Such reasoning, like the cosmological, ontological and teleological arguments, help to reaffirm one's faith in one's religion as they seek to logically prove the existence of God and get rid of the doubt they have regarding their faith.

Miracles and revelations that are unexplained though doubted also increases faith in a higher being. On Thursday 21 September 1995, Hindu statues worldwide seemed to be drinking the milk given to them. This became known as the Hindu milk miracle[1]. The lack of scientific explanation after doubting the validity of the miracles leads one to conclude that the event is truly a miracle since there is no other explanation, thus re-enforcing one's faith in the religion. Explained events also allow one to gain more knowledge in the field of sciences as we now have a scientific and logical explanation behind the happening.

The supposed answering of one's questions and dispelling of one's doubts also leads one closer to God. In Christianity, Thomas, one of Jesus' twelve disciples doubted the resurrection but became a believer after seeing Jesus in the flesh after the crucifixion.[2]

Of course one has to assume that prayers and questions that are supposedly answered and miracles are indeed the workings of God and would reinforce one's faith that God exists. Thus the strengthening of one's faith in God would lead one closer to the truth and knowledge.

However, one has to also factor in the relativism of religion. The alleged evidences has regarding God's existence strengthens my own faith in the religion that I already believe in, namely Catholicism, and will not attribute the workings to other God's doing. Different religions contradict each other as Hindu and Taoist teachings are polytheist while Christianity and Islamic teachings are monotheist while atheists believe that there is no God. This contradiction cannot all be true if truth is absolute. Thus doubting and the subsequent reinforcement of one's faith might not lead one towards knowledge. It is only if truth is relative that one would be able to gain more knowledge regarding the relevant religion.

In addition, the basis of religion is faith; you can never prove religion but can only choose to believe it. Doubting does not enable one to know everything about the religion as there is always an element of mystery in it. The gap between the tangible and intangible in religion would have to be bridge with belief and not doubting of the intangible elements. Doubting of the fundamental of the religion would result in one turning away from religion instead of trying to grow in faith and knowledge.

Hence in general, doubting everything can lead to radical scepticism with no independent ground for the testimony-based beliefs that we hold. After all, since doubts can never be entirely ruled out, how can we have certainty and

claim to know anything? Even more problems would occur when the methods of obtaining the knowledge in different areas of knowledge are doubted as not just the hypothesis or falsification is doubted, but the way of getting them is questioned. Certain statements would have to be unable to be doubted to be able to prove anything. Hence we can adopt Rene Descartes' single principle that thought exists ('I think therefore I am') and is the firm ground upon which cannot be doubted. All other knowledge that can be doubted can then be re-established upon it to acquire a firm foundation for knowledge.

Therefore, one should take the pragmatic approach towards truth and not doubt if the theory works least we end up falling into radical scepticism. Only when there is conflict between the alleged truth and one's observations, doubting the alleged truth and finding out if it is the observation or the belief that is wrong would then be the key to knowledge.