

On Knowledge

Stacking Karma
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Revision	Notes
0.1	Initial draft. Throw down some ideas.
0.2	Concept flow ironed out. Based on ideas, list out core ideas.
0.3	Defined each range of knowledge
0.4	Fleshed out delta between intellectual and experiential through several common domains.
0.5	Removed section on communism/socialism. Started wrapping up.
0.6	Proof reading and improving flow. Published rough draft.
0.7	Revision post “exploring rationality”; including knowledge/information/action/experience relationships. Feb 2025

“I Know That”

It seems to me that human knowledge comes at different levels of comprehension. Having been an adult for a while now, with several formative adult experiences, I am noticing that the statement “I know that”, is a very interesting statement. It is a telling statement. What is it telling us? I think that most of the time it informs us that people who are interacting do not have the same knowledge level. One such example could be an experienced soldier saying “do you understand that people die in wars?” to a young person who is politically in favor of military conflict. A trump card example is an older person telling a younger person to “treasure time and to really enjoy every moment”. In each of the simplistic examples provided, there is a divide in the level of comprehension. On reflection, the statement “I know that” is frequently uttered by a person who is lacking full understanding on the topic.

I am motivated to keep this written work short, and the objective is to unload a few thoughts. Specifically that “knowing” something can be organized into a few categories.

I believe the categories are:

1. **Unaware** – totally unaware of domain. This is “you don’t know what you don’t know”.
2. **Category Aware** – Aware of domain on the most superficial level. This is “I know that I don’t know”.
3. **Intellectually Aware** – Aware of the domain and it’s details but lacking any real experience. This is “I know, I know”.
4. **Aware through experience** – Have a deep understanding through a wide range of experiences in the domain. This is “I understand”.

Let’s have a closer look and flesh out each of the four states of knowledge.

Defining the Levels of Knowledge

(1) Unaware

This state of knowledge is when you have no idea about some domain. For example, imagine several seven year old kids are playing in a yard, and one of them says “did you know there is a war in some far away place?”. Any kid that says “what is war?” is unaware of the concept/category.

This category is pretty intuitive. One interesting aspect of this category is the axiomatic statement: you don’t know what you don’t know. People who are unaware of some domain, are also unaware that they don’t know that the domain exists.

This level of comprehension is unusual in that it is not really a range, and is more of a binary reality; where the others levels of knowledge are a range.

(2) Category Aware

This state of knowledge is when you are simply aware of the category, but don’t know much about it. For example, imagine the kid from the school yard who learned the word ‘war’ asking their parent to explain its meaning. The parent may say “it’s when people are willing to damage themselves to damage those they have hate for. It is an environment of destruction in which two large groups take part”. Now this kid will understand the category, but they won’t be able to flesh out anything specific about war. There is merely a feel for the category.

In this level of comprehension the individual is aware of they know very little. Yet, this level of knowledge is a range that eventually shades into the next level of comprehension.

(3) Intellectually Aware

This level of knowledge is when a person has a significant amount of facts about the domain of knowledge, to the point where they can guess many macro outcomes correctly. Imagination plays a significant role in filling the blanks. To be “intellectually aware” is to be able to have imagination tie facts together to the point where the generated story is somewhat close to the reality on the ground.

For example, imagine our seven year old from the schoolyard becoming interested in war. By the time they are 15, they have seen some movies, read some books, and know a sea of facts about various wars, which can be abstracted into facts about war in general. This is a prime example of a level of knowledge of “Intellectually Aware”.

This level of knowledge has a low chance of good outcomes when action is required because it is a stage of false confidence. The issue at hand is that an individual at this level houses many data points about the domain (war in this case) that are simply false; but all the held data points are assumed correct. This understanding is the best that this individual can muster. Their model of reality seems to jive with any war stories that are rolling in if there are ongoing wars that are being reported on. They are “knowledgeable”.

The “useful idiot” typically resides in this space. There is no contrarian view here. This view is constantly undergoing small changes to better jive with any new incoming facts.

Another interesting note to make is that at this level of knowledge, there is a lack of understanding of the foundational concepts regarding the topic. For example, young person who is old enough to vote, may like a socialist party due to the promise to be kind and to take care of others. Yet once questions such as “what is wealth?”, and “how is wealth generated?” which are foundational to the quality of life in a socialist “paradise” are posed, the answers indicate a lack of understanding of socialism. A lack of deep understanding of foundational topics is a hallmark of this category.

(4) Experientially Aware

Having experienced some domain of knowledge first hand, there is now a deeper understanding of that domain. The point here is that the individual has immersed their senses in the domain of knowledge, and has been forced to endure the realities of the domain. The space where imagination fills in the gaps where experience is lacking, is minimal. The narrative for the facts that belong to the domain is set.

