

What Counts as Knowledge?

An Introduction to Epistemology



Course promise: ask sharper questions about belief, evidence, truth, and justification



Epistemology is the philosophical study of knowledge, belief, truth, and reason



Everyday stakes: news, scientific claims, expert testimony, personal experience, disagreement



Roadmap: defining knowledge, Gettier cases, sources, skepticism, justification, truth, social epistemology



Opening reflection: name one thing you know—and what justifies you in believing it



Core Terms: Knowledge, Belief, Opinion, and Information

IDEAS
REASON
A BRIGHTER
TOMORROW

Propositional Knowledge (knowing that)



Knowledge of facts
and propositions.

Practical Knowledge (know-how)



Knowledge through
skill and practice.

Acquaintance Knowledge



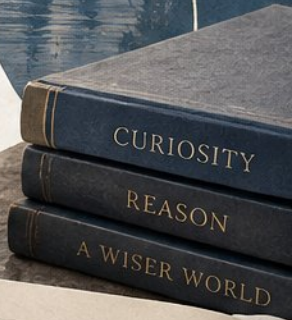
Knowledge by
familiarity or direct
experience.

Mere Opinion



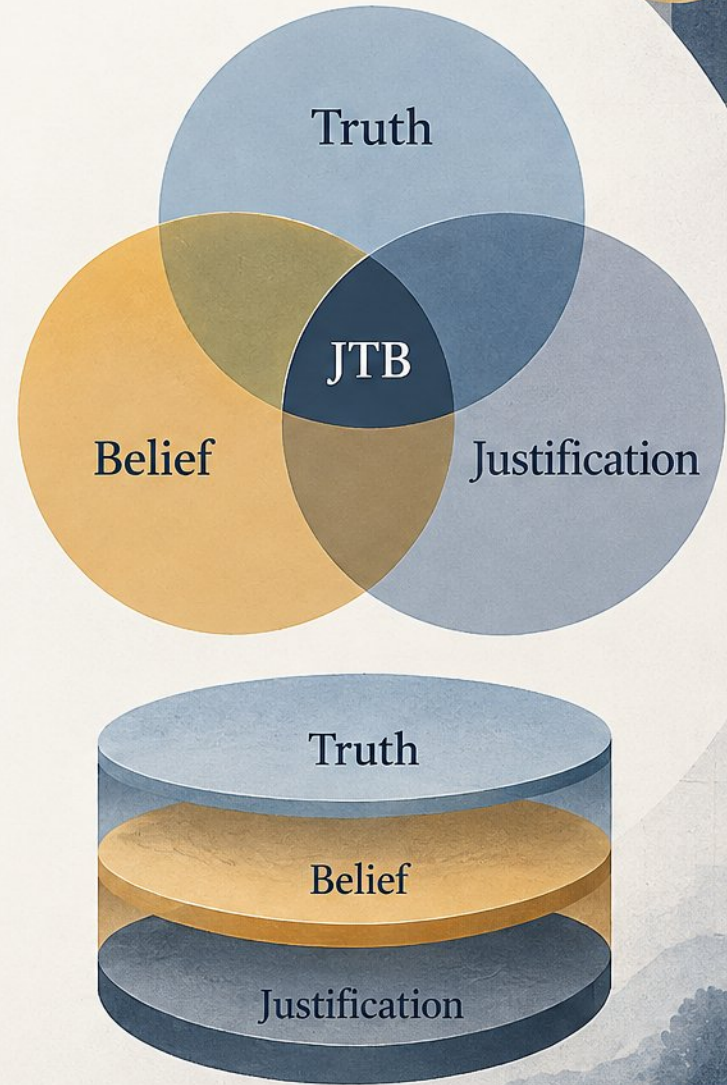
A personal view
not necessarily
based on evidence.

