Philosophy as Fact-Based Discipline: 200 Philosophical Facts

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1. Introduction

I'm probably the only philosopher in the world who holds that (i) there is tremendous agreement amongst philosophers on the truth-values of many substantive philosophical claims, (ii) there is enormous fact-based progress in philosophy, (iii) philosophers frequently succeed in the aim to acquire communal knowledge of substantive philosophical truths, and (iv) there is plenty of genuine philosophical expertise regarding the truth-values of substantive philosophical claims (setting aside expertise regarding the discussions of those topics). Thesis (i) is the pivotal one. What makes philosophy bizarre compared to other fields is that we are unaware of all of that. And all this time we thought philosophy had something to do with acquiring self-knowledge.

In the appendix I list 200 straightforward facts directly about philosophical matters that virtually all philosophers know and non-philosophers don't know. Our strong preference for discussing controversial matters has caused us to seriously underestimate the straightforward epistemic accomplishments of philosophy. This leads to a new conception of philosophical achievement and what the discipline of philosophy is.

The list of facts is long because there is no other available way to prove that there really are many such facts. 200 claims, from *just one* subfield of philosophy (epistemology, with sprinkles from logic and the philosophy of language) and tied to *just one* philosopher's tastes (mine), is much more significant than a dozen or so claims plus some hand-waving argumentation that "there must be" hundreds more. I will show how to repeat the exercise for other subfields of philosophy, ending up with over a thousand claims (section 3).

As for what the significant consequences are for such a group of facts, regarding philosophical *achievement*, *expertise*, *progress*, *benefits*, and *pedagogy*, I'll treat those in sections 5-9.

You should skim the list of Basic facts in the appendix but only *after* reading the next section.

2. How to Interpret the List of Basic Facts

I call them *Basic* facts because they are elementary compared to the facts philosophers pursue, such as the truth-values of theses regarding physicalism, consequentialism, and so on.

For an imperfect but helpful context for skimming the list, consider a typical lecture in a math class. The teacher introduces a new concept and then proves a series of claims that use it, so the students achieve a partial mastery of the new concept. The teacher starts with *elementary* claims and proofs. The same pedagogy occurs in physics and chemistry. Despite the fact that the exercises are elementary, the sum total of them is illuminating for the intended audience—which excludes other math teachers. Similarly, each of the 200 Basic facts will not be illuminating for you, although their sum can be.

There are five points to make regarding how to interpret the sentences in (1)-(200) in the appendix.

First point. For some of the sentences, there are ways of interpreting them that won't bring consensus amongst philosophers, and in the philosopher's traditional search for flaws it can be tempting for a reader to choose the least charitable interpretations. I want to avoid those.

For instance, take (143):

> Some claims are true for a great many people and false for a great many other people depending on people's preferences about things like fear, taste, comfort, pleasure, and so on (e.g., "Chocolate tastes better than vanilla", "Sky diving is scary").

A philosopher might insist that (143) is false since *claims* are either truths or falsehoods but certainly not both. In saying that (143) is true, I'm not disagreeing with that philosopher. I'm saying that there is a way of interpreting (143) so that it comes out true—and I supplied examples to help the reader hit on that interpretation. When in ordinary life Jo says "Chocolate tastes better than vanilla", and Mo responds "That's true for you but not for me", we don't have difficulty admitting that what Mo said was true. We might have difficulty *analyzing* "what he said" (e.g., issues about logical form), but that's another matter.

For another example, take (5):

> One person can doubt what another believes, another disbelieves, another wonders about, another assumes, etc.

A philosopher of mind might hold a view about propositional attitudes that makes (5) express a falsehood (e.g., she thinks that strictly speaking propositional attitudes are so finely-grained that no two people believe the same thing). In saying that (5) is true, I'm not disagreeing with her view. I'm saying that there's a way to interpret (5) so that it comes out true. When Jo says "It only looks like he's agreeing with her. She believes it but he's just assuming it for the sake of argument", we can interpret her second sentence so that it comes out true.

Second point. Most of the Basic sentences make weak claims constructed with an eye to non-philosophical contexts. Most of the sentences contain terms such as "most" (as in "in most cases"), "a fair amount", "often", "at least" (as in "at least sometimes"), "occasionally", "roughly put", "typically", "some", "can" (as in "can happen", in a frequentist sense) and so on (those terms show up 277 times). They aren't attempting to express exceptionless principles.

Third point. In saying that these are *facts*, I'm assuming the falsehood of radical views such as eliminative materialism, radical skepticism, compositional nihilism, semantic nihilism, truth nihilism, and so on, each of which conflicts with a non-trivial portion of the 200 claims. Such an assumption is nearly ubiquitous in epistemology and metaphilosophy

discussions. If you like, we can throw the assumption of their falsehood into an antecedent for the 200 claims, now conditionalized. (That won't make for perfect unanimity amongst philosophers but it will be very close.) Physicists often omit roughly similar antecedent-building qualifications such as "non-relativistic" (e.g., "If the object is moving at non-relativistic speeds"), "frictionless" ("If the surface is frictionless, or nearly so"), or "not earliest conditions after the Big Bang" when listing their relatively elementary facts.

Fourth point. The term "miracle" occasionally gets used in ordinary life with a meaning different from how it's used in some contexts in philosophy, such as in debates about testimony. In ordinary life "miracle" has a meaning according to which it's obvious there is testimony sufficient to justify beliefs in miracles (e.g., sports miracles). The term "miracle" has a complex semantics, with multiple factors helping to fix differing semantic values, in philosophy and in sports. I think something roughly similar might be true of "evidence". In ordinary discourse, "The knife was a strong piece of evidence in the trial" is literally true even if (we can suppose for the sake of argument) in some philosophical discourse "No ordinary physical objects such as knives are pieces of evidence" is true too, as when said by a philosopher who is arguing that all pieces of evidence are known propositions or sensory experiences, say. When I use "evidence" in the list, I am using it as it works in *charitably* interpreted ordinary discourse—say, in a newspaper article about some trial or criminal investigation. Sometimes, like in item (32) from the list, I try to make the interpretative point explicit. Similar remarks hold for the likely complex semantics of "belief".

Fifth point. Matters of ambiguity might be even messier than suggested in my previous point. It's not beyond the pale to think that key epistemic terms such as "know" have *several* common and importantly differing semantic values in sufficiently differing yet ordinary uses. Maybe on different occasions of use "S knows P" has the truth conditions of *S believes P with high confidence*, *S non-stupidly believes the truth P*, *S's belief P is socially accepted in her community*, or *S has explicitly proven P to experts*—and it has *each* of these wildly differing meanings in *a great many* contexts that are *ordinary*, not extraordinary. Most philosophers are strongly inclined to reject such semantic complexity, or at least the epistemically more extreme meanings, but the world isn't made for us. If there were this semantic complexity, it wouldn't mean that anything goes, however. If S merely guessed P, without believing it, then even if P were true S wouldn't "know" P—no matter which already existing meaning of "know" you want to employ.

I am *not* saying that "know" is this semantically unwieldly. I am saying that even if it is, we can say things like (71), "Highly confident belief that doesn't amount to knowledge is possible". The accurate way to understand it is this: under one common and central notion expressed with "knows", it's possible to have a highly confident belief that doesn't amount to "knowledge".

Here is the general interpretation rule for reading the list: when you read an item and think to yourself, "Well, that one *can* be true but only if you interpret a certain way, and under that way it's pretty trivial", *that's* the very meaning I have in mind—the so-called trivial one (or ones). In order for an item to mistakenly be on the list, there can't be *any* charitable interpretation of it that makes it come out true. The objection, "But since they are trivial, they are inconsequential" is mistaken, as we will see in section 6.

3. *Continuing the List*

My method in composing the list was to take various epistemological notions and think of *elementary* truths about them—just like how the math teacher starts out with elementary truths involving a new concept. Then I tried to formulate the claims so that they would be both comprehensible to non-philosophers and acceptable to the vast majority of epistemologists, keeping in mind the five interpretative points from section 2. Other than that, the list is random.

It's not difficult to continue the list. For one thing, I didn't treat all epistemic notions (e.g., I ignored *doubt*). For another, it's child's play to come up with dozens more facts of the same form as (55)-(92), such as "It is possible to have a belief that is true, evidentially inferred, evidentially irrational, socially accepted in one group but not another, and held with very high confidence".

After seeing it actually done for epistemology, I suspect that we could list hundreds of Basic facts from at least some other subfields of philosophy (I don't know any reason to think every subfield will be roughly equally good at generating Basic facts). Here are some from the philosophy of language.

- Some words apply to just one thing (e.g. "Bertrand Russell"), others apply to many things (e.g., "dog"), and yet others failed to apply to what they were intended to pick out (e.g., "Planet Vulcan" doesn't pick out any planet, and "The current King of the USA" doesn't pick out any person).
- Some sentences are true, others are false, and yet others are neither.
- Some sentences express commands, some express requests, some express questions, some express threats, and so on.
- Some words are quite vague (e.g., "yellow") while others are much more precise (e.g., "prime number").
- Vague words typically can have borderline cases, which is what happens when you are familiar with the word but its meaning doesn't seem to be complete enough for you to figure out if the word applies to a certain item—the borderline case—even though you seem to know everything relevant about the item.
- Some words have the same meanings on different occasions of use even though they pick out different things (e.g., "I", "here", "today").
- Some words pick out ordinary material objects, some pick out actions, some pick out processes, and some pick out events.
- There can be two words that pick out the same thing but have different conceptions associated with them (e.g., "George Orwell" and "Eric Blair").
- Some descriptions pick out just one thing (e.g., "The 35th president of the USA") while other descriptions pick out many things (e.g., "Billionaires who live in New York").

