

Knowledge & Belief Writing Assignment

Due Monday Oct. 31 at 5pm in HAND-IN folder

Write about the difference between knowledge and belief. Please use the “What do we know” sheet (below) as a starting point for your paper if you wish. Consider the following questions.

- **What is the difference between knowledge and belief?**
- How do we know something is true?
- What is the role of doubt and skepticism in the acquisition of knowledge?
- What’s the difference between what we KNOW to be true compared to what we BELIEVE to be true?
- Are there any useful rules or guidelines on how to proceed from believing something to knowing something?
- Are there some questions that cannot in principle ever be knowable, but only believable?
- What are the criteria for moving from the category of possibly true to probably true to certainly true?
- Does knowledge only exist when we move from the category of probably true to certainly true? What are the criteria for judging something as certainly true?
- What is a fact? What qualifies as a fact? Who decides? Who has the power to reverse that decision? On what basis might such a reversal occur?
- Does the definition of knowledge change, depending upon the field of study in which one is engaged?
- Why are these distinctions important? Does it really matter?

For this assignment, I want you to address the first question (“What’s the difference between knowledge and belief?”) plus *at least one of the other questions* above. You may certainly address more than one, but don’t address so many that it chops up your essay.

I don’t expect you to discuss deeply personal religious beliefs or to confess to any beliefs in the supernatural, unless you choose to do so.

Length: 4-5 pages, double-spaced, no outside sources required, though you may use them if you like.

What do you know?

Rate the statements below with respect to the following levels of certainty, as you see each individual statement:

Possibly true
Probably true
Certainly true
Definitely not true
I have no idea

The common cold is caused by a virus.

The earth revolves around the sun.

Each of us has an unconscious mind that influences our behavior.

Humans are descended from primitive animals that inhabited the earth many years ago.

The earth is over 4 billion years old.

The brain is the primary organ in the body responsible for decisions concerning behavior.

The earth's atmosphere is made up primarily of nitrogen and oxygen.

There is intelligent life elsewhere in the universe.

There is intelligent life on other planets in our solar system.

Our bodies are composed of fundamental units called cells.

Atoms consist of protons, neutrons, and electrons.

Gravitational forces from the earth keep us from floating off into space.

After we die, our souls leave our bodies.

Thomas Jefferson was one of the men responsible for creating the U.S. Constitution.

Human beings lived in this hemisphere before Columbus and other European explorers arrived.

All humans alive today are descended from an African man.

God exists.

Human beings can travel into the future.

Light consists of both particles and waves.

Human beings have walked on the moon.

It is more dangerous to ride in a car than to fly in a jet.

Smoking cigarettes causes lung cancer.

Most people who try methamphetamine become addicted to it.

During the 18th and 19th century in this country, women could not legally vote.

A civil war was fought in this country during the 1860s pitting Northern states against Southern states.

Millions of Jews were killed during the reign of Adolf Hitler in Germany.

The majority of the earth is covered in water.

If two objects of different weights are dropped from the top of a building, the heavier of the two objects will hit the ground first.

It would take 4 years for light to travel from Earth to the nearest star besides our sun.

The liver is the main organ of the body responsible for breaking down drugs into a form the body can excrete.

Water consists of hydrogen and oxygen.

Dinosaurs and human beings lived at the same time millions of years ago.

Over 80% of the U.S. population has fantasized about murdering someone.

Earth has been visited by intelligent beings from outside our solar system.

Sexual orientation is biologically determined.