The likelihood of a single data point reversing the outlook is very, very, low. I mean, you can’t “Kaizer Soze” a person’s global view in this domain. For example, our 15 year old with an interest in war, has grown up, enlisted and has been deployed to live combat. Having seen, felt, smelled, heard, and tasted death and ruin as it unfolded and it’s residual long term effects, the soldier is likely to decide that war is horrible. No novel fact can convince them otherwise. The soldier may still deem war necessary, but even so, at no point will war be believed to be wonderful after an immersive experience.

I believe that at this level of knowledge is where most of the contrarians come to existence. To be a contrarian you need confidence to go against the herd; which takes some ‘minerals’ since we are a social specie. To have confidence to go in the opposite direction is likely a direct result of experience that has illuminated a situation which is still confusing to many; or, the contrarian

understands the situation correctly, while others subscribe to an incorrect model. The difference between a contrarian and a kook is that in the long term the contrarian is proven to be correct.

As previously mentioned, each knowledge level is a range. In this domain of knowledge you likely have the biggest range. Many curious humans will go off the deep end investigating the realities of their experiences. These investigations can yield very interesting knowledge that builds up our human understanding of ourselves. One tragic feature of humanity, is that knowledge has to be discovered by each individual for themselves. The issue is that those that don't experience the event are relegated to the intellectual level of comprehension no matter how good the description created by the experiential level of comprehension may be. That which is discovered within that is documented creates a map that only those who reach that level can understand.

Delta between Intellectual and Experiential Levels of Knowledge

Anytime a potential difference exists, it is very interesting to explore that delta. Carl Jung in relation to the potential within the self, is unpacked by ChatGPT below in an excellent manner:



Yes, the phrase **"in filth it will be found"** is indeed associated with **Carl Jung**. It appears in his writings as part of his exploration of the **shadow** concept in psychology. The "shadow" refers to the unconscious part of the personality that contains repressed weaknesses, desires, and instincts—often the aspects of ourselves that we choose to ignore or suppress.

The phrase suggests that uncomfortable truths or repressed parts of ourselves, the "shadow," may surface in situations that are messy, chaotic, or morally compromised—symbolized by "filth." It speaks to the idea that facing the darker, hidden parts of the self is necessary for growth, self-awareness, and psychological integration. Jung believed that confronting the shadow, rather than denying or avoiding it, was essential for personal transformation and wholeness.

In essence, "in filth it will be found" suggests that, even in the messiest or most uncomfortable situations, the truth of our unconscious will eventually emerge, forcing us to deal with what we've repressed or overlooked.

Where Carl Jung is was a genius investigating the human mind and the potential within it, I am merely a fool who acknowledges that any potential is interesting; the more potential the more interesting. Given this approach, in this section we consider the gap (aka potential) between 'intellectually aware' and 'experientially aware' across multiple domains of knowledge.

Harvest Bearing Plants

By the time I was a full blown adult, I knew a lot about plants; all of which was in the intellectual domain of knowledge. I knew that plants need a growth medium (soil or foam for hydroponics), sun, and water. Nutrition is of course something that is required as I have seen and smelled manure spread on plants. I knew that there are different soil types and so on. My knowledge was significant. However, when I started to grow plants (tomatoes, basil, peppers, sunflower, etc...) I ran into all kinds of issues such as pots versus in ground, over-watering, excessive sunlight, excessive wind that broke plants, and a squirrel (I think) that castrated my sunflower! One day I woke up to my huge sunflower plant totally missing the flower. Karfuooi Koocoonuts!

The experience of growing multiple types of plants to full harvest, has changed tremendously my knowledge of plants. Relative to what I knew when watering a house plant and holding intellectual

knowledge about plants, I am miles ahead. It is important to note that the volume of knowledge did not increase by a lot. The changes were limited to elimination of incorrect facts, and learning a handful of small tricks, which ultimately resulted in a more accurate correlation between action and outcomes. There is obviously much left to learn, but the experiential state of knowledge which is built on intellectual knowledge is a far more evolved and fruitful state.

War

It is interesting that a generation that has been to war is very reluctant to go to war. Yet generations that have not experienced widespread participation in war are way more eager to go to war. I am not going to go off looking for examples to prove this, simply because I know this to be true. The intellectual understanding of war is inaccurate. Too many falsehoods are incorporated into the model of what war is. Once the horrors of war are experienced, and people know what it is, there are no longer errors in the model of what war is, and no one wants war in that generation. Having lived through a time of a very brief conflict, no amount of Hollywood movies that make war look cool can erase the smells, sounds, and feelings that are deeply ingrained in me. The mildest experiences of conflict are the only thing that prevents me from caving in to Hollywood's version. Only a person who has never experienced war would be willing to engage in it lightheartedly.

Marriage

It would be so wildly humorous to get a large sample of people who truthfully answer the following questions:

- What is the best thing about marriage?
- What is the worst thing about marriage?