Again, one must keep in mind the interpretation instructions. For instance, "sentence" and "word" are used to include tokens, types, and/or uses of tokens, as appropriate. In addition, in composing the list I intentionally use slippery terms such as "pick out" and "apply to" because I don't want to be locked into expressing any technical notions such as that

picked out by some philosophical uses of "refer". Finally, instead of offering controversial definitions, such as that for "borderline case", I offer rough but illuminating characterizations, so as to increase the percentage of agreement.

A significant, but not overwhelming, percentage of philosophy's elementary facts will also be parts of other fields, such as linguistics and psychology. That's fine; we aren't fighting turf wars.

Without intending to be precise or thorough, one could divide philosophical truths that *are generally known by the philosophical community but not other communities* into three categories: Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced. The latter would be our communal knowledge that, for instance, such-and-such version of consequentialism, physicalism, or epistemological externalism is true. Needless to say, most philosophers think that category is empty, or nearly so, as there is no such (roughly) community-wide knowledge (even if some individuals know them). The Intermediate category would contain truths of the form "Under plausible assumptions, P", where P is some standard controversial philosophical thesis. Sometimes we can list the assumptions, such as "Assuming there are propositions and they have parts", "Assuming some version of consequentialism is true", "Assuming we have libertarian free will", or "Assuming we have lots of ordinary knowledge of external world matters". Other times, it's more difficult to list the assumptions. In this essay I'm concerned only with the Basics category.

4. The Theses

When it came to figuring out the philosophical import of the list, I ended up with nine theses:

FACTS: There are hundreds of Basic facts in philosophy, including the 200 I gave.

KNOWLEDGE: Philosophers today know almost all of them, or are easily and consistently disposed to accept them given the interpretation instructions of section 2. As a consequence, amongst philosophers there is massive agreement alongside the well-documented massive disagreement.

CONCEPTION: Any significantly accurate conception of philosophy must include the idea that it is, in large part, a *factual, results-oriented* discipline.

IGNORANCE: The typical moderately-educated adult today who isn't a philosopher knows only a small percentage of the Basic facts and for most of the others is not consistently disposed to accept them.

EPISTEMIC: The transition from the state described in IGNORANCE to the state described in KNOWLEDGE is an enormous epistemic improvement, compared to most other significant learning episodes. The magnitude of the gap in understanding is akin to the gap in tennis ability between the typical kid who does well on her college tennis team and a professional who occasionally plays in Grand Slam tournaments such as Wimbledon.

PRACTICAL: The same transition provides significant practical benefits for one's ordinary life.

PEDAGOGY: A significant *potential* portion of the benefits of philosophy lies in the teaching of Basic facts.

EXPERTISE: On *most* reasonable and useful conceptions of philosophical expertise, knowledge of the Basic facts is a significant component of such expertise, even if it's not the most impressive component.

PROGRESS: On *some* (but perhaps not most) reasonable and useful conceptions of philosophical progress, knowledge of the Basic facts is a significant component of such progress, even if it's not the most impressive component.

I will treat these in order. But it's worth noticing now that most of these theses contain words with a high degree of vagueness, such as "enormous", "small", and, most commonly, "significant". I will address this vagueness in section 8.

5. A More Accurate Conception of Philosophy

I won't argue (further) for either FACTS or KNOWLEDGE, since I take it that given the interpretive instructions in section 2, the reader can verify them to a significant degree. In this section I'll focus on what FACTS and KNOWLEDGE mean for our conception of philosophy.

It's remarkable that the Basic facts in philosophy are almost entirely hidden from not only the typical moderately-educated adult (as argued in the next section) but even from philosophers. We know the Basic facts, at least dispositionally, but we almost never think about the vast majority of them. They just aren't on our radar. In order to prove (to myself, to others) they exist in significant numbers I had to list 200 of them; anything less would have received only shoulder shrugs from readers (or me, for that matter).

Because the facts are more or less hidden, we miss the similarities of philosophy to hard sciences. Although there is long-standing disagreement on many philosophical matters, the same feature in found in physics. Physicists could construct a poll similar to the PhilPapers one (Bourget and Chalmers 2023) in such a way that it would show profound disagreement in physics. Even so, many philosophers would respond that although there is serious disagreement in physics, philosophy is different in that there is so little agreement.

With the 200 facts, plus the instructions on how to greatly expand the list, we see that they're wrong. Plenty of authors have argued that since there is so much long-standing disagreement, there is little to no convergence of opinion in philosophy. If they were right, KNOWLEDGE would be false, since their antecedent about long-standing disagreement is true. For instance, Coliva and Doulas write "what is epistemically problematic about disagreement, specifically disagreement in philosophy—i.e., widespread, pervasive disagreement—is that it yields no clear convergence to the truth" (2025, 38). Similarly, Lougheed writes that "The epistemic significance of widespread peer disagreement in philosophy indicates that there is a lack of convergence on the truth in philosophy" (2019, 294). However, it should be obvious that these inferences are fallacious. Just because there is plenty of disagreement (which is true) hardly means there isn't plenty of agreement and, thus, the way is open to convergence to the truth.

Even so, it is at least a little uncharitable to attribute a mistake here. Like I mentioned above, the Basic facts aren't on our radar at all. When we talk about philosophically substantive claims, wondering about agreement and disagreement, it's charitable to interpret us as talking about only non-Basic claims. Under that reading, it's quite reasonable to note, as those authors do, that there's almost nothing but widespread long-standing disagreement on those claims, and, hence, little to no convergence of opinion.

This will be a theme through much of my discussion: since the Basic facts are more or less invisible to us, when we philosophers talk about philosophical agreement and disagreement, convergence and the lack of convergence, expertise, and progress, the charitable if not exactly accurate way to interpret most authors is that they are talking only about the controversial bits of philosophy. The mistake here is failing to realize that an uncontroversial part exists too, is huge, and is significant.

We're familiar with the challenge, "What are the *results* that your discipline has discovered, other than creating or improving other fields?" (usually voiced by a dean or science professor). Some philosophers respond by describing the structure of results without actually, you know, *listing any results*. We end up saying things like *we have expert understanding of the key dependence relations amongst key concepts* (e.g., Merricks 2022, Dellsén, Firing, Lawler, & Norton 2024). I and other philosophers tend to like that response for multiple reasons, but many people outside of the discipline certainly do not. They want to see the results themselves, not high-level descriptions of the results.

It would be much better to *state many results* and not merely describe them with relatively unilluminating language like "understanding of dependence relations". If I'm right, we *can* state many results. Imagine a shelf of philosophy textbooks each of which contains systematic lists of *hundreds* of key results for students and interested others to learn—some primary, some secondary, and so on. That would be impressive—to students, deans, parents, other professors, and so on. The idea that we have a discipline that is rich in discoveries of straightforward facts—that's CONCEPTION—once struck me as naïve. No longer, as we can literally list hundreds of results which prove CONCEPTION.

Note that I didn't give a philosophical argument that there are such results. Instead, I just produced the results—which is a superior way to proceed. Compare arguing that "there must be" two-headed snakes versus just shutting up and revealing one for people to see. I flirted with the idea of taking that approach seriously by publishing just the appendix of this paper, with no commentary whatsoever.

6. Going from Ignorance to Knowledge

Many philosophers will balk at IGNORANCE. The alleged problem with it isn't that it's vague, with its targeting the "moderately-educated adult", which allows for quite a bit of range. Philosophers are often quantifying over vaguely defined groups of adults. Instead, the problem is supposed to be that the clear majority of those moderately-educated adult non-philosophers are *easily disposed* to accept virtually all my 200 claims, if just prompted. So, IGNORANCE is false. And if IGNORANCE is false, then the transition mentioned in EPISTEMIC and PRACTICAL happens in few moderately-educated adults, so those theses are mostly inapplicable even if true. Further, IGNORANCE's falsehood casts serious doubt on EXPERTISE, PROGRESS, and PEDAGOGY as well—due to their now doubtful use of "significant" in all three theses. In my experience, this objection to IGNORANCE is the main objection to the rest of my project, after FACTS, KNOWLEDGE, and CONCEPTION have already been dealt with.

I'm sorry to say it, but the objection to IGNORANCE is inaccurate—usually wildly so. In order to get a handle on IGNORANCE, EPISTEMIC, and PRACTICAL, consider an apt analogy.

Alex is ignorant of the vast majority of the differences amongst depression, trauma, stress, anxiety, and sadness. These are distinct states, but she is clueless about their important differences. She uses "depressed", "traumatized", "stressed", "anxious", and "sad" pretty much like most people do, with partial facility. She definitely expresses some truths, such as "Jo is pretty sad this week". However, she doesn't have five distinct conceptions in her mind (under one reading of "conception"). If she has five loved ones with those five psychological states, then as far as she's can tell, they all have "psychological difficulties", as she would put it.

