

Knowledge, Belief and Objectivity

Preliminaries

Carlotta Pavese

8.28.14

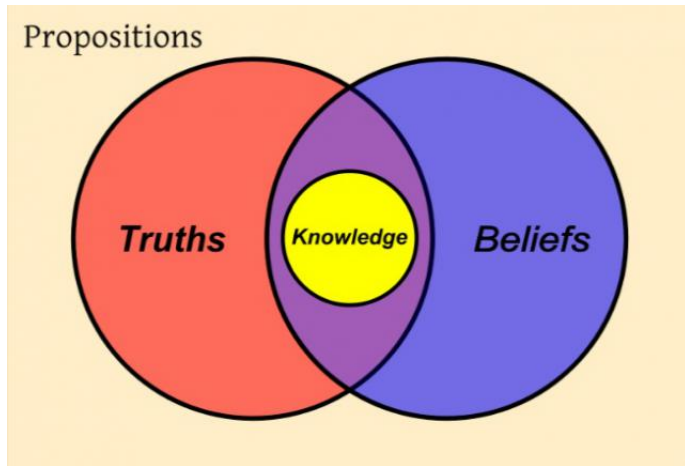
Outline

- 1 Knowledge and Belief
- 2 Knowledge and Objectivity

Outline

- 1 Knowledge and Belief
- 2 Knowledge and Objectivity

Knowledge, belief and truth



Knowledge and belief

Question

Can you know that something is the case without **believing** it?

Knowledge and belief

Another Way to Put the Same Question

Does knowledge require belief?

Yet another way

If one knows that p , does one thereby believe that p ?

Methodology

- ① As epistemologists, when we tackle questions like whether knowledge requires belief, what we want is to look at some CASE STUDIES.

The Schoolboy Example

Schoolboy

A schoolboy is taking a quiz. One question reads “When was the Battle of Hastings?” He remembers studying about Hastings and some battle, but he has no idea when it happened. But “Year 1066” looks good, so he chooses that. And so on for the rest of the quiz. As it turns out, he gets a score of 95% on the test. He thinks to himself: “I happened to know more than I thought.”



The Schoolboy Example

- 1 What do you think about this case?

The Schoolboy Example

- 1 What do you think about this case?
- 2 Does the schoolboy really know the answer?

The Schoolboy Example

- 1 What do you think about this case?
- 2 Does the schoolboy really know the answer?
- 3 Does the schoolboy really have no belief about it?

Three Diagnosis of the Schoolboy Example

- 1 Some philosophers would describe this case like this:
“The boy knew what the right answers were, he just didn’t believe them.”

Three Diagnosis of the Schoolboy Example

- 1 Some philosophers would describe this case like this:
“The boy knew what the right answers were, he just didn’t believe them.”
- 2 If they’re right, then this is a case of **knowledge without belief**.

Three Diagnosis of the Schoolboy Example

1 ...

Three Diagnosis of the Schoolboy Example

- 1 ...
- 2 Other philosophers would say “He knew what the right answers were, all right. But he also believed that they were the right answers. That’s why he chose them.

Three Diagnosis of the Schoolboy Example

- 1 ...
- 2 Other philosophers would say “He knew what the right answers were, all right. But he also believed that they were the right answers. That’s why he chose them.
- 3 If they are right, this is **not** a case of knowledge without belief.

Three Diagnosis of the Schoolboy Example

- 1 ...
- 2 Other philosophers would say “He knew what the right answers were, all right. But he also believed that they were the right answers. That’s why he chose them.
- 3 If they are right, this is **not** a case of knowledge without belief.
- 4 What he didn’t have was *knowledge that he knew those answers and believed them.*

Three Diagnosis of the Schoolboy Example

1 ...

Three Diagnosis of the Schoolboy Example

- 1 ...
- 2 ...

Three Diagnosis of the Schoolboy Example

- 1 ...
- 2 ...
- 3 Still other philosophers would deny that the schoolboy knew the right answers at all.

Three Diagnosis of the Schoolboy Example

- 1 ...
- 2 ...
- 3 Still other philosophers would deny that the schoolboy knew the right answers at all.
- 4 According to them, in order to know that they're the right answers, you need to have more confidence in them than the schoolboy had—or/and you need to be aware of some good reasons for thinking they are the right answers.