- Three kinds of knowledge: propositional (knowing that), practical (know-how), and acquaintance
- Epistemology separates mere information or opinion from justified, truth-connected belief
- Knowledge is a normative term: saying someone knows implies they should believe and have good evidence
- Evidence, reasons, and justification form the bridge between belief and truth
- Applied habit: when someone says "studies show" or "I know," ask which kind of claim is being made



The Classic Definition: Knowledge as Justified True Belief

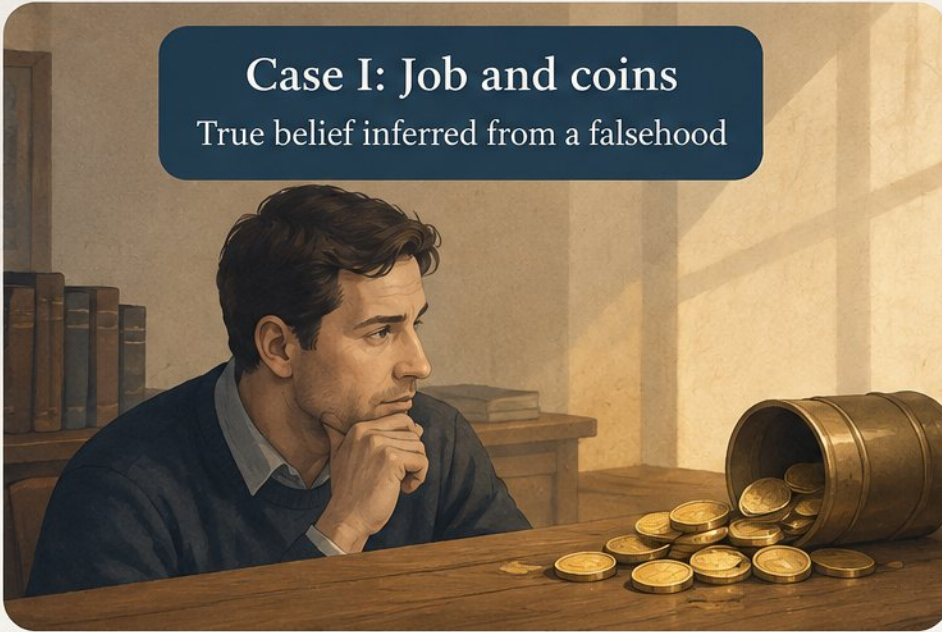
- JTB (tripartite) analysis: S knows that P iff P is true, S believes P, and S is justified in believing P
- Truth condition rules out false beliefs
- Belief condition rules out knowing what you don't believe
- Justification condition rules out lucky guesses (a correct coin-flip is true belief, not knowledge)
- Roots in Plato's *Theaetetus* and *Meno*; Gettier (1963) later challenged this analysis
- Preview: JTB faces famous counterexamples — Gettier cases