Next, Alex is educated so that she sees clearly the key similarities and differences of the five psychological states. Now she is much more perceptive and discerning. She can interpret what her war-traumatized father says and does in certain contexts so much better than before. Her understanding of her anxious brother's mind and behavior is vastly improved. She can communicate with her stressed mother and sad roommate in ways that help them start to overcome their problems. She can interact with her depressed girlfriend in a significantly smoother, compassionate, effective manner. She hasn't been turned into a miracle worker, of course. But she's doing significantly better than before, for both herself and her loved ones.

Before her education, she was significantly ignorant of the conceptual terrain. In the educational process, she made significant epistemic advances. These advances led to practical benefits in her life. So, we have analogies to IGNORANCE, EPISTEMIC, and PRACTICAL. I hold that something quite similar happens when one learns the 200 Basic facts, thereby enhancing one's framework of epistemic concepts—just like how education enhanced Alex's framework of psychological concepts. There are many other such analogies. We often use "momentum", "energy", and "force" when talking about one object hitting another object "hard". In such cases, most people have just one vague conception corresponding to the three terms, which unbeknownst to them stand for quite different things (e.g., momentum is proportional to speed, not acceleration, while force is the reverse).

These analogies are apt because they help us elaborate on IGNORANCE. There are two general ways of being ignorant of a set of facts: having a good grasp of the relevant concepts in the facts but denying many of them, or having a tenuous grasp of the concepts, and few true or false views about them. For the most part, moderately-educated people are closer to the second option than the first option, although there is a continuum here between the two extremes. The psychology and physics cases illustrate the situation.

Those are analogies, not arguments. Unfortunately, one cannot provide a typical philosophical argument for IGNORANCE. To see this, suppose you wanted to convince someone that the typical baseball fan doesn't have a firm grasp of how to use baseball statistics to assess a player's performance. I happen to know that that baseball thesis is true, but the only reason I know it is that I've listened to those people and I am publishing a book on the philosophy of ranking items such as baseball statistics or philosophers. You can't provide anything like a typical philosophical *argument* for that fact about most baseball fans. At best, you would have to produce transcripts of conversations amongst people who are serious baseball fans (e.g., found on Facebook and Reddit baseball groups populated not by novices but by people with amateur backgrounds in baseball statistics and history). If you haven't had those conversations, then you're missing the data.

The same holds in the psychology and physics cases: to realize the tenuous grasp people have of the respective sets of notions, from psychology and physics, one doesn't give anything like a philosophical argument.

Similarly, the only reason I know that IGNORANCE is true is that I've paid close attention to what people outside of philosophy say about, and use, key philosophical notions. It can be difficult for a philosopher to vividly imagine, but there are loads of *reasonable, moderately-educated* adults (e.g., with associate or bachelor degrees) who often if inconsistently confuse true belief and highly confident belief, for instance. The same holds for being mostly blind to the distinction between true belief and belief based on strong overall evidence, or even just strong evidence. It's not at all difficult to find *educated* or high-IQ people saying things like "A fact is information minus emotion", "An opinion is information plus experience", "Ignorance is an opinion lacking information", and "Stupidity is an opinion that ignores fact" (each of which I've encountered in intelligent discourse recently). I've even encountered educated people—Bachelor's or even Master's degrees—who inconsistently deny fact (2), "Some beliefs are true while others are false." The same holds not only for the comparatively advanced Basic facts, such as those about higher-order evidence, but even the simplest ones.

For many educated people, it is a difficult task for them to list ten of their beliefs at all, on *any* semantic value of "belief". The idea that some beliefs are expressed with complete declarative sentences is something that they haven't encountered before. I'm not saying that they don't have beliefs, or can't recognize beliefs expressed with complete declarative sentences. But I am saying that their grasp of that notion is incredibly weak, in a great many cases. That's what my experience with moderately-educated non-philosophers outside of universities and colleges says.

The two cases, philosophy and baseball, are similar. Any baseball fan has a partial grasp of what the stats *Slugging Percentage*, for hitters, and *Earned Run Average*, for pitchers, are. But when you talk to them about those stats, you realize that their grasp of them is surprisingly weak, despite the fact that they can often talk competently and informatively using the vocabulary in some familiar contexts.

Similarly, the typical moderately-educated adult can talk competently using a good portion of epistemic language (saying true things), and can sometimes easily agree to some of the Basic facts under *some* promptings. But it is usually not difficult to discover that their grasp of those concepts is really quite weak. If you prompt them *just right*, you can—in the favorable cases—get them to assent to many of the fact sentences. Even so, it's often comparably easy, or difficult, to get them to reject them. Moreover, you can say a little that will cause them to refuse to assent or dissent, as they are unsure. Again, the comparison with the average person's grasp of "stressed", "anxious", "traumatized", "depressed", and "sad" is suggestive.

Think of what people say about evidence. First, for many people, some ideas are backed by evidence and others aren't. It's an on-off switch, without degrees. Second, some people have only the most tenuous grasp of the concept of counterevidence, able to spot it in certain situations but have never heard it articulated. Third, many think evidence comes in just two pots: the kind scientists discover and the kind that police detectives find. That's all there is to it. In my experience, philosophers *significantly* underestimate how little most people know about evidence.

You might protest that it's easy to get them to assent to all sorts of basic truths about evidence and other epistemic notions, and that means they were awfully close to knowing them. Once again, we have to be careful. Some people can be taught these truths relatively easily. But a great many can't. Many people can be swayed not towards the truths but claims that will, to any philosopher, be obviously false. Charitable interpretation has its place, but it's inaccurate to focus on just the pleasant data when interpreting, and ignore the contrary data.

Another way to get evidence for IGNORANCE is to do the following exercise with students who haven't had a philosophy class before. At the very beginning of the semester—before you've taught them anything at all—ask them what they think knowledge is. Next, ask them what they think truth is. Then try evidence, fact, and reasonable belief, one after the other. Do not comment on their answers in the slightest; just nod your head enough to keep the students talking. Nothing *definitive* regarding IGNORANCE will result (e.g., it's a skewed group of people, plus small sample size), but it will suggest that a typical person's grasp of central epistemic notions is surprisingly weak.

IGNORANCE is a thesis about *moderately*-educated non-philosophers. But the lack of knowledge of Basic facts is true of a significant number of highly-educated non-philosophers as well. Consider the philosophizing of public figures such as Richard Dawkins, Jordan Peterson, Sam Harris, and others. A significant component of it (although not all of it) is cringeworthy, the type of thing that makes philosophy professors roll their eyes. One part of what's going on here is that those figures don't have knowledge of the Basic facts. It's their *elementary* mistakes, not advanced ones, that make professional philosophers cringe. Keep in mind that each of those public figures has a high IQ, a fantastic education, years of successful research, and so on. Not even close to being "moderately-educated".

So much for IGNORANCE. Unfortunately, I don't have much in the way of *sharable* evidence for EPISTEMIC either. However, perhaps all it takes to see that EPISTEMIC is true is look at the Basic claims, imagine what it's like to have a very weak grasp of them, and then recall what it's like to know them all, or nearly all. The epistemic improvement will be considerable. Or, imagine what it's like to be convinced of the claims from a few paragraphs back—"A fact is information minus emotion", "An opinion is information plus experience", "Ignorance is an opinion lacking information", and "Stupidity is an opinion that ignores fact"—and imagine what it's like to graduate to knowing the 200 Basic facts. Or, again, recall what it was like to be clueless regarding the differences amongst sadness, depression, anxiety, stress, and trauma—and then learn their pair-wise similarities and differences.

When it comes to PRACTICAL, consider first the philosophy of language facts from section 3. If you're anything like me, you read them, saw how elementary they are—under the interpretation instructions—and thought something along the lines of "There's no way that learning these could be of *practical* help in one's ordinary life".

That's true! The same holds when one reads *just a few* of the epistemology Basic facts. But when one teaches all 200 of them to someone, especially with the aid of a thousand true/false exercises connected to the 200 facts (yes, I wrote them, but I won't torture you with a list), one sees that appearances are deceiving: when you go from a few to 200, matters change enormously. That's another reason why I had to list 200 facts instead of just a dozen or so. Little things can add up to big things.

One of the main practical advantages that comes from learning the 200 epistemology facts is something that could be aptly termed *epistemic preventative medicine* (e.g., preventing one from falling for wild conspiracy theories, primitive religious beliefs, meaningful coincidences, much anecdotal evidence, wildly false opinions about expertise, confusions about probabilities and possibilities, etc.). In particular, I have found that non-philosophers make far fewer epistemic mistakes when thinking about politics, religion, ethics, sex, love, and relationships—the areas where we have most of our most important beliefs—when they no longer confuse these eight states with one another: *knowledge, true belief, evidentially reasonable belief, practically useful belief, emotionally comforting belief, socially accepted belief, highly confidently held belief*, and *belief for which you have an overwhelming feeling that it's true* (for the last one, think of the states of mind of people who say things such as "I just knew that my father was in trouble that day even though I hadn't heard from him in ages; I could sense it"). Claims (55)-(92) are key for that purpose, and we could easily add dozens more in the same vein. In addition, Basic claims about expertise are enormously useful as epistemic preventative medicine, as will be obvious upon reflection about political discourse over the last decade or so.