Second argument

- 1 Here is a different argument for the claim that one can know without belief.

Second argument

- 1 Here is a different argument for the claim that one can know without belief.
- 2 <http://www.netflix.com>

Second argument

- 1 Here is a different argument for the claim that one can know without belief.
- 2 <http://www.netflix.com>
- 3 Pennsatucky: “I don’t believe that I am chosen. I *know* that I am.”

Second argument

- 1 Here is a different argument for the claim that one can know without belief.
- 2 `http://www.netflix.com`
- 3 Pennsatucky: “I don’t believe that I am chosen. I *know* that I am.”
- 4 If one can speak truly by saying that, one must be able to have knowledge without belief.

Is the argument convincing?

- 1 Hmm. By saying that, is Pennsatucky really saying that she does not believe that she is chosen?

Is the argument convincing?

- 1 Hmm. By saying that, is Pennsatucky really saying that she does not believe that she is chosen?
- 2 Compare: “My book is not going well, it is going great!” .

Is the argument convincing?

- 1 Hmm. By saying that, is Pennsatucky really saying that she does not believe that she is chosen?
- 2 Compare: “My book is not going well, it is going great!”.
- 3 Would that mean that my book is really not going well? Or just that my book is not *only* going well, but very well?

Saying versus Meaning.

- 1 In most cases, if your words carry an implication that goes beyond what they really mean, it's possible for you to cancel that implication, e.g., by **elaborating**.

Saying versus Meaning.

- 1 In most cases, if your words carry an implication that goes beyond what they really mean, it's possible for you to cancel that implication, e.g., by **elaborating**.
- 2 So when we notice that you're running out of gas, I might say to you, "There's a gas station around the corner—but I'm not saying that it's open."

Saying versus Meaning.

- 1 In most cases, if your words carry an implication that goes beyond what they really mean, it's possible for you to cancel that implication, e.g., by **elaborating**.
- 2 So when we notice that you're running out of gas, I might say to you, "There's a gas station around the corner—but I'm not saying that it's open."
- 3 By saying this I'm not being very helpful. But I'm not contradicting myself, either.

Saying versus Meaning.

- 1 This is the contrast between *what a speaker gets across by saying something* and *what she literally said*—what her words really mean.

Saying versus Meaning.

- 1 This is the contrast between *what a speaker gets across by saying something* and *what she literally said*—what her words really mean.
- 2 Something we say things we do not *mean*. Can you think of any examples?

Saying versus Meaning.

- 1 This is the contrast between *what a speaker gets across by saying something* and *what she literally said*—what her words really mean.
- 2 Something we say things we do not *mean*. Can you think of any examples?
- 3 Sometimes we mean things we do not *say*. Can you think of any examples?

Saying versus Meaning.

What does all this have to do with knowledge?

Saying versus Meaning.

- 1 Well, when Pennsatucky is tempted to say, “I don’t believe I am chosen, I know I am,” I think she’s responding to a phenomenon of the sort we’ve been discussing.

Saying versus Meaning.

- 1 Well, when Pennsatucky is tempted to say, “I don’t believe I am chosen, I know I am,” I think she’s responding to a phenomenon of the sort we’ve been discussing.
- 2 If she said “believe I am chosen” she would imply that she wasn’t sure, or that there was some doubt about the matter, people would expect that if she knew that she was chosen (or even thought she knew), she’d say so.

Saying versus Meaning.

- 1 Well, when Pennsatucky is tempted to say, “I don’t believe I am chosen, I know I am,” I think she’s responding to a phenomenon of the sort we’ve been discussing.
- 2 If she said “believe I am chosen” she would imply that she wasn’t sure, or that there was some doubt about the matter, people would expect that if she knew that she was chosen (or even thought she knew), she’d say so.
- 3 But she takes herself to know. She doesn’t have any doubts about that. So she doesn’t want to imply that she’s unsure; that’s why she insists “I know it.”

Knowledge and Belief

- 1 Let's suppose that's right. When Pennsatucky says "I believe I am chosen" she implies that she doesn't know that she is chosen.

Knowledge and Belief

- 1 Let's suppose that's right. When Pennsatucky says "I believe I am chosen" she implies that she doesn't know that she is chosen.
- 2 But is that because what it means to believe something excludes your also knowing it?

