What da ya know?

(And how do you know?)
Epistemology:
A short history and overview

• I know
Epistemology:
A short history and overview

• I know
  – that I have a hand.
Epistemology: A short history and overview

• I know
  – that I have a hand.
  – that Paris is the capital of France.
Epistemology:
A short history and overview

• I know
  – that I have a hand.
  – that Paris is the capital of France.
  – that gold’s atomic number is 79.
Epistemology: A short history and overview

• I know
  – that I have a hand.
  – that Paris is the capital of France.
  – that gold’s atomic number is 79.
  – that a rook can move horizontally or vertically on the chess board.
Epistemology: 
A short history and overview

• I know
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  – that gold’s atomic number is 79.
  – that a rook can move horizontally or vertically on the chess board.
  – what a rose smells like.
Epistemology:  
A short history and overview

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  – how to ride a bike.
Epistemology: A short history and overview

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  – how to ride a bike.
  – where I live.
Epistemology:
A short history and overview

• I know
  – that I have a hand.
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  – that gold’s atomic number is 79.
  – that a rook can move horizontally or vertically on the chess board.
  – what a rose smells like.
  – how to ride a bike.
  – where I live.
  – that I shouldn’t be needless cruel.
Epistemology: A short history and overview

• I know
  – that I have a hand.
  – that Paris is the capital of France.
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  – that a rook can move horizontally or vertically on the chess board.
  – what a rose smells like.
  – how to ride a bike.
  – where I live.
  – that I shouldn’t be needless cruel.
  – who I am.
Epistemology: A short history and overview

• I know
  – that I have a hand.
  – that Paris is the capital of France.
  – that gold’s atomic number is 79.
  – that a rook can move horizontally or vertically on the chess board.
  – what a rose smells like.
  – how to ride a bike.
  – where I live.
  – that I shouldn’t be needless cruel.
  – who I am. (most days)
Epistemology:
A short history and overview

• Same term but..
  – Different “ways of knowing”
  – Different “objects” or “kinds” of knowledge.

• Western philosophy has concentrated on “propositional” knowledge.

• “Propositional belief” is a “that” belief:
  – I belief that...
Epistemology: A short history and overview

• The “proposition” is what comes after the “that.”
  e.g.
  – that the earth revolves around the sun,
  – that Tuesday comes after Monday
  – that the square root of four is two

• Impression that all knowledge is propositional: expressed in propositions.

• I think this is problem, but we’ll talking more about that throughout the semester.
Epistemology:
Plato and Epistemology

Plato argues that knowledge is best understood as “true, justified belief.”

That is, to say that Jose knows that Mary is guilty of cheating on her quiz is to say:
Plato argues that knowledge is best understood as "true, justified belief."

That is, to say that Jose knows that Mary is guilty of cheating on her quiz is to say:

1. Jose **believes** that Mary is guilty.
Epistemology: Plato and Epistemology

Plato argues that knowledge is best understood as “true, justified belief.”

That is, to say that Jose knows that Mary is guilty of cheating on her quiz is to say:

1. Jose believes that Mary is guilty.
2. It is true that Mary is guilty.
Epistemology: Plato and Epistemology

Plato argues that knowledge is best understood as “true, justified belief.”

That is, to say that Jose knows that Mary is guilty of cheating on her quiz is to say:

1. Jose believes that Mary is guilty.
2. It is true that Mary is guilty.
3. Jose has a good reason (justification) for his belief that Mary is guilty.
Epistemology: Plato and Epistemology

The Traditional Account of Knowledge

$Kn= TJB.$

- Widely accepted as **THE** correct understanding of knowledge

- More recently it has been challenged

- We will be looking both at the traditional account of knowledge in this course and its challenges during this semester.
Epistemology: Plato and Epistemology

The Traditional Account of Knowledge

• Today:

• How the traditional understanding of knowledge along with empiricist models of mind have come to influence contemporary popular conceptions of what can and what cannot count as knowledge.