Of course, even excellent philosophers regularly have their brains turn to mush when thinking about politics, religion, sex, love, and relationships. I don't know anyone who escapes, including myself. The epistemic preventative medicine doesn't prevent all epistemic diseases or injuries. But the epistemic transition mentioned in PRACTICAL contributes towards significantly reducing the frequency.

In addition, since a good portion of the Basic facts are about the notion(s) of evidence, by going over them obsessively, people get much better at forming roughly accurate ideas of how strong or weak their epistemic position is to make various judgments. Such an improvement in accuracy can be enormously beneficial in a practical sense, as many educated people implicitly think evidence is something that applies only in court cases and science—and they know very little about either. For others, it's news that evidence can be strong or weak.

I suspect that it's because the Basic facts of philosophy are largely hidden from philosophers (hidden but known; section 5) that we are attracted to the claim that traditional epistemology fails to provide practical guidance for living (cf. Ballantyne 2019, McKenna 2023, Webb 2004, and Bishop and Trout 2005). I'm willing to allow, for the sake of argument, that the vast majority of the material we debate in our professional publications in epistemology isn't guidance-helpful. If that's the main point, I'm sympathetic—although I think most of us agree that there are recent exceptions, such as the epistemology of disagreement. But the 200 facts prove that elementary epistemology can be significantly helpful in guiding our lives.

7. The Pedagogical Benefits of Philosophy

When pointing out the benefits of philosophy as a discipline, we usually talk about the wild successes in generating or positively changing other fields of study. A second benefit is that philosophy provides the primary means for us to scratch our philosophical itches, which is important given the frequency and personal importance of those itches. A third benefit is the improvement in our ability to think about complex or emotional topics (e.g., Prinzing & Vazquez 2025).

If my theses IGNORANCE, EPISTEMIC, and PRACTICALITY are right, we probably have a great deal of unrealized potential when it comes to the third benefit. Yes, studying philosophy as it is currently presented to the public often (not always) benefits people by making them sharper thinkers, at least a bit and for a short time. But I suspect we could do much better at that task by disseminating the most straightforward concrete results of our discipline: the Basic facts. I cannot be sure of this PEDAGOGY thesis, as I haven't done the appropriate empirical studies. So, it's just speculation. Even so, IGNORANCE addressed typical "moderately-educated" adults. Typical undergraduates aren't quite there yet, so they will usually benefit even more from the Basics instruction. When you think about undergraduates, don't think of your favorites, or the exceptional ones.

The philosophy-science pedagogical contrast is remarkable. In most (but not all) undergraduate philosophy textbooks, the author devotes the vast majority of the book to introducing and discussing philosophically controversial topics, simplified accordingly. This is the very opposite of what one sees in undergraduate science textbooks. Roughly put, science textbooks are almost entirely made up of presentations of basic facts about uncontroversial matters, while philosophy textbooks are mostly full of simplified roadmaps to controversial matters, with basic facts making sporadic appearances mainly in service of getting to the controversial issues. We should try adopting the scientific pedagogy, at least occasionally. Just like in the sciences, significant progress can occur in philosophy through learning uncontroversial truths.

We spend many pages in philosophy textbooks going over controversies but only a paragraph arguing that some true beliefs don't amount to evidentially reasonable beliefs. The books usually don't even bother to argue that highly confident beliefs aren't always true—despite how useful such an argument would be to many students, especially if illustrated with not boring, clear-cut examples but with actual examples of *emotionally-pivotal* beliefs our students *actually* have about love, religion, politics, morality, relationships, and sex that often generate foolish actions, decisions, and beliefs. If I may say so, the result of our odd pedagogy is an army of graduates who wrote fine papers on Gettier cases, skepticism, or virtue epistemology but believe in astrology, reiki, Shamanic healing, and comparable bullshit.

8. The Significance of the Theses

After listing my theses in section 4, I pointed out that most of them contain terms with a high degree of vagueness, such as "significant". Because of that vagueness, two people could *agree* with those theses but differ considerably in the question of the *extent* of the significance. I want to address that issue now via responding to a good objection.

> I might be willing to grant most of your theses. Even so, no one—*no one*—got into philosophy to learn Basic facts. Focusing on them is like an athlete focusing on the startling fact that they can do 100 pushups without stopping. The average person can't even come close to that feat. So, yes, that's impressive—just like learning the Basic facts is. But the athlete got into their sport to do great things, not do pushups. Our knowledge of the Basic facts isn't really terribly important.

The objector answers the question "Yes, but *how* significant?" with "Not very much".

I think this is a mistake. True enough, none of us got into philosophy to learn the Basic facts. But knowledge of them is a lot more substantial than I would have guessed. The appropriate analogy isn't pushups but the one I gave earlier, about learning the differences amongst depression, trauma, stress, anxiety, and sadness.

Someone who goes into psychology might not have had any interest in learning those facts. She might have gone into the field because she is interested in neuropsychology, industrial-organizational psychology, or topics in abnormal psychology. But in the course of studying those topics, she learns more pedestrian things about psychology—our emotions, cognitive development, common disorders, and so on—that are highly useful and almost unknown outside of her profession.

Or consider someone becoming a physicist. She wants to learn about dark matter and dark energy, or where mass comes from, or black holes, or non-locality. But on the way there, she learns basic facts about light, electricity, magnetism, mechanics, stars, galaxies, radically different kinds of planets, and so on. Those facts are pretty significant.

Similarly, in virtue of investigating the big questions in philosophy, one will come to understand a great many intellectual matters that other people can't. She can assess evidence outside of philosophy much better than most people. She can understand and even contribute to scientific research, public policy, and other areas better than just about anyone outside of those areas. She almost never falls for foolish ideas, such as astrology, the paranormal, primitive religious views, Shamanism, reiki, and so on. She doesn't fall for the many foolish ideas about expertise. She knows, better than anyone else, the relations amongst the notions listed earlier, which gives her a leg up when thinking about *almost any* complex or controversial topic: *knowledge, true belief, evidentially reasonable belief, practically useful belief, emotionally comforting belief, socially accepted belief, highly confidently held belief*, and *belief for which you have an overwhelming feeling that it's true*. That's not anything like being able to do 100 pushups (which is not meant to minimize the tremendous health benefits associated with such a feat!).

Nothing will stop one from adopting a conception of philosophy that doesn't include the communal knowledge of Basic facts. But in that case one is neglecting a unique and highly valuable achievement of the discipline—along with *a way to fight the political forces that want to diminish support for philosophy*. It's a familiar but impoverished conception.

9. Philosophical Expertise and Progress

Many philosophers have offered skeptical thoughts about philosophical expertise or progress (e.g., Kornblith 2013, Shand 2017, Dietrich 2011, Chalmers 2015, Licon 2023, Lougheed 2019, Hannon & Nguyen forthcoming, and Brennan 2010). To a rough approximation, I claim that knowledge of Basic facts is a significant component of both philosophical expertise and progress.

However, the terms "philosophical expertise" and "philosophical progress" are slippery enough that we have to proceed cautiously in figuring out what our knowledge of the Basic facts says about expertise and progress. Without disambiguation it's foolish to even start the debate. To move forward, we examine "date" and "proton".

Chris and Alex are dating each other. Alex has a more generous conception of dating than Chris does. If Chris and Alex give different responses, "3" and "6", to the prompt "How many dates did you two go on in the last two months?", neither one is wrong, as the semantics of "date" can switch with contextual factors and the conceptions the speakers hold can count as relevant contextual factors. In contrast, if they give different responses, "3" and "6", to the prompt "How many protons are in the atom of that element?", at least one of them is wrong. Their conceptions of protons don't count when it comes to fixing semantic values.

Although I'm skeptical, the terms "philosophical expertise" and "philosophical progress" *might* be just like "proton" and unlike "date" in having meanings that aren't terribly conception dependent, so when I say "Basic facts are part of philosophical progress and expertise" and a critic says "No, they're not", just one of us is right. However, it's more likely that the terms are more similar to "date" than to "proton" when it comes to context dependence. In that case both my remark and my critic's remark might be true, if we have sufficiently different conceptions of philosophical progress/expertise and the terms allow for both conceptions as contextual factors fixing semantic values.

So much for the warm-up. Let's go over this matter with some care, treating "expertise" before "progress".

Suppose first that I'm wrong and "philosophical expertise" is more like "proton" than "date" when it comes to context dependence. If so, then my position is that knowledge of Basic facts is a significant component of expertise, even though it's clearly less "deep" or advanced than other alleged components of such expertise, whatever they happen to be. It's knowledge that we acquire through the study of philosophy, and it belongs mainly to the discipline of philosophy alone.

The comparison with physics is helpful. The rough analogy to the philosophical Basic facts would be the material covered in introductory undergraduate courses in physics, primarily for first-year students. Knowing that material is definitely part of any physicist's expertise—but it's certainly not the most impressive, most advanced part. When considering philosophical expertise, it's a mistake to leave out our knowledge of the relations amongst the eight epistemic states listed in the discussion of PRACTICAL in section 6, for instance, for the same reason it's a mistake to leave out facts about the introductory parts of classical mechanics, atomic theory, electromagnetism, thermodynamics, or optics when considering the expertise of a physicist. *If* "expertise for philosophers" and "expertise for physicists" are roughly as uniform across meanings as "proton" is, then it's a mistake to leave out the lower-level components of expertise just mentioned. Just because a physicist wouldn't mention it on their CV doesn't mean it's not part of their expertise. They don't need to mention it because it's understood by everyone involved that it's covered.

