

The theory of knowledge



“ IN EXPANDING THE FIELD OF KNOWLEDGE WE BUT INCREASE THE HORIZON OF IGNORANCE” (HENRY MILLER). IS THIS TRUE?

Knowledge is the antonym of ignorance. When we are faced with two opposites, the general notion is that if one increases the other is bound to decrease. Take a pigment for example. The darker pigment you add to your paint, the less lighter it would get.

To understand this stance, we must first understand the definition of knowledge and ignorance. However, knowledge is too extensive to be defined in one sentence and discussed in one essay. Therefore, I will be limiting my writing to few areas of knowledge such as religion, language, science and mathematics to enforce my evaluation. Henry Miller talks about the increase in the horizon of ignorance and I feel that horizon is the perfect word for describing ignorance.

Karl Popper stated that, “ Our knowledge can only be finite, while our ignorance must necessarily be infinite.” I support his premise because the scope for ignorance is as vast as that of knowledge. As we obtain more knowledge, we only find more fields that could be developed even further, thereby, increasing our ignorance. Barring few exceptions, we can connect this to almost all areas of knowledge because, just like the horizon, as we get closer to it and we think that we have found the final answer, only to realize that, in reality, we are still far away from the end point.

A common opinion is that as we increase our knowledge, we get less ignorant because we learn more. Citing environmental science, as we learn more about global warming, we find out the detrimental effects of objects which we were unaware of before, thereby, decreasing our ignorance on this <https://assignbuster.com/the-theory-of-knowledge/>

issue. However, we realize that we are oblivious to so many other issues, which we never knew about before, only to discover that our field of horizon has increased.

The more acquainted we get with religion, the more aloof we get to the prevailing norms in society. To gain religious knowledge one has to lose, till a certain extent, contact with the outside world. This is because if one actually has to follow one of these books diligently, he ought to compromise with the present customs of society. Looking at Hinduism, there are so many traditions such as Sati that have been abolished by society. Most religions stress the importance of simplicity and abbreviation from materialistic goods. The great sages and priests of the twenty-first century stay as far away from civilization as possible, to get away from the “existing crimes” and seek solace in the isolated areas. The main reason for this is that these books have been written so many years back that it is impractical for most of the people to follow most, if not all, traditions encrypted in these books. Hence, in gaining this knowledge one gets ignorant and becomes unaware of the scenario in the real world.

Looking at a simple arithmetic problem; since kindergarten we have learned that when one and one is added, the end result is two. However, as we study further on and learn about other base theorems such as the Base two theorem where one plus one is not two, it is ten. Only then do we discover that we have so much more to learn about, like other base theorems and how we were ignorant about other base theorems apart from the base ten theorems used primarily in daily life. On learning more theorems, we realize

that there are so many fields that we have not even looked at. Hence, aren't we ignorant?

Isaac Newton discovered Calculus in the seventeenth century. Only after this discovery did we learn the significance of this discovery in other fields such as science, engineering and even mathematics itself. Calculus enabled us to mathematically describe the dimensions of the physical universe and lead to the discovery of Modern science. Once the great scholars of the renaissance period understood the working of Calculus, it opened up doors to aspects of Mathematics and Science that were never even dreamt about before. The further development in these areas of knowledge facilitated us to expand our knowledge in computer science, business studies and engineering. On discovery of these relatively new fields of knowledge, we now understand the potential that lies in front of us to expand our knowledge even more, but this would only open up new areas that we would be ignorant to.

“ As we acquire more knowledge, things do not become more comprehensible, but more mysterious.” This statement by Albert Schweitzer is apt for nearly all areas of knowledge. As our knowledge increases we do understand so many new concepts and theories.

Space has always been connected with mystery. The development in the field of space science has been tremendous. Forty years back, Man went to the moon for the first time. Since then, we have developed some amazing space shuttles and rockets to boost the advance in the field of astronomy. But as we discover more about our Solar System, we only realize that we are ignorant to so many issues about further planets that we would never think

about if our knowledge had not increased. Citing the example of the first space shuttle to land on Mars, when we barely had enough knowledge about the planet, we always thought that life on Mars would be impossible and discounted life on any other planet, beside Earth, too. However, on more research and expeditions, Man found traces of water on Mars that could indicate the possibility of life in Mars. Thereby, increasing our field of knowledge has shed light on so many issues. We learn about so many new aspects as exemplified in the above examples that we only get more confused because of the enormity of knowledge or potential knowledge that could be acquired available to us.

Looking at the flipside, we must understand that even before acquiring more knowledge, we were still ignorant to all the possible developments that increased our horizon of ignorance. It is only that we were aware of what we are ignorant about, after gaining more knowledge. The only difference is that we now know that we are ignorant about these new fields we do not have any knowledge about.

Human beings have constantly evolved from premature cavemen to sophisticated and complex men. The reason for this is the thirst for more knowledge as we only get more curious to learn more. Our curiosity has been the main motivating factor for us to question our intellect and discover more. This drive to know everything pushes us to acquire more and more knowledge. The only way we can expand our current knowledge is by knowing more about those fields that we are aware about but are ignorant of. As we try to learn more about these topics, we ultimately reduce the ignorance that increased when we first discovered about these subjects.

Language is one area of knowledge that goes against Henry Miller's opinion, particularly when we improve our vocabulary. As we stumble across new words, all we need to do is look up a dictionary to find the meaning of that word and we have acquired new knowledge without getting more ignorant. After finding out the meaning, we have gained knowledge about that word and our quest is over.

Knowledge is the expertise and skills acquired by a person through experience or education. It is the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject. Experience is a journey from the womb to the tomb. Hence, throughout our life we keep on acquiring knowledge, it is a never-ending process. Analysing both sides, I comply with John F Kennedy that, "The greater our knowledge increases, the greater our ignorance unfolds." I feel that when we span across new areas or develop any existing theory or knowledge, we only find new paths that could lead to more developments. Only then do we realize that we are ignorant to so many subjects that we would have never come across before, if we had not increased our knowledge. We probably would never be ignorant of anything if we had not started our quest for knowledge because if we were unknowledgeable we would not be ignorant to anything, we would probably not know the meaning of ignorance itself.

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