Gettier Cases and Epistemic Luck

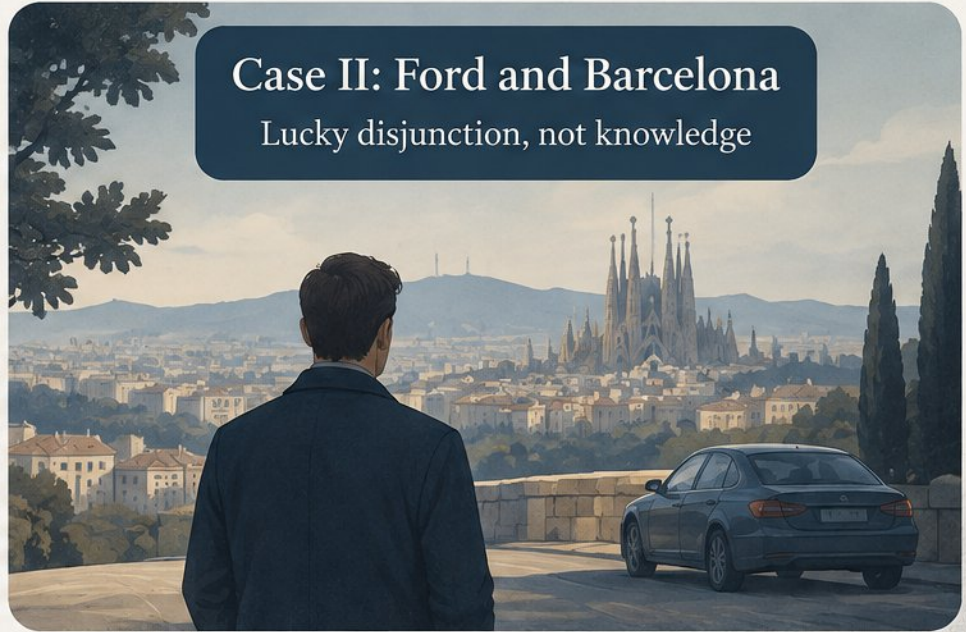
Case I: Job and coins

True belief inferred from a falsehood



Case II: Ford and Barcelona

Lucky disjunction, not knowledge



- Two counterexamples challenge the classic JTB analysis
- Case I: Job and coins — true belief inferred from a falsehood
- Case II: Ford and Barcelona — lucky disjunction, not knowledge
- Two principles: fallibility and justification closure
- Double luck: bad luck creates falsehood, good luck restores truth
- Conclusion: justified true belief is not sufficient for knowledge

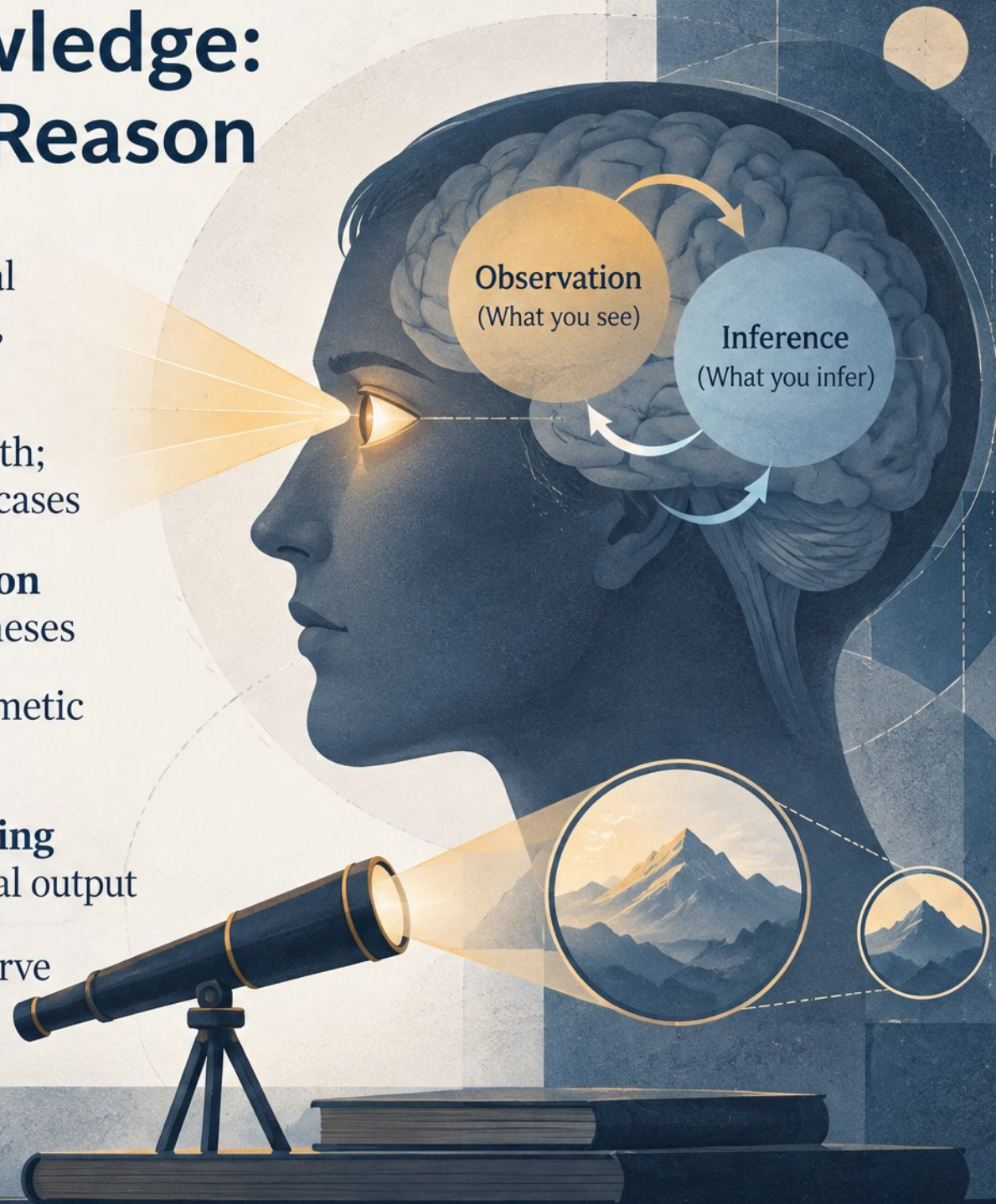
After Gettier: Repairing or Replacing the Analysis