• In the second half of my lecture today I will be looking at Active Theories of perception and some of its consequences for knowledge, truth and justification.
Epistemology: Plato and Epistemology

Plato’s Allegory of the Cave:

• Key to Plato’s thought is his distinction between appearance and reality:
  
  – Not everything that appears to be true is true.
So ...

How do we avoid deception and error?

How do we acquire knowledge?

Two very old epistemic positions give very different answers.
Epistemology: Rationalism and Empiricism

Plato:

• Via reason and introspection
  • (not via the senses)
• Points to math and geometry

– **Note:** We can know the truth of a mathematical claims, and know them with *certainty*. After all, one does not say that the square root of four is *probably* two.

Plato’s epistemology is an example of **Rationalism**.
Epistemology: Rationalism and Empiricism

Aristotle:

• Via sensory experience.
• Points to all we know about the objective world around us.
  – Note: These known things are only known with a degree of probability.

Aristotle's epistemology is an example of Empiricism.
Epistemology: Rationalism and Empiricism

These two viewpoints battled against one another for the next 2000 years.

Rationalists

- Trust in a priori reason and introspection.
- Distrust the senses or sensory knowledge.
- Some ideas (the most reliable) are innate, born in us.

- Ex:
  - Parmenides (5th c. B.C.E) (Arguably)
  - Plato (429–347 B.C.E.)
  - Plotinus (204/5 – 270 C.E.)
  - Saint Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109 C.E.)
  - Rene Descartes (1596–1650 C.E.)
Epistemology: Rationalism and Empiricism

These two viewpoints battled against one another for the next 2000 years.

Empiricists

• The only way to acquire knowledge is through the senses (“Nihil est in intellectu quod non prius in sensu.”)
• Deny the existence of innate ideas

• Ex:
  – Heraclitus (c. 535 – c. 475 BCE) (Arguably)
  – Aristotle (384–322 BCE)
  – Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274 C.E.)
  – John Duns Scotus (1265/66-1308 C.E.)
  – Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679 C.E.)
  – John Locke (English 1632-1704 C.E)
Epistemology:
Rationalism and Empiricism

**Continental Rationalists:**
- René Descartes
  French - 1596-1650
- Baruch Spinoza
  Portuguese/Dutch 1632-1677
- Gottfried Leibniz
  German - 1646-1716

**British Empiricists:**
- John Locke
  English 1632-1704
- George Berkeley
  Irish 1685-1753
- David Hume
  Scottish 1711-1776
Epistemology: Rationalism and Empiricism

Over time, Empiricism came to dominate philosophy in the United Kingdom, and eventually the United States.

• Greatest influence on contemporary popular thinking about knowledge, truth and justification.

• Examine several features of this view.
Epistemology: John Locke and the Causal Theory of Perception

John Locke (1632 -1704)

• The only way to come to know the world is through sensory experience.
• Claims that we start life with a blank slate, "tabula rasa."
• Points out that there is the
  – world and
  – there are ideas about the world.

• This places critical importance on determining: What is the connection between reality and our perceptions of reality?
Epistemology: John Locke and the Causal Theory of Perception

To this end, Locke offers his:

– **Causal Theory of Perception** - the world interacts with our perceiving organs and causes perceptions (ideas) in our minds.
Epistemology:
John Locke and the Causal Theory of Perception

• Here is a crude rendering of how this was supposed to work.
  – You have an object (say an apple) and it interacts with our perceiving organs (say our eye) and *causes* in us the perception of an apple.
Epistemology:
John Locke and the Causal Theory of Perception

• What is the relationship between our ideas and the world? How does the one give us knowledge about the other?

Simple and Complex Ideas:

• Simple ideas are ideas that cannot be broken down into any component parts. For example, the idea of “white.”

• Complex ideas are ideas that can be broken down into component parts. For example, the idea of a unicorn.
Epistemology:
John Locke and the Causal Theory of Perception

Primary and Secondary Properties:

- Our experience of objects reveals two kinds of properties.

**Primary Properties** are properties of reality.
- These are qualities of the object independent of who or whether anyone is perceiving the object. Thus these are independent of perception.

