

# Second Hand Knowledge

A significant portion of the information we claim to know comes to us from "Second Hand Knowledge" - in other words we read/hear material from people who already claim to be in the know. Today I want you to discuss at your table group the following questions about different types of second hand knowledge. Some places where this knowledge can come from are:

- Cultural Traditions
- School
- The Internet
- Expert Opinion
- The News Media

# The Plan

Today in class the plan is as follows --

1. Select a group leader to keep you on track
2. Select a group recorder to write down your group member names and ideas
3. Throughout the class we will have whole class discussion about these ideas - be prepared to speak up
4. At the end of class your groups' ideas will be collected. Do a good job.

# The Nature of Knowledge

1. Have you ever passed an exam by cramming the week before, but felt that you didn't really understand the subject? What does this suggest about the difference between knowledge and information?
2. What is the difference between knowing in the sense of understanding and knowing in the sense of being able to recite the relevant facts and theories without understanding them?
3. How much do you think you could know about the world if you never trusted what anyone else told you, or anything that you read?

# Cultural Tradition

1. Which of the following is natural and which is simply a matter of tradition?
  - 7 Day Week, 365 Day Year, A base of 10 number system, The value of Pi, Reading from left to right, Wearing clothes
2. Which of the following would you be unwilling to eat or drink? Give reasons.
  - Cows, pigs, dogs, snails, Cockroaches, alcohol, sulfuric acid
3. To what extent do you think beliefs about what is disgusting are determined by the culture we grow up in ? What, if anything is considered disgusting in every culture?



# School

1. How does "education" differ from "indoctrination"?
2. Do you agree with the author that it is more a matter of how things are taught rather than what is taught?
3. Do classes at IHS encourage you to "question things and think for yourself?"
4. "What opinions, if any, are teachers in your country expected to keep silent about, and to what extent can this be justified?"
5. What qualities would you look for if you were appointing a new teacher at your school? Would it vary by subject?
6. If you were asked to plan a curriculum for 14-18 year olds living in a colony on the moon, what would you include and why?
7. To what extent do you think schools are culturally biased?

# The Internet

1. How do you determine the reliability/validity of information you find on the internet?
2. Is Wikipedia a good source? Why/why not?
3. What about things like Yelp? Are these reviews valuable/reliable/unbiased?
4. Has the Internet done as much to harm as it has to help humanity progress as a species?
5. How do you think the Internet will be different in 5 years? 10 years? 50 years?

# Expert Opinion

1. How much should we believe expert opinion?
2. Was Richard Feynman right when he said "I believe that a scientist looking at non-scientific problems is just as dumb as the next guy"?
3. Are there areas of knowledge where expert opinion is not as important or of no more value than non-expert opinion? Explain your thinking.
4. How does one become an expert?
5. Is it possible to be an expert in many areas of knowledge? What about all areas of knowledge?
6. Examine the list of "expert opinions". Which ones appear to be reasonable, which unreasonable? Explain.

# The News Media

1. How biased do you think our news media is in America? What are you basing your response on?
2. Do you think the news is overly focused on “bad news”, “extraordinary news” and “relevant news”? Do you agree with the author’s implications of this?
3. How important do you think it is for people to examine news from sources that doesn’t mirror their pre-existing views?
4. How objective do you think our print and television media is? What could be done to improve it?