- Fourth-condition responses add a requirement: no false evidence, no inference from falsehood
- Justification-replacement responses swap justification for reliability, causal connection, safety, or sensitivity
- Goldman's causal theory and process reliabilism; Lehrer and Paxson's defeasibility account
- Virtue epistemology: knowledge is true belief produced by epistemic virtue, so the knower deserves credit
- Zagzebski's worry: any JTB + X analysis independent of truth faces new Gettier recipes



Sources of Knowledge: Perception and Reason

- **Perception:** senses give empirical knowledge; active interpretation, not passive reception
- **Reason:** deduction preserves truth; induction goes beyond observed cases
- **Inference to the best explanation** selects among competing hypotheses
- **A priori** insights like basic arithmetic seem justified by reason alone
- **Illusions and motivated reasoning** can distort perceptual and rational output
- **Practice:** separate what you observe from what you infer



Sources of Knowledge: Memory, Introspection, and Testimony

IDEAS
INQUIRE
UNDERSTAND

Memory



- Memory preserves knowledge from past experience but can degrade

Introspection



- Introspection reports inner states; its claimed infallibility is contested

Testimony



- Testimony: learning from what others say, write, or publish

- Reductionism: trust testimony only with independent evidence of reliability
- Anti-reductionism: trust by default absent reasons for doubt
- Testimonial knowledge needs a reliable speaker and competent hearer



PERSPECTIVE

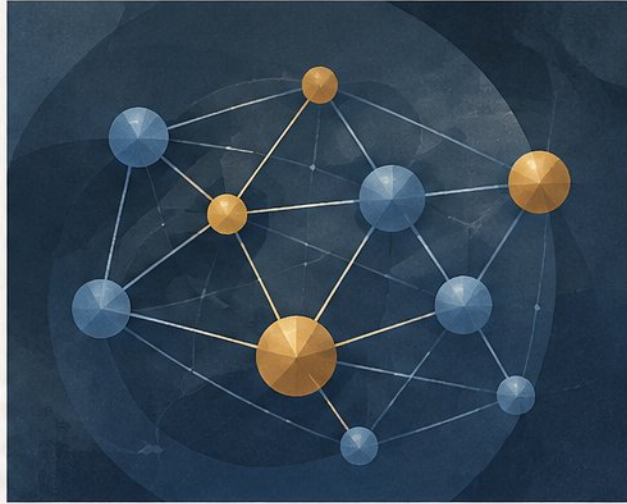


Skepticism: Can We Know Anything at All?

- **Cartesian skepticism:** an evil demon or brain-in-a-vat could make experience illusory
- **The skeptical argument:** if I don't know I'm not a BIV, I don't know I have hands
- **Pyrrhonian regress:** every reason demands a further reason, threatening infinite regress
- **Local skepticism** doubts a specific domain; global skepticism doubts all knowledge
- **Takeaway:** uncertainty is real, but demanding infallibility everywhere is self-defeating