**Secondary Properties** are properties that are only properties of our peculiar experience of reality.
- They are not properties of the object at all.
- They are properties of an individual’s perception of the object.
- These only occur in the mind of the perceiver at the moment of the perception. Thus these are perception dependent.
Epistemology:
John Locke and the Causal Theory of Perception

Two ways to tell the Difference:

• 1. To change a primary quality of the object you have to change the object itself, but to change a secondary property one need only change the conditions of perception.

• 2. Primary properties can be experienced by more than one sense, but secondary properties can be experienced by one sense alone.

• Consider the (complex) idea of an apple:

• It is a complex idea composed of, among other simple ideas, the ideas red, round, sweet, and solid.
Epistemology:
John Locke and the Causal Theory of Perception

• Red
• Round
• Sweet
• Solid
Epistemology:
John Locke and the Causal Theory of Perception

- **Red is secondary**- I would no longer see red if I changed the lighting or stare at a bright green poster board. Also I have only visual access to color.
Epistemology:  
John Locke and the Causal Theory of Perception

• **Red is secondary** - I would no longer see red if I changed the lighting or stare at a bright green poster board. Also I have only visual access to color.

• **Round is primary** - I would have to cut or smash the apple to change its shape. Also, I have both visual and tactile access to the shape.
Epistemology:
John Locke and the Causal Theory of Perception

• **Red is secondary** - I would no longer see red if change the lighting or stare at a bright green poster board. Also I have only visual access to color.

• **Round is primary** - I would have to cut or smash the apple to change its shape. Also, I have both visual and tactile access to the shape.

• **Sweet** - A) Primary B) Secondary

• **Solid** -
Epistemology: John Locke and the Causal Theory of Perception

- **Red is secondary** - I would no longer see red if change the lighting or stare at a bright green poster board. Also I have only visual access to color.

- **Round is primary** I would have to cut or smash the apple to change it’s shape. Also, I have both visual and tactile access to the shape.

- **Sweet** -
  - A) Primary
  - B) Secondary

- **Solid** -
  - A) Primary
  - B) Secondary
Epistemology:
John Locke and the Causal Theory of Perception

- **Red is secondary** - I would no longer see red if change the lighting or stare at a bright green poster board. Also I have only visual access to color.

- **Round is primary** I would have to cut or smash the apple to change it’s shape. Also, I have both visual and tactile access to the shape.

- **Sweet**
  - A) Primary
  - B) Secondary

- **Solid**
  - A) Primary
  - B) Secondary
Epistemology:
John Locke and the Causal Theory of Perception

• **Red is secondary** - I would no longer see red if change the lighting or stare at a bright green poster board. Also I have only visual access to color.

• **Round is primary** I would have to cut or smash the apple to change its shape. Also, I have both visual and tactile access to the shape.

• **Sweet** - secondary.

• **Solid** - primary.
Epistemology:
John Locke and the Causal Theory of Perception

• Must be careful about distinguishing primary and secondary and making claims about reality.

• Serious inquiry (science) should confine itself to primary properties.

• No point in arguing over whether the soup is too salty or not.
Epistemology:
John Locke and the Causal Theory of Perception

• Secondary properties are not properties of objects, but rather properties of the perception of objects

• They are not fixed nor stable.
  – Had we all evolved like snakes, “sound” wouldn’t happen at all, though *sound waves* would continue to be just as they are.

• *Serious* inquiry (science) should confine itself to the investigation of primary properties.
Epistemology:
John Locke and the Causal Theory of Perception

One consequence of this view:
Knowledge consists exclusively of objective, empirical facts and perhaps math.

If you are not talking about these matters, you are not in the business of saying anything true or false. Everything else is relegated to “matters of opinion.”

This Empiricist Account of Knowledge and Knowing remained and remains incredibly influential in Western concepts of objective knowledge and inquiry.
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

• This Empiricist conception of knowledge and the domains of meaningful discourse reaches full-flower in a view called:

Logical Positivism
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

• Recasts old epistemic questions into “language” questions.

• There are many uses of language
  – e.g. Assertions, Commands, Questions, Interjections, Poetry Recitations, etc.