Now suppose that I'm right that "philosophical expertise" is more like "date" than "proton" when it comes to context dependence. In that case, I suppose one might want to use "philosophical expertise" to capture *just* the most advanced discipline-related knowledge philosophers have—and the meaning-determining factors for the term would allow such a semantic value. Under that interpretation, "Knowledge of the Basic facts is a component of philosophical expertise" is false. That's fine with me! But then I insist that for most other purposes the term has a broader semantic value so that knowledge of Basic facts counts as a low-level component of philosophical expertise, for the reasons given in the

previous paragraph. It's discipline-specific knowledge that is had by members of our profession but not people outside it, and we obtained it via studying and doing philosophy.

In brief, there is genuine philosophical expertise, but almost all of us have been looking in the wrong places for at least one of its central components. When looking for philosophical expertise authors usually look at intuitions about *controversial* thought experiments, such as those about the reference of proper names, Gettier cases, compatibilist free will scenarios, the Chinese room, Mary in the black-and-white room, Fake Barns, Twin Earth, Nozick's Experience Machine, Thomson's Violinist, and various personal identity scenarios (e.g., Egler and Ross 2020, Horvath and Wiegmann 2016, Nado 2014, Schindler and Saint-Germier 2023, and Williamson 2011). Nothing in this paper says anything, pro or con, about our alleged philosophical expertise about those cases.

The serious objections to philosophical expertise—doubts about the reliability of philosophical intuitions, cultural variations of judgment, framing effects, and so on—have no plausibility when applied to our knowledge of Basic facts (for evaluation of those objections, see papers mentioned in previous paragraph). Those objections target our opinions on the truth-values of philosophical claims that are much more controversial—such as ones associated with the thought experiments listed in the previous paragraph. Even if those objections are sound when hitting those more controversial claims, they don't touch our Basics knowledge. No critic of philosophical expertise is worrying about philosophers' convictions that some highly confident beliefs aren't true, some beliefs are practically useful but not evidentially reasonable, a person might be evidentially reasonable in denying a claim even when the publicly available evidence regarding it is strong, and so on. This doesn't mean we understand the epistemic basis of our knowledge of Basic facts, but it does mean we aren't worried about whether it's reliable (assuming, as mentioned earlier, the falsehood of radical ideas such as eliminativism, truth nihilism, and the like).

The story with "philosophical progress" probably is more complex than that for "philosophical expertise". When we use "progress" we often think of the epistemic improvement that applies to the discipline itself, instead of individuals. For instance, we wonder about the epistemic improvement going from *philosophy a century ago* to *philosophy today*. Perhaps there is no such epistemic improvement when it comes to knowledge of Basic facts: the typical philosopher from a century ago might be just as knowledgeable as us when it comes to the Basic facts of philosophy. That's a matter for historians, not me. For what it's worth, I suspect that if you go back many centuries, the typical philosophers had a much weaker grasp of the Basic facts compared to us today.

However, there's another way to construe "philosophical progress": it's the epistemic gap (set aside other kinds of gaps) regarding philosophical issues going from *typical moderately-educated non-philosopher* to *typical philosopher*, which occurs as a result of studying philosophy. I'm not saying that that's the only way or even best of multiple ways to construe "philosophical progress". It's not! So, my thesis PROGRESS is modest. But my construal of "philosophical progress" is one useful way to construe progress: it tells us the epistemic improvement philosophy has achieved starting from a state of little philosophical awareness. And in *that* sense of "progress", knowledge of Basic facts is clearly a component of philosophical progress. This is enough to conclude that the skeptical views about philosophical progress are either false or significantly exaggerated.

A natural objection to both EXPERTISE and PROGRESS is that the Basic facts are too elementary to amount to a *significant* part of either philosophical expertise or progress. However, this objection seriously underestimates the epistemic gap between knowing/not knowing the Basic facts. I already addressed this point when evaluating IGNORANCE and EPISTEMIC in section 6. Philosophers shouldn't be so modest: our knowledge of the Basic facts is a lot less elementary than many of us think.

It is clear that "philosophical progress" is more like "date" than "proton" when it comes to varying conceptions affecting semantic values. To see this, consider first how it's common, when discussing philosophical progress, to talk about how an enormous portion of philosophy's progress comes from generating or radically improving epistemically successful fields of study. There was a time when our discipline hadn't had a significant role in generating most of modal logic, or a good portion of linguistics. Then, later, our discipline had made those enormous epistemic achievements. If that's not epistemic progress over time, what is? So, it might be thought, that work in logic and linguistics *must* be included in the epistemic progress of philosophy.

Nope. There's nothing preventing us from using "philosophical progress" to restrict ourselves to the generation of philosophical knowledge that doesn't belong to other fields—"proper" or "internal" philosophical progress, if you will. Both conceptions of philosophical progress are reasonable, useful in discussion, and count as contextual factors in fixing the semantic values of some standard uses of "philosophical progress".

My preference—which has no chance of being followed—would be for philosophers to ditch the terms "philosophical expertise" and "philosophical progress" entirely, as they just invite confusion generated by operating with differing conceptions. In particular, arguing over what philosophical progress "consists in" is like arguing over what a date *really* is, regardless of varying conceptions. It indicates a linguistic mistake, ignoring context sensitivity. As an alternative, I find it useful to think in terms of *epistemic improvement or gap*, temporal or not, in at least the ways I have been doing (e.g., from *typical moderately-educated non-philosopher* to *typical philosopher*, from *discipline at one time* to *discipline at a later time*, from *philosopher early in their education* to *philosopher later in their career*).

Some philosophers seem to think there is little or no significant philosophical progress at all, setting aside its influence on other fields (e.g., Dietrich 2011, Shand 2017, Lougheed 2019, Tőzsér 2023). We have done enough here to show that that's a mistake. However, most authors are careful to say that there is little to no significant progress on the "big" or "fundamental" or "central" questions of philosophy (e.g., Chalmers 2015, Kornblith 2013, Hannon & Nguyen forthcoming). Charitably interpreted, this allows for plenty of progress on non-big questions, which is my claim. So, my theses are consistent with the views of those authors, again charitably interpreted (this is another application of the interpretation "theme" I mentioned in section 5).

Yet other authors are more difficult to pin down. Russell's famous remark, "Philosophy is to be studied, not for the sake of any definite answers to its questions, since no definite answers can, as a rule, be known to be true, but rather for the sake of the questions themselves" (1912/1964, 161) *can* be charitably interpreted as focusing on the "big" issues only but it's difficult (for me) to know if that's accurate. The same holds for van Inwagen's "Disagreement in philosophy is pervasive and irresoluble. There is almost no thesis in philosophy about which philosophers agree"

(2004, 334). Regardless of the interpretation issue, those authors failed to recognize the existence of pervasive philosophical agreement leading to the theses defended in this essay. In that sense, I disagree with their claims.

I have been focusing on our knowledge of Basic facts as a component of philosophical expertise and progress. But our knowledge of Intermediate facts, as characterized at the end of section 3, might be another component. However, I'm less certain of it since I have not been able to satisfactorily list many uncontroversial examples that I think we have communal knowledge of.

There are loads of questions about the knowledge of Basic facts that I can't answer! For instance, I would love to know *when* in their philosophical work philosophers learn them (it's obvious they don't know them as teenagers; they do know them as professors; so when did the bulk of learning happen?), how they learn them (since we don't learn most of them consciously, was it just via "messing around with" epistemic concepts in a variety of ways, thereby increasing mastery?), how long it takes (surely years), and what this Basics knowledge most fundamentally consists in (factual knowledge, ability knowledge, or something else—or is this a poor question?). There's no reason to think the correct answers will be the same across philosophical subfields. My guess is that learning the facts isn't similar to learning a bunch of new facts about a notion one *already* understands well, such as dining room tables or apples. Instead, it's a case of acquiring a much more nuanced and accurate conceptual framework—just as the math teaching case suggested (or think of the typical student's grasp of the notions of logical structure and deductive inference, before and after your logic class). For my purposes in this paper, I just want the comparatively modest theses that we have this Basics knowledge, as a result of our training, typical moderately-educated non-philosophers don't, and learning it is a big deal in multiple respects.[1]

APPENDIX

See section 2 for strict instructions on how to interpret the following 200 claims.

1. Beliefs can be positive, negative, trivial, controversial, silly, serious, short-term, long-term, and concern just about any topic.
2. Some beliefs are true while others are false.
3. We believe *in* things, such as people, political causes, and organizations. These cases of believing-in-X typically involve many positive, favorable beliefs about X.
4. We often don't consciously believe something but are easily disposed to believe it, if we are just asked and given a short time to consider.
5. One person can doubt what another believes, another disbelieves, another wonders about, another assumes, etc.
6. Evidence can be positive or negative. Positive evidence for a belief B is evidence that suggests B is true. Negative evidence regarding B is evidence that suggests B is false; it's sometimes called *counterevidence*.

[1] Thanks to the editor and referees for their stimulating suggestions.