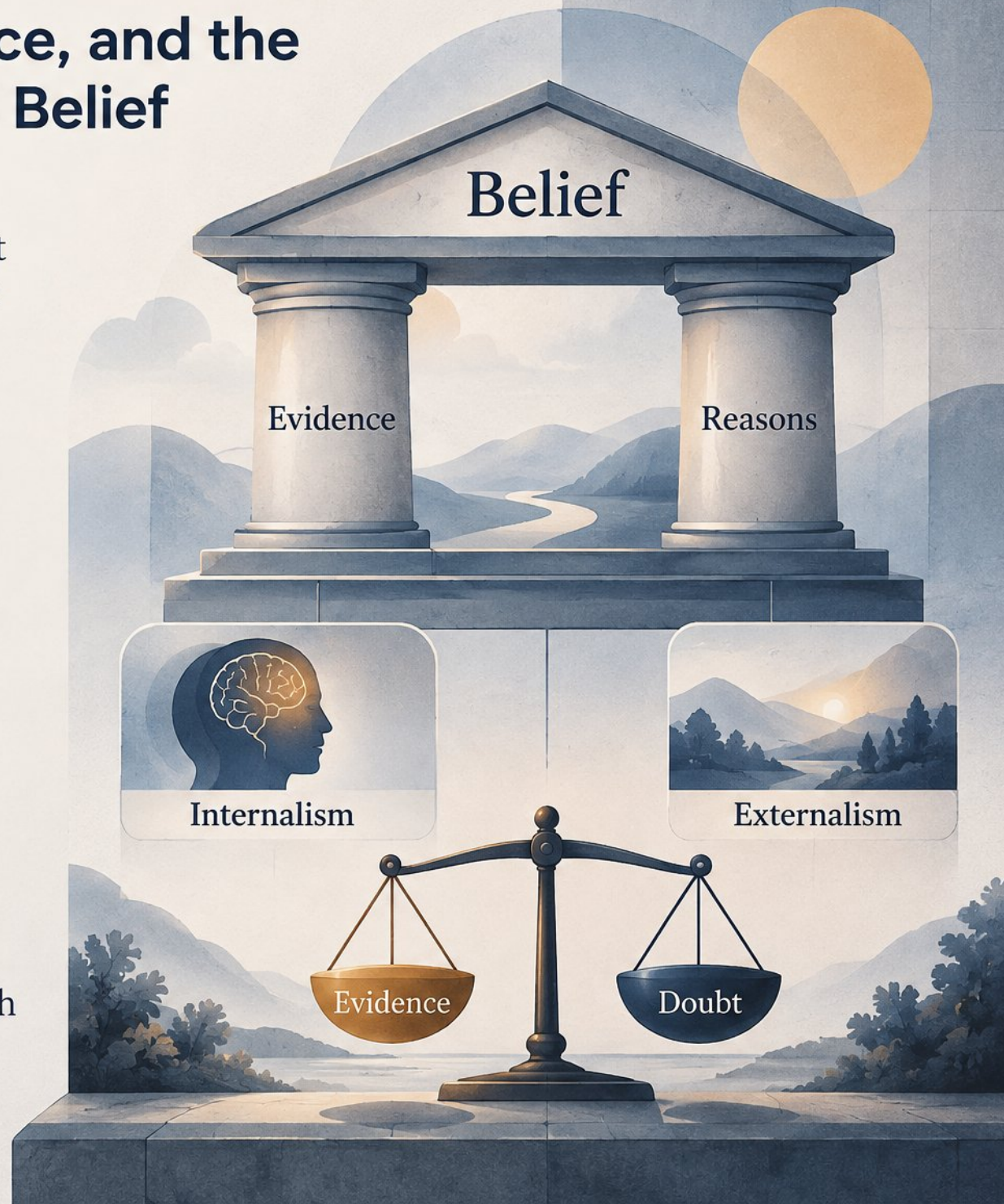
Responses to Skepticism: Foundations, Coherence, and Context



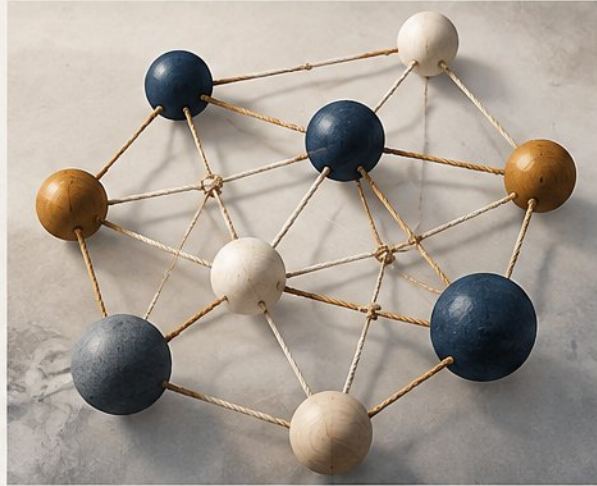
- **Foundationalism:** basic beliefs justified without support from other beliefs
- **Coherentism:** beliefs justified holistically, within a web of mutual support
- **Contextualism:** standards for 'knows' shift with conversational context
- **Relevant alternatives:** rule out relevant alternatives, not every imaginable scenario
- **Hybrid and externalist views** combine strengths of these approaches