• But if “knowledge” equals “true, justified propositional belief”, the only sort of sentences that express knowledge claims must be assertions.
Epistemology: Logical Positivism

• Assertions:
  – The sort of sentence that has a **truth value**. Only this sort of sentence is meaningful according to Positivism because only this sort of sentence actually informs us (conveys information).
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

These are to be distinguished from Pseudo-assertions.

- **Pseudo-assertions:**
  - The sort of sentence that may appear meaningful at first but in fact is not. It does not have a truth value and does not provide us with information.

- **Note:** Keep in mind that when we speak of a sentence having a “truth-value” we do not mean that the sentence *is* true, but only that it is either true or false—has one of the two possible truth values.
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

• Don’t waste time arguing about pseudo-assertions.

• How to tell the difference?

• Assertions usually take the form of declarative sentences.

• But not all declarative sentences are assertions.
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

Consider for example:
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

Consider for example:

“In the swirling vortex of love, a candle burns.”
Epistemology: Logical Positivism

Consider for example:

“In the swirling vortex of love, a candle burns.”

• This *is* a declarative sentence.
Epistemology: Logical Positivism

Consider for example:

“In the swirling vortex of love, a candle burns.”

• This *IS* a declarative sentence.
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

Consider for example:

“In the swirling vortex of love, a candle burns.”

• This *IS* a declarative sentence.

• This *IS NOT* an assertion.
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

Clearly it is not true, nor is it false.

But note:

“In the room next-door a candle burns.”

IS an assertion.

• What the difference? Not the grammar.
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

Further, consider these:

• Kwai gives you all the goodness of garlic.

• This product was scientifically formulated to help you manage your hair-loss situation.

• History is the unfolding of consciousness to itself and for itself where the Absolute presents itself as an object and returns to itself as thought.

• With Elastizine you’ll see an average of 28% increase in younger looking skin.
Have you tried everything to lose weight? Sweaty exercise is boring and takes too much time. Crazy diets don’t work and always leave you feeling hungry and deprived. Wish there were another way? Well now there’s **Tone and Trim**. Based on years of research, this revolutionary new breakthrough technology was scientifically formulated by a leading medical doctor to help you lose those unwanted inches without diet or exercise. Just take two small capsules a day, one before breakfast and one before bed, and voilá! You’re on your way to s slimmer sexier you! **Tone and Trim** is all natural; there’s no stimulants and no danger of harmful side effects. **Tone and Trim** works with you body’s own calorie burning mechanisms like a super turbo boost, leaving you leaner and more vitalized. Can’t believe any weight-loss program could be so simple and easy? Believe it! Don’t waist your time on crazy fad diets or strenuous exercise that doesn’t work! Lose that ugly fat and have the body you’ve always dreamed of with **Tone and Trim**. What are your waiting for? Pick up the phone and call today. Don’t let another day go by without your **Tone and Trim** body!
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:
Epistemology:  
Logical Positivism  

Let’s look at this again:  

Have you tried everything to lose weight?
Epistemology: Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

Have you tried everything to lose weight?

a. Declarative
b. Interrogative
c. Imperative
d. Interjection
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

Have you tried everything to lose weight?

Interrogative.

(Thus neither true nor false; provides no information.)
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

Sweaty exercise is boring and takes too much time.
Epistemology: Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

Sweaty exercise is boring and takes too much time.

a. Declarative
b. Interrogative
c. Imperative
c. Interjection
Epistemology: Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

Sweaty exercise is boring and takes too much time.

Declarative sentence.

Probably an assertion, but note that the subject is “exercise” not the product being promoted. This tells you nothing about the product.
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

Crazy diets don’t work and always leave you feeling hungry and deprived.
Epistemology: Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

Crazy diets don’t work and always leave you feeling hungry and deprived.

a. Declarative
b. Interrogative
c. Imperative
d. Interjection
Epistemology: Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

Crazy diets don’t work and always leave you feeling hungry and deprived.

(Same as last one.)
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

Wish there were another way?
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

Wish there were another way?

a. Declarative
b. Interrogative
c. Imperative
d. Interjection
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

Wish there were another way?