7. In ordinary life we occasionally have both strong positive evidence and strong negative evidence regarding the same particular belief.
8. One's *overall* evidence is the combination of all one's evidence regarding that belief.
9. We sometimes use the terms "rational", "justified", and "reasonable" in such a way that a belief is evidentially rational, reasonable, and justified and when the believer's overall evidence that she bases her belief on is strongly supportive of the belief. Her belief is evidentially irrational, unjustified, and unreasonable when her overall evidence that she bases her belief on is not strongly supportive of the belief.
10. A "mere opinion" (or "just his opinion") is typically a belief, that may or may not be true, but is evidentially unjustified and doesn't amount to knowledge because it isn't based on good overall supporting evidence.
11. A particular belief can start out evidentially reasonable, become evidentially unreasonable (with the acquisition of strong counterevidence), and then go back to being evidentially reasonable (when new supporting evidence is found, especially if it debunks the counterevidence).
12. There are at least three basic cognitive attitudes one can take to a claim: believe it, disbelieve it, or suspend judgment on it.
13. One often does and often should, in an evidential sense, suspend judgment on a potential belief B when one sees that one has virtually no decent evidence at all about B.
14. One often does and often should, in an evidential sense, suspend judgment on a potential belief B when one sees that one's evidence for B is about the same in strength as one's evidence against B.
15. One often does and often should, in an evidential sense, suspend judgment on a potential belief B when one sees that one has no idea what the overall evidence regarding B says, since that evidence is so hard to assess.
16. One often does and often should, in an evidential sense, suspend judgment on a potential belief B when one knows that one has a very strong bias or prejudice or something similar that could very easily sway one in the wrong direction regarding B.
17. Suspension of judgment is not the same thing as adopting some other person's view on the matter, pro or con. When you suspend judgment on some belief, you neither believe it nor disbelieve it.
18. In some cases, suspension of judgment is temporary. Other times it is permanent, or nearly so.
19. Suspending judgment on C ≠ not acting on C. Just because you suspend judgment on some claim (so you don't believe it or disbelieve it) doesn't mean that you can't act on it.
20. Tribal signaling is often different from belief. We sometimes seem to make ordinary assertions and seem to express beliefs when really all we are doing is signaling to others that we support a certain group, even if we don't have the beliefs in question.
21. Two people can say the very same words in expressing themselves even though one is expressing an ordinary belief while another is just tribal signaling without belief.

22. "Faith" has several closely related meanings that it is easy to get confused about. Sometimes faith = evidential trust, as when you have trust, based on evidence, that something is true. Other times faith is little more than a practically or emotionally useful trust. Still other times it is mere hope in the absence of good overall evidence.
23. A person can be entirely evidentially reasonable in suspending judgment on a claim they have some strong evidence for.
24. Some beliefs are beneficial, in a practical sense, for a person to have, regardless of whether they are based on good overall evidence. We can call them *practically useful*.
25. A belief can be both practically useful and evidentially rational.
26. A belief can be neither practically useful nor evidentially rational.
27. A belief can be practically useful in different ways, as when one belief makes you feel much better about yourself and significantly boosts your self-esteem, while another belief need not make you feel better about yourself but spurs you into action that benefits your life.
28. Two people could have the same belief but one person's belief is evidentially irrational while the other's is evidentially rational, due to the fact that the first person bases her belief on weak overall evidence and the second person bases her belief on strong overall evidence.
29. You can have strong evidence for your belief even though it's evidentially irrational for you to have it.
30. You can have strong evidence against your belief even though it's evidentially rational for you to have it.
31. It's possible for someone to have a belief that you know perfectly well to be false and yet their belief is based on excellent overall evidence.
32. There are many kinds of evidence (in one ordinary sense of "evidence"): sensory (you saw your brother making lunch), physical (the sandwich he made), ordinary testimonial (your mother said your young brother did a fine job making lunch), expert testimonial (a repairman says that your car's carburetor is broken), memorial (you vividly remember her stealing the jewelry), mathematical (you figure out how much money to tip the server at a restaurant), and so on.
33. Several people can have the same evidentially reasonable belief but have very different bodies of evidence for it.
34. For the most part, if you feel as though you definitely remember something, your memory is right. For instance, if you seem to clearly remember living in Saudi Arabia, or that Bill Clinton was president of the USA, or that winter is colder than summer, you're probably right. The exceptions exist alongside an enormous number of unremarkable successes.
35. Sometimes intuitions are real evidence (you "use your intuition" to find your way home when lost, or a tennis player uses her intuition to know what her opponent is going to do next). However, in many cases what people call a case of intuition isn't evidence at all but just lucky guessing at best.
36. Sometimes feelings are real evidence (you can feel that it's going to rain; you can feel that something is wrong with your elbow; a trained pianist can feel what the other jazz musicians are trying to do).

However, in many cases what people call feelings aren't evidence at all but vague guessing or lucky guessing.

37. Roughly put, in many cases something counts as strong evidence for a belief when it significantly increases the likelihood that the belief is true. It counts as weak evidence when it increases the likelihood by a lesser amount.

38. Just because someone thinks they have strong evidence for their belief doesn't mean that they actually have strong evidence for it. In that specific sense, evidence is objective.

39. Sometimes you have a belief that is supported by evidence that lots of people have, other times you have a belief that is supported by evidence that no one other than you has, and in yet other cases there is a mixture of "public" and "private" evidence.

40. In many cases, if you have a belief based on good but not overwhelming overall evidence, and then you acquire new evidence that supports the same belief to a significant extent, where the new evidence is quite different from the old evidence, then you are evidentially reasonable in increasing your confidence in that belief.

41. Just because the publicly available and well-known evidence regarding an idea is overwhelmingly strong, a person might be evidentially reasonable in denying it, if they haven't been exposed to even a hint of that evidence.

42. Some belief-forming methods are highly reliable in resulting in true beliefs (e.g. visual perception or simple arithmetic), while others are much less reliable (e.g., wishful thinking).

43. One can have different levels of confidence in the truth of a claim, as when one person is extremely confident it's true while another person agrees it's true but isn't as confident as the first person that it's true.

44. Ordinary levels of confidence in a belief are not levels or degrees of truth. I might believe something with more confidence than you believe it, but in virtually all cases that says something about our psychology, not about the truth of our shared belief.

45. There are lots of "kinds" of knowledge: knowing how, knowing where, knowing what, knowing who, knowing when, knowing that, knowing an object, and knowing why.

46. You can know how to do something even though you can't do it yourself, as for example when you're a teacher of an athlete.

47. Just because two people know what something is, doesn't mean that they know all the same facts about it; furthermore, one of them might know what it is much better than the other person.

48. Just because you don't know something that a great many other people know, you need not have done anything wrong in lacking that knowledge, as there aren't time and resources available to learn everything that others have figured out.

49. You can sometimes gain new knowledge by reasoning from already existing knowledge.

50. Knowledge (in the sense of "knowing that") always or almost always requires truth: you can't know something unless it's true.

51. Knowledge (in the sense of "knowing that") always or almost always requires good evidence: you can't know something unless your belief is based on good evidence. But there are lots of kinds of evidence, and they can be quite different from one another.
52. Knowledge (in the sense of "knowing that") is almost always objective: just because you or other people think you know something doesn't mean that you really do know it.
53. It's often true that in order to know *what it's like* to X, one has to have had some relevant first-hand experience instead of mere testimony (e.g., in order to know what it's like to see color, to be pregnant, to be humiliated, to win a sports championship).
54. All at one time, a belief can be socially accepted in a particular relatively unified group of people, socially rejected by another relatively unified group of people, and unknown to a yet third relatively unified group.
55. True but evidentially unreasonable belief is possible.
56. True but not practically useful belief is possible.
57. True but not highly confident belief is possible.
58. True belief that doesn't amount to knowledge is possible.
59. True belief that isn't socially accepted (in a given group) is possible.
60. Evidentially reasonable but false belief is possible.
61. Evidentially reasonable but not highly confident belief is possible.
62. Evidentially reasonable but not practically useful belief is possible.
63. Evidentially reasonable belief that doesn't amount to knowledge is possible.
64. Evidentially reasonable belief that isn't socially accepted is possible.
65. Practically useful but false belief is possible.
66. Practically useful but evidentially unreasonable belief is possible.
67. Practically useful but not highly confident belief is possible.
68. Practically useful belief that doesn't amount to knowledge is possible.
69. Practically useful belief that isn't socially accepted is possible.
70. Highly confident but false belief is possible.
71. Highly confident but evidentially unreasonable belief is possible.
72. Highly confident but not practically useful belief is possible.
73. Highly confident belief that doesn't amount to knowledge is possible.
74. Highly confident belief that isn't socially accepted is possible.
75. Socially accepted belief that isn't evidentially reasonable is possible.
76. Socially accepted belief that isn't practically useful is possible.
77. Socially accepted belief that isn't highly confident is possible.
78. Socially accepted belief that isn't true is possible.
79. Socially accepted belief that doesn't amount to knowledge is possible.
80. Knowledge without highly confident belief is possible.