Knowledge and Belief

- 1 Let's suppose that's right. When Pennsatucky says "I believe I am chosen" she implies that she doesn't know that she is chosen.
- 2 But is that because what it means to believe something excludes your also knowing it?
- 3 Or is this implication just something that people will naturally assume?

Knowledge and Belief

- 1 Let's suppose that's right. When Pennsatucky says "I believe I am chosen" she implies that she doesn't know that she is chosen.
- 2 But is that because what it means to believe something excludes your also knowing it?
- 3 Or is this implication just something that people will naturally assume?
- 4 It seems more like the second.

Knowledge and Belief

- 1 I think we should say the same thing about Pennsatucky's knowing that she is chosen. When she knows that she is chosen, she also believes that she is chosen.

Knowledge and Belief

- 1 I think we should say the same thing about Pennsatucky's knowing that she is chosen. When she knows that she is chosen, she also believes that she is chosen.
- 2 It's just that, she doesn't just believe it, she also takes herself to know it. That her point.

Knowledge requires Belief

- 1 Neither arguments we just considered convincingly established that one could have knowledge without belief.

Knowledge requires Belief

- 1 Neither arguments we just considered convincingly established that one could have knowledge without belief.
- 2 So it is **widely held** that one's knowledge that p requires that one believes that p .

Knowledge requires Belief

- 1 Neither arguments we just considered convincingly established that one could have knowledge without belief.
- 2 So it is **widely held** that one's knowledge that p requires that one believes that p .
- 3 From now on, we will also assume that knowledge requires belief. It looks like a good assumption to make.

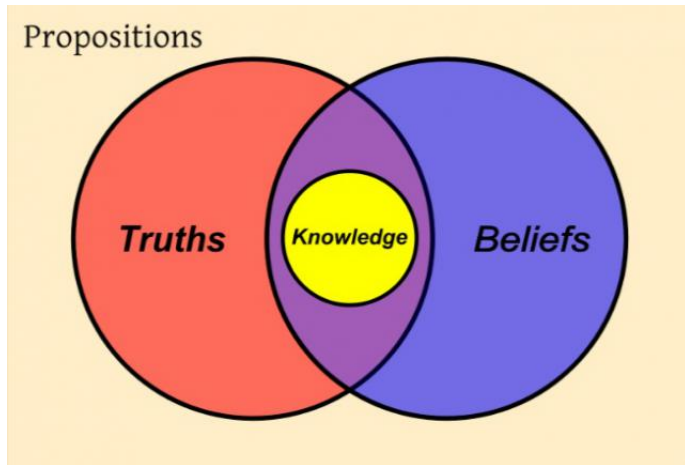
Knowledge requires Belief

- 1 Neither arguments we just considered convincingly established that one could have knowledge without belief.
- 2 So it is **widely held** that one's knowledge that p requires that one believes that p .
- 3 From now on, we will also assume that knowledge requires belief. It looks like a good assumption to make.
- 4 Accordingly, I cannot know that p , without believing that p .

Knowledge requires Belief

- 1 Neither arguments we just considered convincingly established that one could have knowledge without belief.
- 2 So it is **widely held** that one's knowledge that p requires that one believes that p .
- 3 From now on, we will also assume that knowledge requires belief. It looks like a good assumption to make.
- 4 Accordingly, I cannot know that p , without believing that p .
- 5 Another way of saying this is to say that belief is a **necessary condition** for knowledge.

Knowledge, belief and truth



Knowledge, belief and truth

- 1 So knowledge does not merely require **beliefs**, or merely **truth** of the proposition known.

Knowledge, belief and truth

- 1 So knowledge does not merely require **beliefs**, or merely **truth** of the proposition known.
- 2 Knowledge requires **true belief**.

Knowledge, belief and truth

- 1 So knowledge does not merely require **beliefs**, or merely **truth** of the proposition known.
- 2 Knowledge requires **true belief**.
- 3 One cannot know that it is sunny outside, without believing that it is sunny outside and without that belief being true.

Outline

- 1 Knowledge and Belief
- 2 Knowledge and Objectivity

Knowledge and objectivity

- 1 So knowledge does not merely require belief, or merely truth of the proposition known.

Knowledge and objectivity

- 1 So knowledge does not merely require belief, or merely truth of the proposition known.
- 2 Knowledge requires **true belief**.

