

How Much Do We Need to Know?

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The inherent human curiosity to know has led us to send astronauts to the moon, deploy robotic vehicles to Mars, launch space probes beyond our solar system, and install satellite observatories in space. Knowledge is what makes us different from other species on Earth. We seek and need knowledge. The knowledge we require to survive in this world and live a happy and peaceful social life is constantly changing with time. How to hunt animals, how to catch fish, how to gather fruits from trees – that was all our ancient ancestors needed to know to lead a happy life. But in the modern world, the bases of the division of labor have become wide and diverse and we need to have specific professional knowledge and a lot of technical knowledge and skills to survive. Do you need to know about the supernova and black hole to live a peaceful life with your family on your modest income as an accountant or dentist? Most likely, your answer would be “No”. So, how much do we need to know, and about what?

Let's try to find some answers to this question. First of all, we need to have knowledge about the job we are doing to put food on the table. The field and volume of this knowledge vary with our profession. The volume of knowledge a plumber needs is much less than that of an engineer. Also, the knowledge of supernovas and black holes, while not necessary for accountants and dentists, is absolutely required for astronomers or astrophysicists. The kind of knowledge needed also depends on your location. If you are a city dweller you need to know how to cross roads using zebra crossing, how to travel by metro rail or subway, how to call an Uber, how to make online transactions, etc. most of which you do not need to know if you live in a village. Similarly, if you live in a village, you are close to nature and accordingly, you need to know a lot about nature and of course, the chores of village living.

We have heard the story of the miraculous survival of four children who went missing after the plane carrying them crashed in the Amazon in southern Colombia on May 1, 2023. The crash killed all the adults on board, in-

cluding their mother, the pilot, and another person. According to AP News, the children were aged 13, 9, and 4 years and 11 months. They were found alive after 40 days on June 9, 2023. The children belonged to an indigenous community and possessed familiarity and knowledge of the Amazon Forest. That knowledge greatly helped them to survive.

What we need to know also depends on our age or stage of life. Children do not need to know the price of the stroller they are carried in. If your knowledge is more or less than what it should be at your age, you may face unique challenges and pressures that might be difficult to withstand and you

sleep. Additionally, possessing extensive knowledge often leads to unnecessary complexity when seeking simple answers. The point will be illustrated in this story:

Once, a wise man stood by a field, admiring the lush greenery and enjoying the cool breeze. Some cows were grazing in the field. Feeling playful, he approached a seemingly uneducated man passing by and asked, 'Can you tell me how many cows are there?' The man turned, observed for a few moments, and replied, '23'. The answer was correct which the wise man did not expect. He was amazed, 'That's right! How did you do that?' The 'unwise' man felt a bit offended and

during a significant part of the Middle Ages, barbers held the predominant role in medical practices in Europe. They performed a wide range of surgical tasks, including bloodletting, amputation, leeching, and tooth extraction, along with their routine duties of grooming and styling beards and hair. In our region, we all know the story of the barber who used to operate on boils very confidently. However, one day, when a doctor provided him with some knowledge about anatomy, his confidence was all gone. Now he was always worried during his boil surgeries about veins, arteries, muscles, and other structures under the skin that might get damaged.

Knowledge also seems to be inversely proportional to happiness. The more you know, the more your wants and needs grow in various dimensions: material possessions, fame, power, and so on. And since worldly resources are limited, all your wants and needs will not be fulfilled and will cause you unhappiness. Even in the case of knowledge itself, people with great wisdom and knowledge may feel unhappy because they know the vastness of how much they don't know. The opposite will happen with people with less knowledge; they will have fewer concerns and more happiness. Consider the example of someone who has never heard of an air conditioner (AC) and has no idea about what it is. This person will never miss the comfort of an AC or feel unhappy about not having it.

So, it looks like our knowledge needs to be optimized. It should be of the right quality and quantity to enable us to lead a happy and peaceful life. Probably, it sounds like a rather silly proposition and obviously not attainable. But think about this: in ancient times, people travelled thousands of miles to acquire knowledge, and today in this digital world, we are overwhelmed by the amount of information or knowledge coming to us every moment. The sheer magnitude of this information overload is beyond the human capacity for retention and processing.

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may end up in frustration and depression. Thus, what we need to know and how much we need to know depends on various factors.

There is an old movie titled, 'The man who knew too much'. It is a 1956 Alfred Hitchcock movie. In the movie, an American doctor Ben McKenna while vacationing with his wife and son in Morocco inadvertently acquires information about an international assassination plot. This knowledge puts him and his family in colossal danger as the conspirators seek to eliminate any potential risk of exposure. Thus, knowing much can be dangerous.

Having more knowledge also makes you more aware and concerned. It can then be difficult for you to achieve deep

replied, 'Why, I just counted their heads! How did you do it?' The wise man responded with a complacent smile, 'Well, I actually counted their legs and divided the total by 4. Definitely, that's not easy for you.'

We also have the idioms, "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing" and "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread". So, knowing less is also dangerous. But let's think positively. Less knowledge can have benefits too. More knowledge exposes you to thoughts in many directions that may result in dilemmas and confusion which diminishes your confidence. The less you know the more confident you are.

According to Aleksa Vuckovic's article published in Ancient Origins,

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