Interrogative
Epistemology: Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

Well now there’s **Tone and Trim**.
Epistemology: Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

Well now there’s **Tone and Trim**.

Ok. This seems to be an assertion about Tone and Trim. But what is it saying?
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

Well now there’s **Tone and Trim**.

Ok. This seems to be an assertion about Tone and Trim. But what is it saying?

“Tone and Trim exists.”
Epistemology: Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

Based on years of research, this revolutionary new breakthrough technology was scientifically formulated by a leading medical doctor to help you lose those unwanted inches without diet or exercise.
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

Based on years of research, this revolutionary new break-through technology was scientifically formulated by a leading medical doctor to help you lose those unwanted inches without diet or exercise.

a. Declarative
b. Interrogative
c. Imperative
d. Interjection
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

Based on years of research, this revolutionary new break-through technology was scientifically formulated by a leading medical doctor to help you lose those unwanted inches without diet or exercise.

Declarative, probably an assertion about the product, but again, what is it telling you?
Epistemology: Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

Based on years of research, this revolutionary new breakthrough technology was scientifically formulated by a leading medical doctor to help you lose those unwanted inches without diet or exercise.

What does “scientifically formulated” mean? “Leading” in what respect? And while this tells you the intent of the doctor who created the product, even assuming this is a true claim, it does NOT assert that she was successful in her “intent.”
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

Based on years of research, this revolutionary new breakthrough technology was scientifically formulated by a leading medical doctor to help you lose those unwanted inches without diet or exercise.

For all we know her intent was to help you lose weight with a placebo and the power of suggestion. Bottom line... what is this really telling you?

Probably nothing worthwhile.
Epistemology: Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

Just take two small capsules a day, one before breakfast and one before bed, and voilá!
Epistemology: Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

Just take two small capsules a day, one before breakfast and one before bed, and voilá!

a. Declarative
b. Interrogative
c. Imperative
d. Interjection
Epistemology: Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

Just take two small capsules a day, one before breakfast and one before bed, and voilá!

Imperative (command).

Not an assertion. Tells you nothing.
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

You’re on your way to a slimmer sexier you!
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

You’re on your way to a slimmer sexier you!

Ambiguous Language. Might be an imperative.
Epistemology: Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

**Tone and Trim** is all natural; there’s no stimulants and no danger of harmful side effects.
Epistemology: Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

**Tone and Trim** is all natural; there’s no stimulants and no danger of harmful side effects.

a. Declarative  
b. Interrogative  
c. Imperative  
d. Interjection
Epistemology: Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

**Tone and Trim** is all natural; there’s no stimulants and no danger of harmful side effects.

Declarative sentence. Meaningful (useful) assertion about the product.

But then again, so is water. Are they selling you water?
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

Tone and Trim works with your body’s own calorie burning mechanisms like a super turbo boost, leaving you leaner and more vitalized.
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

**Tone and Trim** works with you body’s own calorie burning mechanisms *like a super turbo boost*, leaving you leaner and more vitalized.

The phrase “like a super turbo boost” is a simile, a poetic figure of speech which robs the sentence of “literal” meaning.
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

Can’t believe any weight-loss program could be so simple and easy?
Epistemology: Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

Can’t believe any weight-loss program could be so simple and easy?

a. Declarative
b. Interrogative
c. Imperative
d. Interjection
Epistemology: Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

Can’t believe any weight-loss program could be so simple and easy?

Interrogative.
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

Can’t believe any weight-loss program could be so simple and easy?

Interrogative.

Believe it!
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

Can’t believe any weight-loss program could be so simple and easy?

Interrogative.

Believe it!

Imperative.
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

Can’t believe any weight-loss program could be so simple and easy?
      Interrogative.

Believe it!
      Imperative.

Don’t waste your time on crazy fad diets or strenuous exercise that doesn’t work!
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

Can’t believe any weight-loss program could be so simple and easy?

Interrogative.

Believe it!

Imperative.

Don’t waist your time on crazy fad diets or strenuous exercise that doesn’t work!

Imperative
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

Lose that ugly fat and have the body you’ve always dreamed of with **Tone and Trim**.
Epistemology: Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

Lose that ugly fat and have the body you’ve always dreamed of with Tone and Trim.