Justification, Evidence, and the Structure of Rational Belief

- **Justification:** adequate support for a belief; fallible, so it doesn't guarantee truth
- **Internalism:** justification depends on mental states or what is reflectively accessible
- **Externalism:** justification depends partly on external facts like reliable belief-forming processes
- **Evidentialism:** believe only in proportion to the available evidence
- **Threshold question:** how much evidence is enough, and does it vary with the stakes?



Truth, Objectivity, and Disagreement



- **Correspondence:** true when it matches the facts
 - **Coherence:** true when it fits a belief system
 - **Pragmatist:** truth tied to inquiry and utility
 - **Deflationary:** "is true" an expressive convenience, not a real property
 - **Realism vs. anti-realism:** does truth need a mind-independent reality?
 - **Key habit:** separate truth from consensus, power, or repetition
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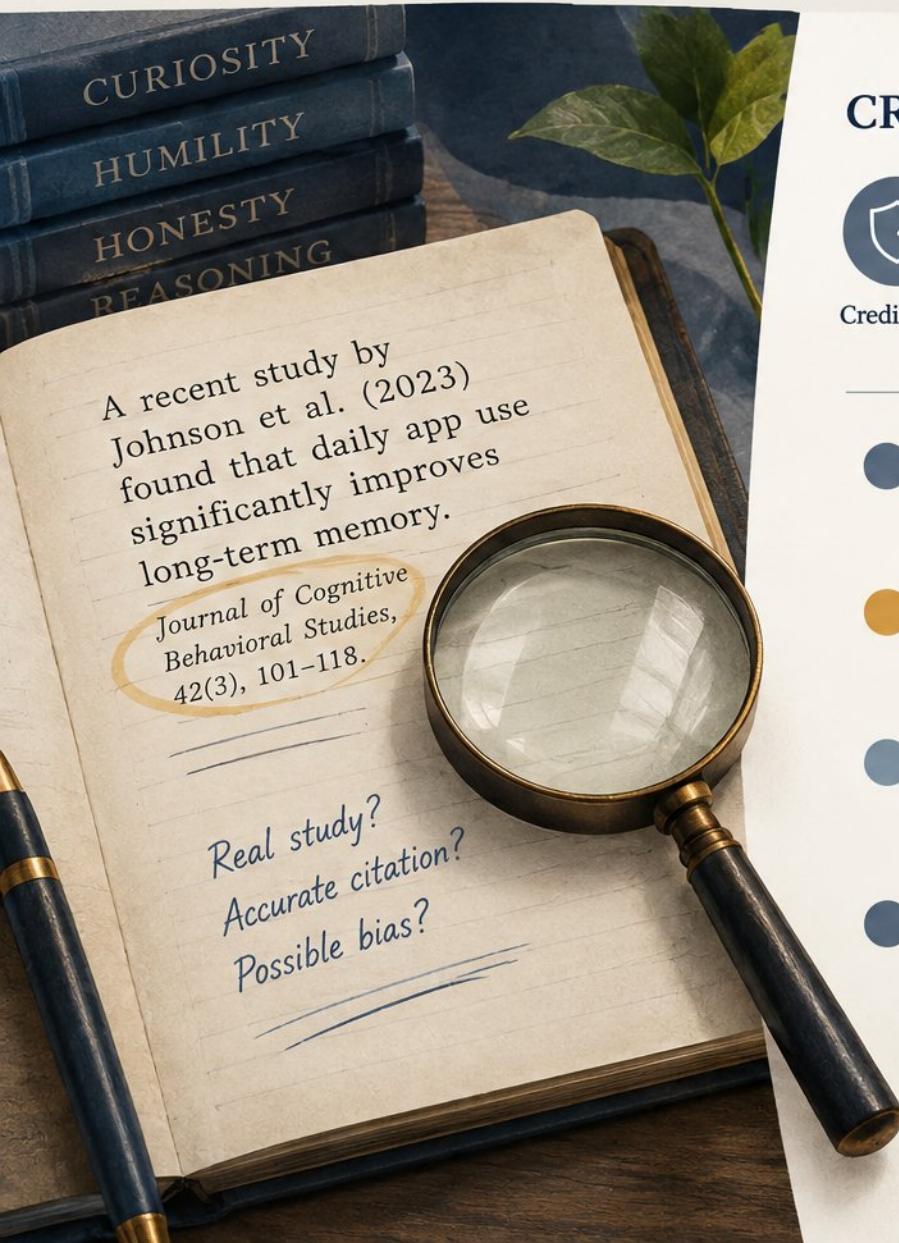
Social Epistemology: Testimony, Experts, and Epistemic Injustice