81. Knowledge without practically useful belief is possible.
82. Knowledge without socially accepted belief is possible.
83. True belief that wasn't evidentially inferred is possible (an evidentially inferred belief is one that was acquired from previous beliefs via an evidentially reasonable inference).
84. Practically useful belief that wasn't evidentially inferred is possible.
85. Highly confident held belief that wasn't evidentially inferred is possible.
86. Socially accepted belief that wasn't evidentially inferred is possible.
87. Evidentially inferred belief that isn't true is possible.
88. Evidentially inferred belief that isn't evidentially reasonable is possible.
89. Evidentially inferred belief that isn't practically useful is possible.
90. Evidentially inferred belief that isn't highly confident is possible.
91. Evidentially inferred belief that doesn't amount to knowledge is possible.
92. Evidentially inferred belief that isn't socially accepted is possible.
93. It's arguable that one can have an evidentially reasonable and true belief without it amounting to knowledge, but these cases would be rare in ordinary life.
94. Roughly put, a good reason for believing a claim C often is some fact that makes the belief C more likely to be true. A desire for C to be true often is a strong hope or want that C be true because if it is true then the desire will be satisfied. A cause of believing C consists of whatever things actually caused you to adopt that belief.
95. You can have several different reasons to believe something, and the reasons can differ in how strong they are.
96. One can have a good reason to believe something without actually believing it.
97. One can have a good reason to believe something without wanting it to be true.
98. One can want something to be true even though one doesn't have a good reason to believe it's true.
99. One can be caused to believe something even though one doesn't have a good reason to believe it.
100. One can be caused to believe something even though one doesn't want it to be true.
101. One can want something to be true even though one doesn't believe it.
102. The term "reason for a belief" can, depending on conversational context, mean the cause of the belief or a piece of evidence for a belief, which can be either strongly or weakly supportive. So, "reason" is ambiguous.
103. You might have reasons for one of your beliefs but you don't actually base your belief on those reasons, or you do so to only a tiny extent.
104. In order to separate the true experts from the people who only think they are experts, it's often helpful to look at their credentials:
    - Do they have a Master's degree or PhD in the relevant field?
    - Do they do actual research that gets published in professional, peer-reviewed journals?

- If they don't, do they often cite and thoroughly discuss research published in professional, peer-reviewed journals when making claims they say they have expertise on?

105. One tricky problem with expert testimonial evidence is that just because someone's an expert in one domain doesn't mean they are expert in other domains, even closely related ones.

106. One tricky problem with expert testimonial evidence is that for some culturally sensitive topics, we can be fooled into not asking or actively ignoring the relevant genuine experts.

107. One tricky problem with expert testimonial evidence is that there are lots of cases where there is genuine difficulty—independently of deception—in figuring who, if anyone, is a genuine expert.

108. One of the most important things about expert testimony is this: you need to figure out what testimony is trustworthy. Roughly put, testimony is trustworthy when it is reliably right.

109. It's often best to follow the collective judgment of many experts rather than just one expert's opinion on a difficult topic.

110. Two people can both be genuine experts on a topic and yet one is much more expert on it than the other person.

111. When it comes to a specific topic, one expert might have a great depth of expertise about one relatively narrow part of the topic while another expert might have less depth but more breath to her expertise on the topic.

112. There are times when the experts on a given claim think it's false even though the vast majority of non-experts, numbering in the millions, think it's true.

113. In many cases, a person can be an expert in a field even though they suspend judgment on many important claims from that field.

114. In many cases, a person can be an expert in a field even though they make a significant number of mistakes in that field.

115. Even when you are following the beliefs or advice of someone you consider an expert, you usually are still the one in charge, being autonomous and holding the reins of your intellectual life, since you are the one choosing which experts to follow, if any.

116. In many cases, you not only have evidence E1 for one of your beliefs B, but you get new evidence E2 about how supportive that evidence E1 is for B. E2 is sometimes called *higher-order evidence*.

117. In some cases, higher-order evidence E2 suggests that E1 is true but supports B only weakly.

118. In some cases, higher-order evidence E2 suggests E1 is false.

119. Group disagreements: when I discover that there are many people who disagree with me regarding my belief B, how do I know that my group (the people who agree with me) have been in a better position to judge B than the group who disagree with me? In many real-life cases, I have no good reason to think my group has been in a better position to judge B. That suggests, but doesn't prove, we should suspend judgment a fair amount.

120. Epistemic superiors: when I discover that someone who is clearly an expert compared to me, when it comes to the topics relevant to my belief, disagrees with me on that particular belief, should I give up

my belief, since it seems that it's more probable that they are right than I am right? For a great many controversial beliefs I have, there are going to be many legitimate experts who disagree with me. That suggests, but doesn't prove, we should suspend judgment a fair amount.

121. Disagreement among experts: when I discover that the experts haven't reached any stable consensus about B, shouldn't I suspend judgment about B? That seems reasonable, but experts disagree in a significant (not minor) manner pretty often, so I may end up having to suspend judgment quite often.

122. Many of us fall for the temptation of focusing on the experts we agree with, and conveniently ignore those we disagree with. That suggests, but doesn't prove, we should suspend judgment a fair amount.

123. Unrepresentative evidence: in a great many cases, I know perfectly well that my confident belief is based on only a small portion of the available evidence, which I could get if I just did a little research. But I don't have time to research! There is a real risk that my evidence is one-sided or otherwise unrepresentative. That suggests, but doesn't prove, we should suspend judgment a fair amount.

124. Cultural variability: often our important beliefs seem more a result of the culture we grew up in instead of being the result of having real, good reasons for those beliefs. A good portion of our religious, moral, and political beliefs seem like that. That suggests, but doesn't prove, that we should suspend judgment a fair amount.

125. Reflecting on disagreement can spur one to start thinking for oneself, realizing that one has uncritically adopted the beliefs of others when one probably shouldn't have.

126. In order to be respectful in a disagreement, which often will make it much more pleasant, efficient, and illuminating for everyone, you can do two things, one negative and one positive. (a) Do not get angry or mock, belittle, misconstrue, or insult those who disagree with you. (b) Soften the blow by emphasizing to them one or more positive features of their (false) belief.

127. When we learn that someone intelligent disagrees with one of our personally important beliefs, we often tell ourselves things that we don't have much evidence for but make us feel comfortable, such as "They aren't really as well informed as I am", "They are far more biased or prejudiced on the topic than I am", "They aren't as smart as they seem", or "They don't really disagree with me even though it looks that way".

128. There typically is a causal explanation for the acquisition of a belief, but in some cases the person has no good evidence for their belief, so their belief is evidentially unjustified. So, just because you explain why someone has a belief doesn't mean that you have shown or think that their belief was based on good evidence.

129. If you attempt to evidentially justify your belief B, then you are typically trying to point out the overall good evidence you have for B.

130. If you attempt to morally justify your action A, then you are typically trying to point out the good moral basis you have doing A.

131. Explanations of behavior differ from moral justifications of behavior. You can explain why he did something without even faintly suggesting that what he did was morally ok.

132. When we say, correctly, that some idea is "certain", sometimes all we mean is that lots of people are highly confident in it. Other times, to say an idea is certain is to say something like "The overall evidence we have regarding the idea is extremely strong in favor of it". So, "being certain" has at least a couple meanings.

133. When we say, correctly, that someone is being "honest", sometimes all we mean is that they are saying things that they sincerely believe to be true. Other times, to say someone is being honest is to say that they are saying things that they sincerely believe and that are really true. So, "being honest" has at least a couple meanings.

134. Truth and falsity are objective in this sense: whether a claim is true, or false, is virtually never affected by anyone's thoughts about whether it is true or false.

135. There are many false beliefs that are highly useful, due to the fact that they are (i) in the vicinity of a truth, and (ii) that truth is both relevant and important to the discussion. For instance, it's false that he has PTSD, but it's true that he has some serious unresolved psychological difficulties that are ruining his relationships; it's false that you can achieve your goals if you just have the right mindset, but it's true that you can often initiate huge progress towards many of your important goals in life by merely altering your mindset appropriately.

136. When someone expresses a highly useful false belief, it's often not a good idea to point out that it's false, because (i) it would waste time and effort to do so, (ii) it might elicit anger or other harmful feelings to do so, (iii) the falsehood is often good enough for most practical purposes, or (iv) the person might care a lot more about the truth that's close by than the falsehood itself.

137. We use the terms "true" and "fact" in a variety of very different ways in ordinary life. Sometimes we use "fact" and "truth" not for any old claim that happens to be true but one that is both true and proven or justified or at least has excellent overall evidence backing it up. Other times we use "fact" and "truth" for claims that are widely accepted in some community, even if in fact the claims in question are actually false. On yet other occasions, "fact" and/or "truth" get used to pick out claims that are widely accepted and also considered important.

138. We use the term "valid" in a variety of different ways. Often enough, saying that someone has a "valid point" is to say that you agree that they have some decent amount of supporting evidence for their belief, even though you don't go so far as to admit that their belief is true. A "valid criticism" is often an argument that you admit to have at least some force against you: its premises are at least reasonable, and if they were really true, then would provide some good even if less than conclusive reason to think that your critic is right and you're wrong.

139. Many of our beliefs are about people's opinions, feelings, or thoughts but are still objectively true or false. If you think claim C, which is about Jo's mind, is true, then whether C really is true is virtually never affected by anyone's opinions about whether C is true or false. Whether C is true depends on Jo's mind.

140. According to some ideas about morality, moral claims are objective since whether they are true doesn't depend on whether people think they are true--even though whether they are true may depend on people's minds and behavior. Under some other ideas, moral claims aren't objective since whether they are true does depend on whether people sincerely, more or less naturally, think they are true.