Knowledge and objectivity

- 1 So knowledge does not merely require belief, or merely truth of the proposition known.
- 2 Knowledge requires **true belief**.
- 3 Does it mean that knowledge requires **objective truth**?

Knowledge and objectivity

Distinguish between two questions:

- 1 *Are there any objective facts?*

Knowledge and objectivity

Distinguish between two questions:

- 1 *Are there any objective facts?*
- 2 *Are all facts objective?*

Are there any objective facts?



Are there any objective facts?

The answer to the first question is most definitely yes.

- 1 For instance, Mt. Everest is 8850 m tall. That's how far it rises above sea level.

Are there any objective facts?

The answer to the first question is most definitely yes.

- 1 For instance, Mt. Everest is 8850 m tall. That's how far it rises above sea level.
- 2 And Mt. Everest doesn't care very much about whether we exist or what we know.

Are there any objective facts?

The answer to the first question is most definitely yes.

- 1 For instance, Mt. Everest is 8850 m tall. That's how far it rises above sea level.
- 2 And Mt. Everest doesn't care very much about whether we exist or what we know.
- 3 Mt. Everest would still be 8850 m tall no matter what any of us knew or believed or had evidence for believing.

Are there any objective facts?

You might wonder:

- 1 What if we changed our minds about where to draw the boundaries of Mt. Everest? Wouldn't that make it have a different height?

Are there any objective facts?

You might wonder:

- 1 What if we changed our minds about where to draw the boundaries of Mt. Everest? Wouldn't that make it have a different height?
- 2 It would not. What we'd have done in that case would be to change what object it is we're talking about when we use the word "Mt. Everest."

Are there any objective facts?

You might wonder:

- 1 What if we changed our minds about where to draw the boundaries of Mt. Everest? Wouldn't that make it have a different height?
- 2 It would not. What we'd have done in that case would be to change what object it is we're talking about when we use the word "Mt. Everest."
- 3 The old object—the object we used to call "Mt. Everest"—would still have the same height.

Are there any objective facts?

You might wonder:

- 1 What if we changed our minds about where to draw the boundaries of Mt. Everest? Wouldn't that make it have a different height?
- 2 It would not. What we'd have done in that case would be to change what object it is we're talking about when we use the word "Mt. Everest."
- 3 The old object—the object we used to call "Mt. Everest"—would still have the same height.
- 4 And that's all that's being claimed by the philosophers who say that the facts about Mt. Everest's height are **objective**.

Knowledge and objectivity

You might be uncomfortable with the talk of objective facts or objective truths.

- 1 You may think: “what is true **for you** may not be **true for somebody else.**”

Knowledge and objectivity

You might be uncomfortable with the talk of objective facts or objective truths.

- 1 You may think: “what is true **for you** may not be **true for somebody else.**”
- 2 But what are you really saying?

Knowledge and objectivity

You might be uncomfortable with the talk of objective facts or objective truths.

- 1 You may think: “what is true **for you** may not be **true for somebody else.**”
- 2 But what are you really saying?
- 3 Suppose we say that it is **true for Mario** that Mt Everest is 5000 meters high.

Knowledge and objectivity

What are we really saying?

- 1 That Mario believes it to be true that Mt Everest is 5000 meters high.

Knowledge and objectivity

What are we really saying?

- 1 That Mario believes it to be true that Mt Everest is 5000 meters high.
- 2 But that is compatible with Mario being wrong about it!

Is every fact objective?

In some areas, like aesthetics, it might be less clear whether or not there are objective facts.

Is every fact objective?

It is true for my husband that steaks are the most delicious meal. But it is not true for me.



Are there any objective facts?



It is true for me that Francis Bacon is a great artist. But it is not true for my mom, who finds him terrifying.

Are there any objective facts?

- 1 Usually, in areas that have to do with taste, it is possible to disagree on some matter, without both sides being neither right nor wrong.

Are there any objective facts?

- 1 Usually, in areas that have to do with taste, it is possible to disagree on some matter, without both sides being neither right nor wrong.
- 2 But if I and my friend disagree about whether or not Mt Everest is 5000 meters high, either me or her has to be wrong!

Are there any objective facts?

- 1 Usually, in areas that have to do with taste, it is possible to disagree on some matter, without both sides being neither right nor wrong.
- 2 But if I and my friend disagree about whether or not Mt Everest is 5000 meters high, either me or her has to be wrong!
- 3 So we can use **the disagreement test** to see what facts are objective and which facts are less so.