What are your waiting for?
Epistemology: Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

Lose that ugly fat and have the body you’ve always dreamed of with **Tone and Trim**.

What are your waiting for?

Pick up the phone and call today.
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

Let’s look at this again:

Lose that ugly fat and have the body you’ve always dreamed of with **Tone and Trim**.

What are your waiting for?

Pick up the phone and call today.

Don’t let another day go by without your **Tone and Trim** body!
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

How do you tell a genuine assertion when you see one?

Not the grammar.

So what then?
Epistemology: Logical Positivism

The Criterion of Verification

- The criterion, used by Logical Positivists to determine if a sentence is meaningful.

- "If a sentence is unverifiable, even in principle, then it is meaningless; it is not an assertion; it is neither true nor false."
Epistemology: Logical Positivism


A genuine assertion can be true or false in only one of two ways:

- By definition
  - Analytic or what 18th Century philosopher David Hume would have called “relations of ideas”

- As a statement of observable fact
  - Empirical or what Hume would have called “matters of fact and existence”.
Epistemology: Logical Positivism

• **Matters of Fact:**
  – Empirical
    – Empirical is a fancy word of “observational.” Refers to that which can be learned by observation.
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

• Matters of Fact:
  – Empirical

  – Empirical is a fancy word of “observational.” Refers to that which can be learned by observation.

But what about the assertion “All bachelors are unmarried?”
Epistemology: Logical Positivism

Suppose I ask you to prove it to me.

Would you go door to door and do a survey?
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

Suppose I ask you to prove it to me.

Would you go door to door and do a survey?

No.
Epistemology: Logical Positivism

Suppose I ask you to prove it to me.

Would you go door to door and do a survey?

No.

For claims like “All bachelors are unmarried.” we need take no poll to verify nor do any sort of experiments, etc.. We need only to know the meaning of the terms involved in order to know whether they state a truth or a falsity. This is why they can be known a priori.
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

• **Relation of Ideas:**
  – Definitional-
Epistemology: Logical Positivism

• The claim “All bachelors are unmarried.” is true by definition.

• And the claim “Some bachelors are married.” is false by definition.

• The predicate is contained in the subject

• When we analyze the subject concept we find the predicate concept was there all along.

• Notice the truth or falsity of such claims can be known a priori (independent of experience).
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

• Relation of Ideas:
  – Definitional-a priori, Analytic, A=A, trivial (usually), non-augmentative (usually).

    Ex: “All vixen are foxes.”

  – But (perhaps) also math and geometry.
  – Many, though not all, philosopher have regarded Math and Geometry as analytic. They certainly do seem to be a priori sciences.
Epistemology: Logical Positivism

• **Matters of Fact:**
  – Empirical, Synthetic, A=B, interesting (usually), augmentative (usually).

  Ex: “All Swans are white.”

Loosely speaking these are scientific claims.
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

• If however, the truth of a sentence can be determined *neither* from the meaning of the words (a priori) *nor* by employing the scientific method (empirically) then the sentence fails the criterion.

• The sentence is devoid of cognitive content and is literally *nonsense* according to the Positivists.
Epistemology: Logical Positivism

• Many (all?) the traditional philosophical questions and answers to these questions turn out to be meaningless on Positivist grounds.

• Theological Theories, Metaphysical Theories, Epistemological Theories, Ethical Theories, Aesthetic Theories, seem to consist of sentences that are neither relations of ideas nor matters of fact.

• Therefore, according to the **Criterion of Verification** they are neither true nor false.

• They are meaningless. They convey no knowledge, but rather at best are a kind of poetic or emotive use of language.
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism

• It is not clear what, if anything, could count a “Ethical Knowledge” or an “Ethical Truth” on their view for instance.

• The realm of meaningful discourse is very narrowly circumscribed.
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism: Critique

Now subject the following sentence to the criterion of verification:
Epistemology: Logical Positivism: Critique

Now subject the following sentence to the criterion of verification:

- God exists.
Epistemology: Logical Positivism: Critique

Now subject the following sentence to the criterion of verification:

• God exists.