141. Some of our beliefs (e.g., some political ones) satisfy three related conditions. We can call those beliefs *publicly subjective*.

- The beliefs have no obvious, knock down proof that is publicly available.
- We tend to be tolerant of the beliefs in the sense of not challenging them in a great many and variety of conversational contexts. We tend to say "You're entitled to your opinion" regarding the claim in question.
- Whether people accept these beliefs often depends mostly on what cultural groups they come from, where the groups might be religious, philosophical, political, ethnic, sexual, or whatever.

142. A claim that is objectively true can be publicly subjective. Objectivity and this kind of subjectivity need not rule each other out.

143. Some claims are true for a great many people and false for a great many other people depending on people's preferences about things like fear, taste, comfort, pleasure, and so on (e.g., "Chocolate tastes better than vanilla", "Sky diving is scary"). Call this *preferential subjectivity*.

144. A preferentially subjective claim, such as "Chocolate tastes better than vanilla", rests upon a great number of objectively true claims about people's reactions and preferences. Hence, preferential subjectivity rests upon objective truth.

145. Some claims are publicly but not preferentially subjective (e.g., "Jesus rose from the dead").

146. Some claims are preferentially but not publicly subjective (e.g., "Chocolate tastes better than vanilla").

147. Some claims have neither kind of subjectivity (e.g., "Water contains hydrogen").

148. Some claims might have both kinds of subjectivity, although this is controversial (e.g., "Having children is the primary means to living a fulfilling life").

149. A belief is *relative* when it is true with respect to one thing but false with respect to something else. The things that a belief might be relative to are diverse: geographical locations (e.g., "I am ten meters from you"), spatial orientations (e.g., "I am on your left"), communities (e.g., "Billie Eilish is famous"), sets of rules (e.g., "Three strikes and you're out"), laws (e.g., "You have to drive on the left side of the road"), etc.

150. All preferentially subjective claims are relative (every preferentially subjective claim is relative to preferences), but not all relative claims are preferentially subjective (a relative claim can be relative to things other than preferences).

151. Roughly put, a person P has wisdom on subject S (e.g., French poetry, baseball, hair styling) = P has extremely impressive knowledge of S compared to others.

152. Another notion of wisdom = knowing how to live life extraordinarily well. There are at least three aspects to this: moral wisdom, psychological wisdom, and intellectual wisdom.

153. Moral wisdom: roughly put, a person has this kind of wisdom if she knows how to treat others in an exceptionally fair, just, moral manner, even in confusing circumstances—and she actually lives her life that way too, as long as she is not prevented from doing so.

154. Psychological wisdom: roughly put, a person has this kind of wisdom if she can surprisingly often look into someone's mind and see many of the usually hidden levers that govern their behavior, beliefs, desires, preferences, and choices in life. We are almost like teenagers to her, with motives, fears, hopes, and the rest that are often transparent to her view. This wise person often knows your mind better than you do, at least in some important respects. She can use this psychological knowledge in order to live life in such a way as to achieve a higher degree of well-being and fulfilment, for both herself and those individuals lucky enough to take her advice.

155. Intellectual wisdom: roughly put, a person has this kind of wisdom if she knows how to conduct her intellectual life extraordinarily well. She is expert at regulating her thinking, judging, and believing activity, knowing how to reason extraordinarily well, to think creatively, to adjust her confidence in a claim in accord with the strength of the evidence she knows about, to suspend judgment when the evidence is inconclusive, to spot and take into account genuine expertise, to track the quality of her own evidential position, to spot the signs of irrationality in herself and others, and so on.

156. It's possible for someone to have a pretty high degree of intellectual and psychological wisdom but relatively little moral wisdom.

157. It's possible for someone to have a pretty high degree of moral and psychological wisdom but relatively little intellectual wisdom.

158. It's possible for someone to have a pretty high degree of moral and intellectual wisdom but relatively little psychological wisdom.

159. It's possible for someone to have a pretty high degree of moral wisdom but relatively little psychological or intellectual wisdom.

160. It's possible for someone to have a pretty high degree of intellectual wisdom but relatively little psychological or moral wisdom.

161. It's possible for someone to have a pretty high degree of psychological wisdom but relatively little moral or intellectual wisdom.

162. It's possible for someone to have a pretty high IQ but relatively little intellectual wisdom.

163. It's possible for someone to have a fair amount of sophisticated knowledge but relatively little intellectual wisdom.

164. It's possible for someone to have a pretty high degree of intellectual wisdom but relatively little sophisticated knowledge.

165. One good reason to get comfortable with being intellectually humble is that there are oodles of topics that you are ignorant of even though you "should" know them, according to some people or societal standards.

166. One good reason to get comfortable with being intellectually humble is that there were some episodes in your life when you turned out to be spectacularly wrong (e.g., you were totally confident in a belief B, and then you found out that B was just plain false).

167. One good reason to get comfortable with being intellectually humble is that the phenomenon of pervasive intelligent disagreement shows that many of us know significantly less than we think we know, even when we manage to have true beliefs.

168. One good reason to get comfortable with being intellectually humble is that counterintuitive discoveries are not rare.

169. Open-mindedness is often a good thing because it allows us to acquire new, useful knowledge; but it has to be used carefully, as it can easily lead to our agreeing to false beliefs too.

170. Although there is no generally accepted definition of what it means to be an intelligent person, there are at least four characteristics often associated with such people: comparatively high degrees or amounts of raw intellectual power or ability (RIP), intellectual curiosity (IC), advanced education (AE), and diversity of intellectual interests (DI), where the latter are things you're intellectually curious about.

171. You can have RIP without IC, AE, or DI.

172. You can have IC without RIP, AE, or DI.

173. You can have AE without DI, IC, or RIP.

174. You can have DI without RIP or AE, but not without IC.

175. Useful rule: Don't overestimate the strength of your evidence for your belief.

176. Useful rule: Don't underestimate the evidential significance of intelligent disagreement regarding something you care about.

177. Useful rule: Don't underestimate the difficulty of determining how strong a piece of evidence is, for a given claim.

178. Useful rule: Don't forget the fact that one's evidence is sometimes, in key cases, unrepresentative.

179. Useful rule: Don't forget the fact that there often is a great deal of evidence against your belief that you don't know about.

180. Useful rule: Don't forget that you are rarely an expert on an issue, even if you are generally smart and have done some diligent investigation into the issue.

181. Useful rule: Don't mistake making quick judgments on one's immediate evidence for having a good basis for belief.

182. Useful rule: Don't refuse to acknowledge counterevidence, especially when faced with it.

183. Useful rule: Don't forget that in many cases, if your belief were true, then experts would have enthusiastically discovered and announced it by now.

184. Useful rule: Don't forget the danger in acknowledging rules for wisdom but utterly failing to live by them.

185. Useful rule: Try to accurately assess evidence regarding a claim even when you are wracked with strong emotions about the claim.

186. Useful rule: Try to identify and take into account higher-order evidence.

187. Useful rule: Try to be sensitive to relevant ambiguity, context dependence, and vagueness.

188. Useful rule: When you have a controversial view, try to know the other side as well as your opponents do.

189. Useful rule: If you have a controversial view, and according to you the many people who disagree with you are almost all seriously ignorant or even cruel, then you've probably misunderstood them.

190. Useful rule: Try to be intellectually courageous, so you are comfortable investigating and adopting controversial or even taboo topics and views, for instance.

191. Useful rule: Try to focus on the central questions on an issue. Don't get excessively sidetracked on minor points.

192. Sometimes we confuse "It's possible that X will happen" or "X could happen" with "There's a real chance X will happen", which can cause us to worry excessively over something that has almost no chance of happening.

193. We often endorse a wide-ranging generalization based on nothing more than (a) just a few (b) particularly vivid instances about people or issues (c) we care about deeply. In such cases, our evidence for the wide-ranging generalization is often weak.

194. In some cases, when faced with deciding whether to do something, it's practically useful to do it even when, viewed in isolation, the pros are outweighed by the cons, when every realistically available choice is even worse.

195. An argument is a piece of reasoning intended to support some idea. (The term "argument" has other meanings too.) It's a series of claims, one of which is the conclusion and the others are premises. An argument is not a claim. It is not true and it is not false. An argument can be good or bad, but it's not true or false.

196. A conclusion is the part of the argument that the argument is intended to support. A premise is a claim in an argument that is supposed to help support the argument's conclusion. Premises are intended to work together or separately to support the conclusion. They might fail, but they are meant to support the conclusion.

197. A *relationally supportive* argument is one that has this feature: if the premises were true, then the conclusion would probably or definitely be true as well. This is not to say that the premises or conclusion are true in a relationally supportive argument. It's just to say that if the premises were true, then the conclusion would probably or definitely be true too. Notice that only arguments can be relationally supportive.

198. There are at least five characteristics that make an argument at least partially good: excellently articulated, true premises, persuasive to the intended audience, useful to put forward, and relationally supportive.

199. For the most part, these characteristics are independent of one another: an argument can have some of them but not others. For instance, an argument can be quite useful and relationally supportive yet have a false premise and not be persuasive.

200. An overall strong or good argument is one that has most of those five characteristics, roughly put. There is no commonly accepted precise definition of "good argument" or "bad argument".

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