The disagreement test

- 1 If one can disagree with another about whether X is true, without either being necessarily wrong about it, then the truth of X is **relative**.

The disagreement test

- 1 If one can disagree with another about whether X is true, without either being necessarily wrong about it, then the truth of X is **relative**.
- 2 If instead, one of the two parties has to be wrong, then the truth of X is not relative, but **objective**.

Two distinct questions

- 1 So the question *whether there are any objective facts* is definitely different from the question *whether every fact is objective*.

Two distinct questions

- 1 So the question *whether there are any objective facts* is definitely different from the question *whether every fact is objective*.
- 2 Probably not every fact is objective. But at least some facts are likely to be objective!

Knowledge and objectivity

Let us focus for a moment on more subjective areas, like matters of **taste**.

- 1 Suppose I think steaks are delicious (that steaks are delicious is true for me). And I say:

Knowledge and objectivity

Let us focus for a moment on more subjective areas, like matters of **taste**.

- 1 Suppose I think steaks are delicious (that steaks are delicious is true for me). And I say:
- 2 “Even Marco knows that steaks are delicious.”

Knowledge and objectivity

Let us focus for a moment on more subjective areas, like matters of **taste**.

- 1 Suppose I think steaks are delicious (that steaks are delicious is true for me). And I say:
- 2 “Even Marco knows that steaks are delicious.”
- 3 What am I really saying?

Knowledge and objectivity

- 1 I am not saying *that Mark knows that steak is delicious for me*. After all, Marco may not know anything about my preferences!

Knowledge and objectivity

- 1 I am not saying *that Mark knows that steak is delicious for me*. After all, Marco may not know anything about my preferences!
- 2 I am not even saying *that Mark knows that steak is delicious for himself*. I am not reporting Mark's own preferences!

Knowledge and objectivity

- 1 I am not saying *that Mark knows that steak is delicious for me*. After all, Marco may not know anything about my preferences!
- 2 I am not even saying *that Mark knows that steak is delicious for himself*. I am not reporting Mark's own preferences!
- 3 In other words, when we ascribe knowledge we tend to perceive the object known as somewhat objective, even in areas where objectivity is the most controversial.

Knowledge and objectivity

Let us return to **truth for one**...

- 1 Now, sometimes we speak incompletely.

Knowledge and objectivity

Let us return to **truth for one**...

- 1 Now, sometimes we speak incompletely.
- 2 For example, we'll say that a kitchen gadget is useful, when we really mean that it's useful for certain purposes.

Knowledge and objectivity

- 1 In cases like this, if one way of completing the claim is natural when we're talking about you, and another way when we're talking about me, then we might be tempted to talk of the claim's being "true for you" but "false for me."

Knowledge and objectivity

- 1 In cases like this, if one way of completing the claim is natural when we're talking about you, and another way when we're talking about me, then we might be tempted to talk of the claim's being "true for you" but "false for me."
- 2 For instance, suppose you're cutting eggs for a salad and I'm cutting the tomatoes. We're each using the same kitchen gadget, you with good results and me with frustrating results. If you say "This kitchen gadget is useful," I might respond "That may be true for you, but it's not true for me."

Knowledge and objectivity

- 1 So the fact that we use those locutions does not show that the relevant facts are not objective.

Knowledge and objectivity

- 1 So the fact that we use those locutions does not show that the relevant facts are not objective.
- 2 For example, we'll say that a kitchen gadget is useful, when we really mean that it's useful for certain purposes.

Verificationism

- 1 Let us look at a view that denies the **objectivity of facts**.

Verificationism

- 1 Let us look at a view that denies the **objectivity of facts**.
- 2 If you're a **verificationist** about certain kinds of fact, then you reject the idea that those facts are objective.

Verificationism

- 1 For example, a verificationist about height would say that how tall you are depends on what evidence there is about how tall you are.

Verificationism

- 1 For example, a verificationist about height would say that how tall you are depends on what evidence there is about how tall you are.
- 2 The verificationist believes that it's impossible for all the evidence to point one way but the facts about your height to be otherwise.

Verificationism

- 1 According to Verificationism in a domain, the facts have to be constrained by the evidence.

