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Relationship between Knowledge and Information

Information and knowledge are two separate concepts even though some of us might mistake them as one thing. Information purely provides data and statistics. Knowledge extends the definition of information and reflects more human characteristics as being individual. Hence, knowledge is evolved from information and as knowledge reflects human characteristics, it also tells what one’s beliefs are. According to “From on Certainty” by Ludwig Wittgenstein, a belief is right or wrong depending on one’s knowledge is true or false.

Information is commonly used as the way that humans communicate. Anything that one tries to convey to another and vice versa is initially information with the purpose of letting each other know what is going on. The simplest form of giving information is through common conversations that we use daily. For example, Tom told John, “I bought a new chair yesterday.” The information that Tom gave John is to describe his activity on the day before and what was involved in the activity: the object was a new chair, the person involved was Tom himself, the action was to buy the chair, and the time was yesterday. Those are the four different elements included in the information that Tom wanted to give John. In other words, information can be sent via a casual manner as if Tom says “Hi,” and John replies “Nice to see you.” This greeting is to let John know about Tom’s presence; replying “Nice to see you” is to let Tom know that John heard what Tom said and John responded to let Tom know what he had received from Tom.

The more wide-spread form of information that we all know is through the media like the news we have seen and heard daily through television, radio, and newspapers. The news about President Obama having been re-elected is a kind of information that is exchanged not only through word of mouth but also via a more powerful means such as the media, due to the fact that the content of this information affects the public instead of just each individual or a small group like the casual situations of Tom and John above. The news that we come to know through the media usually tries to convince the audience to believe in as many factors as possible by giving many proofs: images, videos, statistics, interviews, etc. Information such as that on the news is a set of facts given to persuade people to believe in something. The power of the media is influencing viewers, and the media can take advantage of giving wrong information based on false facts. Therefore, the false information will likely cause people have false beliefs.

If information is as one says about one thing to another or to others as the means which the media is using, isn’t it similar with the technique that schools are using: lecturing? Schools are often defined as a place for teachers to give knowledge to their students instead of giving them information. When providing information, a teacher tells her students facts only, without opening more questions and cueing them to think further. Receiving information purely without applying or practicing it, the students only record the facts and cannot develop intelligence to solve problems. If the teacher taught the students to do multiplication, she would give them a multiplication table and make them memorize the basic calculation from 1 to 9. However, the students would only able to do multiplication with numbers from 1 to 9 only if they recorded the facts without applying them on more complex problems: they would not be able to do multiplication of 12 x 23. So what is “a more complex problem” such as 12 x 23? To be able to find out the right answer for this multiplication would require the ability to apply information through the process of thinking. After knowing a set of data such as the multiplication table, the students have to think to solve a more advanced problem like 12 x 23. The answer of this problem is 276, which is the truth. There are many ways to reach the right answer, but some will be shorter than the others depending on one’s thought is processed. But once one figures out how to deal with this problem, it means that he earned a part of knowledge because he understood how and why he applied the information he had obtained to give the right answer. Hence, information can be considered the root of knowledge.

What is the relationship between information and knowledge? Imagine a tree: its roots are information and its fruit is knowledge. How the tree collects nutrients to grow is how a student gathers the information, like the multiplication table in the previous example. The fruit is then the knowledge that has been acquired through a long course of processing. The fruit is the combination of all the good nutrients and care. The tree absorbs nutrients, processes, and bears fruit. The student absorbs given information, processes, and develops knowledge. Thus, knowledge is formed after information.

Knowledge is forwarded after information so if the given information is wrong, it would make false knowledge and whoever believed in the false knowledge would have false beliefs. Therefore, how does one know if the given information is true to avoid false knowledge including false beliefs? Revisit the first example when Tom told John: “I bought a new chair yesterday.” If the sentence is analyzed with four elements mentioned above, it merely provides information. Moreover, after the moment Tom told John the sentence, it meant at least Tom would have a new chair because John actually knew that Tom bought a chair. To know if Tom owned a new chair, John would need to ask Tom if he had the new chair because according to Ludwig Wittgenstein, “Which guarantees what is known, guarantees it as a fact.” Thus, to reveal the chair as a fact, Tom needed to prove to John that the chair was real by letting John see the new chair or describing the chair in detail to John. If Tom proved that he bought a new chair, and what John knew about Tom’s new chair was right, what John believed about the chair was right analogously. However, the fact was only verified with the object – the chair, the other three elements would also need to be clarified in order to confirm Tom gave John true information. The elements of time and action of purchasing could be figured out easily if Tom kept the receipt and showed John that the moment he bought the new chair was yesterday; the receipt should have recorded the time when the chair was sold. The fact that Tom was the person who bought the chair could be confirmed if he went with someone else, like Sally. If he was with Sally while buying the new chair, Sally could confirm to John that Tom paid for the chair. On the other hand, if Tom was by himself, there are still other ways to find out if Tom was the person. John could double checked with the cashier whom Tom paid the money for the chair. Not until all four elements of this sentence are confirmed would the sentence be true; therefore, it would mean John received the true information from Tom.