A. Relation of Ideas
B. Matter of Fact
C. Unverifiable and therefore meaningless.
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism: Critique

Now subject the following sentence to the criterion of verification:

- God does not exist.

A. Relation of Ideas
B. Matter of Fact
C. Unverifiable and therefore meaningless.
Epistemology: Logical Positivism: Critique

Now subject the following sentence to the criterion of verification:

• Humans have immaterial souls.

A. Relation of Ideas
B. Matter of Fact
C. Unverifiable and therefore meaningless.
Epistemology: Logical Positivism: Critique

Now subject the following sentence to the criterion of verification:

- Plagiarism is wrong.

A. Relation of Ideas
B. Matter of Fact
C. Unverifiable and therefore meaningless.
Epistemology: Logical Positivism: Critique

Now subject the following sentence to the criterion of verification:

- The personality has three parts: the id, the ego and the superego.

A. Relation of Ideas
B. Matter of Fact
C. Unverifiable and therefore meaningless.
Epistemology: Logical Positivism: Critique

Now subject the following sentence to the criterion of verification:

• If a sentence is unverifiable, even in principle, then it is meaningless.

A. Relation of Ideas
B. Matter of Fact
C. Unverifiable and therefore meaningless.
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism: Critique

Now subject the following sentence to the criterion of verification:

• If a sentence is unverifiable, even in principle, then it is meaningless.

A. Relation of Ideas
B. Matter of Fact
C. Unverifiable and therefore meaningless.

Oh Dear!
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism: Critique

“If a sentence is unverifiable, even in principle, then it is meaningless.”

Is it a Relation of Ideas, a trivial tautology which can be known a priori where the predicate it contained in the subject?
“If a sentence is unverifiable, even in principle, then it is meaningless.”

Is it a **Relation of Ideas**, a trivial tautology which can be known *a priori* where the predicate it contained in the subject?

No.
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism: Critique

“If a sentence is unverifiable, even in principle, then it is meaningless.”

Is it a Matter of Fact that can be verified by observation?
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism: Critique

“If a sentence is unverifiable, even in principle, then it is meaningless.”

Is it a Matter of Fact that can be verified by observation?

No.
Epistemology:
Logical Positivism: Critique

“If a sentence is unverifiable, even in principle, then it is meaningless.”

• This sentence above is **neither** a relation of ideas (that is, a true-by-definition-tautology)

• **nor** is it a matter of fact (that is, something that can be proven by employing the scientific method).

• Thus either the criterion is meaningless or false.

• There is no way that it could be true.
Epistemology: Logical Positivism: Critique

• Some positivists suggested that it be read as a recommendation (a mild imperative).

  "Regard as meaningless any sentence which is unverifiable."

• But if it is only recommendation, we are free to either accept it or reject it.

• Given the excessively confining and impractical restrictions the criterion imposes on "meaningful discourse" and inquiry, many (me) have chosen to reject it.
Epistemology: Logical Positivism: Critique

• Nevertheless, Positivism remains extremely influential in the popular culture.

• I credit Positivism for the suspicion so many have towards ethical reasoning and argument.

• Having said that, I think a little Positivism is a GOOD thing. I think it a very worthwhile question to ask “What could possibly prove that true or false?”
Epistemology: 
Active Mind

The last topic: **Active Mind Theories**
Epistemology: Active Mind

- Immanuel Kant and Active Mind

- Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804)

- For a variety of reasons, neither Rationalism nor Empiricism seems to adequately account for human knowledge.

- Kant’s solution to the impasse was to revision the very nature of knowledge and experience.

- The mind done not merely receive information in the act of perception; the mind shapes that information and constructs experience out of the raw sense data that the world provides.
Epistemology: Active Mind

- In classical empiricism, the mind is seen as passive.
  - Locke: The mind is a “tabula rasa”
  - Hume speaks of “impressions.”
  - Russell, et al talk of “bare particulars”

Note the passive metaphors they use.

But all experience is mediated by Active Mind
Epistemology: 
Active Mind

Immanuel Kant and Active Mind

Mind constructs experience out of the raw sense data that the world provides.