Verificationism

- 1 According to Verificationism in a domain, the facts have to be constrained by the evidence.
- 2 According to the Verificationist, it doesn't make sense to talk about a situation where everybody is permanently and irremediably mistaken about your height, where the "real facts" are so well-concealed that no one will be able to ferret them out.

Verificationism

- 1 According to Verificationism in a domain, the facts have to be constrained by the evidence.
- 2 According to the Verificationist, it doesn't make sense to talk about a situation where everybody is permanently and irremediably mistaken about your height, where the "real facts" are so well-concealed that no one will be able to ferret them out.
- 3 If the "real facts" are so well-concealed, says the Verificationist, then they cease being facts at all.

Verificationism's consequences

- 1 According to Verificationism, what is true for us depends on the evidence available...on what we are **capable of coming to know**.

Verificationism's consequences

- 1 According to Verificationism, what is true for us depends on the evidence available...on what we are **capable of coming to know**.
- 2 Verificationism has weird consequences.

Verificationism's consequences

- 1 Most of us think that Mt. Everest had its height well before there were any human beings and that it would still have this height even if no human beings or other thinking subjects had ever existed.

Verificationism's consequences

- 1 Most of us think that Mt. Everest had its height well before there were any human beings and that it would still have this height even if no human beings or other thinking subjects had ever existed.
- 2 But it's not clear that a Verificationist is entitled to say things like that.

Verificationism

- 1 If there had never been any thinking subjects, then there wouldn't have been anybody who could have had evidence that Mt. Everest existed.

Verificationism

- 1 If there had never been any thinking subjects, then there wouldn't have been anybody who could have had evidence that Mt. Everest existed.
- 2 So according to the Verificationist, then, there wouldn't have been anybody for whom it was true that Mt. Everest is 8,850 m tall.

Verificationism

- 1 If there had never been any thinking subjects, then there wouldn't have been anybody who could have had evidence that Mt. Everest existed.
- 2 So according to the Verificationist, then, there wouldn't have been anybody for whom it was true that Mt. Everest is 8,850 m tall.
- 3 It looks like the Verificationist has to deny that Mt. Everest would still have been 8,850 m tall, even in situations where no thinking subjects had ever existed.

Verificationism's response

- 1 This is what makes Verificationism such a strange view.

Verificationism's response

- 1 This is what makes Verificationism such a strange view.
- 2 Perhaps the Verificationist could respond as follows:

Verificationism's response

- 1 This is what makes Verificationism such a strange view.
- 2 Perhaps the Verificationist could respond as follows:
- 3 Granted, in the situation we're envisaging, nobody actually has evidence that Mt. Everest is 8850 m tall. But the evidence is still **available**. (Mt. Everest will cast shadows of certain lengths at certain times of the day, and so on.)

Verificationism's response

- 1 This is what makes Verificationism such a strange view.
- 2 Perhaps the Verificationist could respond as follows:
- 3 Granted, in the situation we're envisaging, nobody actually has evidence that Mt. Everest is 8850 m tall. But the evidence is still **available**. (Mt. Everest will cast shadows of certain lengths at certain times of the day, and so on.)
- 4 And if people had existed, they could have gathered and used that evidence. Maybe that's enough to make it true that Mt. Everest is still 8,850 m tall in the situation we're envisaging.

Verificationism

- 1 But in some cases, it is not obvious the evidence would be even available.

Verificationism

- 1 But in some cases, it is not obvious the evidence would be even available.
- 2 There may be no way for any finite being to ascertain what is the number of stars in the universe.

Verificationism

- 1 But in some cases, it is not obvious the evidence would be even available.
- 2 There may be no way for any finite being to ascertain what is the number of stars in the universe.
- 3 And yet, surely, whatever number it is, it is either even or odd!

Conclusion

- 1 According to Verificationism, whether something is a fact depends on whether it is possible to discover that it is:
Unknowable facts are impossible.

Conclusion

- 1 According to Verificationism, whether something is a fact depends on whether it is possible to discover that it is:
Unknowable facts are impossible.
- 2 Verificationism is an interesting but problematic view.

Conclusion

- 1 According to Verificationism, whether something is a fact depends on whether it is possible to discover that it is:
Unknowable facts are impossible.
- 2 Verificationism is an interesting but problematic view.
- 3 In the following of this class, I will set it aside and assume that there are **objective** facts, facts that hold independently of us and of any evidence we might have.