- Knowledge is often produced and shared collectively, not individually
- Testimony is a basic source of justification; trust by default absent doubt
- Two-expert problem: use heuristics like track record, consensus, conflicts of interest
- Peer disagreement: conciliationists revise; anti-conciliationists may hold steadfast
- Misinformation spreads faster than truth online, degrading shared epistemic environments
- Testimonial injustice: credibility deficits from identity prejudice
- Hermeneutical injustice: lacking concepts to articulate one's own experience



Evaluating Claims in Everyday Life and Digital Environments

THINK CRITICALLY
QUESTION DEEPLY
NAVIGATE WISELY



CREDIBLE checklist:



- AI output can hallucinate, fabricate citations, or embed bias—fluent ≠ accurate
- Meta-source evaluation: judging AI by its sources isn't checking those sources
- Preventive warnings and content labels modestly reduce misplaced credibility
- Intellectual virtues—curiosity, humility, honesty, careful reasoning—are trainable habits

Review, Reflection, and Next Steps in Epistemology



Recap:

knowledge terms, JTB, Gettier cases, sources, skepticism, justification, truth, social epistemology



Retain:

justified true belief, epistemic luck, foundationalism, coherentism, contextualism, reliabilism, testimonial injustice



Revisit:

what do you know, and how do you know it?



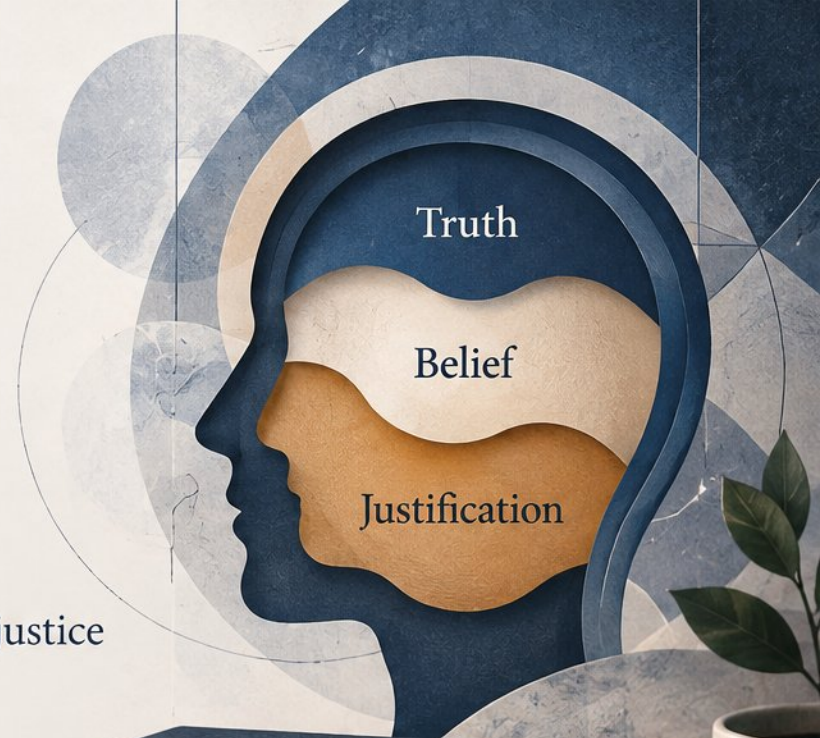
Further reading:

Pritchard; Audi; Carter & Littlejohn; Fricker



Closing:

what counts as knowledge in your own life and work?



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