- Locke thought it was enough to talk about the object, the perceiving organ and the perception.

- Kant, argues against the model claiming it is insufficient to account for our experience.
Epistemology: Active Mind

• It is necessary to see human experiences as having different content, but a consistent “form.”

• The form of human experience is a blank template into which mind pours all sensory information.

• Alternatively think of my (very old, MS DOS based) Maillist program.
Epistemology: 
Active Mind

• My knowledge is not grounded in *the particular experience* of my 100th record, though it is grounded in experience in general.

• Though I don’t know what the CONTENT of the record is, I know the form because when I am referring to this program’s records, I am referring to products of its organizing function which does not/ cannot change
Epistemology: 
Active Mind

Another illustration of what Kant has in mind here can be seen in those “Magic Eye” posters.

At one moment they look like flat two dimensional images. The next they look like a three dimensional image.
Epistemology: Active Mind

What is different from one moment to the next?

Is the poster *giving* you something different when it looks two dimensional from what it is *giving* you when it looks 3 dimensional?
Epistemology:
Active Mind

• For another example, think of visually ambiguous images, specifically the “Duck/Rabbit.”
Epistemology:
Active Mind
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Epistemology: 
Active Mind

- We can complicate Locke model a bit by talking about the object, the organ, the retinal image, and the perception. But again, on this model, the perception is understood as the inevitable product of the retinal image. Mind play no active role.
Epistemology: Active Mind

• But in the case of ambiguous images, the poverty of this view is revealed.

• I can have the duck-perception or the rabbit-perception and which perception I have cannot be explained in solely terms of the object, the organ or the retinal image.
Epistemology: Active Mind

- When I have the duck-perception, the object, the perceiving organ and the retinal image are the *same* as when I have the rabbit-perception.

- There must be some other factor that explains the difference in perception, and that factor is the *activity of mind*. The old Lockeian model of mind simply cannot account for the phenomena.
Epistemology: Active Mind

• I’m going to show you an image on the next slide for a brief second and then quiz you on what you saw.
Figure 1
A jumble of splotches or a face?
[If you have difficulty ‘seeing’ the face, try looking through half-closed
eyes, or holding a pencil in your hand.]

[The image shows a black and white silhouette of two crows in flight, one above the other.]
Epistemology: Active Mind

• What did you see?

A. Jumble of Splotches
B. Man’s Face
C. Woman’s Face
D. Outline of Lake Michigan
Epistemology: Active Mind

• What did you see?

A. Woman’s Face
B. Bird in flight
C. Saxophone Player
D. Ballet Dancer
Epistemology: Active Mind

• What did you see?

A. Old woman
B. Young woman
C. Forest landscape
D. Still life of fruit
Figure 2
Initially seen as a jumble of splotches, once the Dalmatian is seen, its spots are grouped together — a pleasing effect, caused perhaps by activation of the limbic system by temporal lobe cortex.
Epistemology: Active Mind

• What did you see?

A. Abstract design of dots
B. Trees in forest
C. Corvette
D. Dalmatian
Epistemology:  
Active Mind

Opens the door to Radical Relativism:

• Kant believed that our (human) empirical knowledge was universal because the pure forms of experience and the categories of thought were universal for all humans. (Gestalt Psychology)

• BUT....one might object to Kant’s view.

• For instance, what if we do NOT all put the world together in basically the same way.

• Imagine a group of individuals who could ONLY see the duck. They would tell anyone who claimed he or she saw a rabbit that he or she was WRONG. (Perhaps hysterical.)
Epistemology: Active Mind

• This opened the door to the position that there is not merely one “right way” to image or to experience or to know the world.

• This realization gave rise to the Post-modernists’ notion that there is no one point of view from which Truth can be determined.
Epistemology:
Some parting questions

• Is all knowledge expressed in propositions?
• What sort of justification is needed for knowledge claims (certainly, probability?)
• Can knowledge be had outside the realm of empirical science and math?
• In ethical matters?
• Are we are living in different worlds of our own unique creation?
• Must truth be relativized to groups of cognizers?