A video answer of the questions starting from their wedding night, and every five years until death would be an interesting film. I have a feeling the answer to each question will experience significant change. As such, I think the delta between the answers will be wildly and painfully entertaining. Which in itself is an example between intellectual and experiential levels of knowledge. If someone did this across many people it would be so incredibly funny for a brief amount of time, before it got really sad at the end.

Sex

A virgin's outlook (which by definition is an intellectual level of knowledge) may focus on the romantic environment, feelings, and sensation. When taken to its commonplace experiential destination, usually unexpected worries such as health issues, unplanned pregnancy and social awkwardness and feelings of 'unhappiness' should the relationship fall apart, likely become reality. All of which are typically absent in the intellectual level of knowledge. Experience really does append the model, which is one way to think of knowledge.

Children

Those of us who are blessed by children have all kinds of beliefs about them. For the most part, when expecting a baby, everyone is so unrealistically positive. "oh, good for you", and "it's so amazing", as well as "you'll love it" are common comments by family members; all of which are overly optimistic. When baby comes, the common by products of baby are tension between partners, economic challenges, unfathomable lack of sleep, stress, and I won't even get into the recovery of the mom which is a very long journey (pelvic floor therapist strongly recommended ladies), and a lifelong responsibility are all significant side effects that are not swept away by the cuteness of the baby. I mean, yeah, for sure, have kids. Take good care of them. But the intellectual view of kids is very different than the experiential. Obviously still worth it. Kids are an incredible gift if you can get around to that part of your journey.

Nuff Said

By now you can see the trend of significant potential between intellectual and experiential levels of knowledge. I was going to also cover the topics of friends, house ownership, university, technical trades, employment, and large scale projects. However, it seems that the point is made, and I believe there is no longer a need to beat a dead horse.

Knowledge Transfer is an Oxymoron

A recently completed essay titled “Exploring Rationality” had wondered into knowledge. David Hume and Immanuel Kant had a disagreement on how humans acquired knowledge; and the “Exploring Rationality” essay chimed in on the disagreement. A brief summary about the nature of knowledge is shared here.

knowledge is an internal human condition which is developed when information is coupled with action; or is the result of first hand experience. Typically knowledge applies to a very small domain, and is limited to the physical world. It is impossible to have knowledge about anything that is not part of the physical world. For example, in process engineering you can design a process, and this gives the designer experience, and hence knowledge about how to design a process. After designing the process, the knowledge would be in the domain of how to design a process. Meaning the use of tools (ex: software, physical computer, etc...), experience guiding people, and so on. However, the process itself is not at all knowledge, until it is applied to something in the physical world, and is battle tested against physical reality. Only then, is there any knowledge about the actual process produced. Knowledge is the result of engaging with the physical world.

Knowledge is an internal state where an individual is able to achieve the desired result without experiencing anything in that narrow domain that cannot be overcome on their own. This state lends itself to extrapolation, and ability to make predictions.

Typically knowledge about related domains is chained together to grow knowledge. Knowledge cannot be transferred from one person to another. A person with knowledge cannot transfer knowledge to another person. Once the person who has knowledge begins to share their knowledge, what is passed along is information. Once information has been received, it is up to those with the information to convert it to knowledge within themselves through action and experience.

The “Exploring Rationality” essay considers knowledge in relationship to information, action, and experience in the section where there is commentary on the Hume vs. Kant disagreement. Please have a look there for more information. However, it is strongly recommended to read that essay cover to cover as there are concepts that are introduced and then relied upon for the rest of the essay.

Closing Thoughts

What I believe is that with very small exceptions, for the most part there is a traversable hierarchy when it comes to knowledge. What is interesting is that the range in which any one of us is in for a given domain doesn't indicate how smart we are. Teenagers that go through a phase where they "know everything" says nothing about their smarts. The same is true for all of us, where all of us prior to reaching the experiential level of knowledge are not stupid. We simply house excessive data points that are actually not true, and lack a genuine understanding.

"Do you have any experience in this domain?" is the first question that should be asked when a person is suggesting action. The ability to distinguish between those with intellectual levels vs. experiential levels is going to drastically affect the outcomes.

Let's play a game. Have you ever been broke? I'll bet I can find out through this example: Imagine you see a person with a wad of cash in a grocery store. Are they likely rich or poor? The intellectual understanding of money and its relationship to people is "he's rich". The experiential understanding allows for contrarian views within the set, such as: that his banking cards might be maxed out and they are in a precarious position where cash is the last resort; and that people who are rich do not walk around with large sums of cash.

It is interesting to note that human knowledge is a linear trajectory towards a bootstrapping of understanding of the world. For some reason it takes a really long time to understand what's going on in the world and how many seemingly simple realities work. Maybe it's just me.

It's probably important to understand this human phenomenon.

If you disagree with anything, please reach out to me.