Although what Tom told John was true, John could make a decision to believe in the fact or just keep doubting Tom. This is explained in Moore’s view as stated by Wittgenstein, “The concept ‘know’ is analogous to the concepts ‘believe’, ‘surmise’, ‘doubt’.” If so, unless John chose to believe Tom, he would not know for sure that Tom bought a new chair yesterday. As long as John believes, he has the knowledge of the fact that Tom bought a new chair yesterday. There might be some probabilities that John doubted whether Tom had the new chair or not. Maybe John suspected Tom was lying because Tom was usually a liar or because the aside conditions reflected it thusly. When Tom told John about buying the new chair, Tom’s tone of voice might have shown some uncertainty which could have made John doubt him. The same thing can happen with mathematics, and specifically the calculation of 12 x 23. If a student was called up to claim his answer, his tone of voice would prove whether he knew the answer or not. Assume that student’s name was Joe. Even if Joe had the right answer of 276, his voice was still shaky which created a very doubtful atmosphere, especially to the other students who did not know how to calculate this multiplication. They would hardly be convinced by the way that Joe had said the answer because he himself was not even sure if he had the right answer. Joe had gathered the given information from his teacher and applied it to produce the answer of 276; yet, he did not believe in the way he found the answer, no matter how right or wrong it was. Hence, Joe needed to believe in what he knew in order to persuade other people to believe in what he believed. Joe needed to be certain of his answer.

In an opposite case, suppose that instead of giving the right answer, Joe gave a wrong answer of the problem 12 x 23; yet, his tone of voice was very firm and showed a strong belief that he was absolutely not wrong. The condition that Joe made in this circumstance very likely influenced other students to believe that he was right, especially the students who did not know how to calculate this multiplication. The person who could decide what was right is the teacher who had given the students the information of how to calculate. Joe sounded so sure of his belief, even though it was the wrong answer. Now, if Joe only believed in the wrong answer as a mistake, the teacher would be able to explain to him why he was wrong. Yet, if Joe suffered from some kind of mental disturbance, the teacher should have not justified to him as he was making a mistake. According to Wittgenstein, the way to treat a wrong belief as a mistake is different from treating a wrong belief as the result of mental disorder. No matter how patiently the teacher tried to explain to Joe the right answer, Joe would not comprehend it as normally as a person without a mental disorder because his brain worked differently.

On the other hand, what one believes and knows is individualistic, which means that nobody has the same knowledge. So does that mean we all might endure a mental disturbance or that sort of thing? Which knowledge is right? The best answer, said by Wittgenstein, is “Really ‘the proposition is either true or false’ only means that it must be possible to decide for or against it. But it does not say what the ground for such a decision is like.” Knowledge is built by personal experience and private process of thinking which comes after the given information and extends the definition of information. Such as how information is found is through investigating, researching, and studying; knowledge is moreover established by applying the known data to be one’s personal intelligence. What individuals perceive after receiving the same set of information is different from one another. When the teacher gave her students the multiplication table to teach them how to multiply the more advanced problem later, each of her students would solve the information dissimilarly: one could be faster than the others, one could replicate mechanically through steps, or one could solve the problem in a longer but more creative way to find out the right answer. This happened because their brains perceived the same problem in their own ways depending on their natural intelligence. Still assuming all students did their best to calculate means that they decided to find the answer instead of being stuck with the unknown. In case not all students had the right answer before their teacher officially announced it, some might still have firm belief in his solution even though it was wrong, like Joe’s. Yet Joe’s case would be a more special situation if he suffered from a mental disturbance. In such a case, he would need to be treated psychologically so his circumstance does not set him apart from the majority of normal people. If Joe simply had a wrong belief based on a mistake, he still made a decision to give his answer. In addition, to judge any students’ answers as right or wrong, only the teacher would know for certain. The certainty that she knew was created by rules in mathematics. That’s why there was only one right answer – the right knowledge that the problem of 12 x 23 equals 267. On the contrary, the rules apply only to mathematics and not all things: “But it does not say what the ground for such a decision is like.” If there were no rules or logic in mathematics, things would not make sense. One would not able to make sense of information and knowledge. In fact, knowledge is expanded via information and logic. Therefore, unless there are rules such as those in mathematics, one should not judge another’s knowledge or beliefs because there is no ground to make that choice.

Knowledge furthermore extends what information can cover. Knowledge transports individual value and perception. What one knows is what one believes. Even though there is no justified way to find out right or wrong beliefs, one still needs to collect information and use his intelligence to develop his own knowledge and beliefs. Without beliefs, a man has no purpose for living.