

PHILOSOPHY GYM

WHAT IS WORTH ~~KNOWING?~~



A READER

Not ignorance, but
ignorance of
ignorance is the
death of knowledge.

Alfred North Whitehead

Welcome

You know things. Thousands of things. Facts about the world, how to tie your shoes, what coffee tastes like, what it feels like to be disappointed, who you are in your family.

But: What is any of that worth?

Not in the abstract. Not as a general principle. But actually, materially, in your life – what is knowing worth?

This isn't a trick question, though it might be a trick of a question. Because the moment we try to answer it, we discover we don't quite know what "knowing" means, or what "worth" means, or whether the question even makes sense.

Good. That's where we begin.

Before we begin...

An Orientation

This reader isn't here to teach you about knowing.

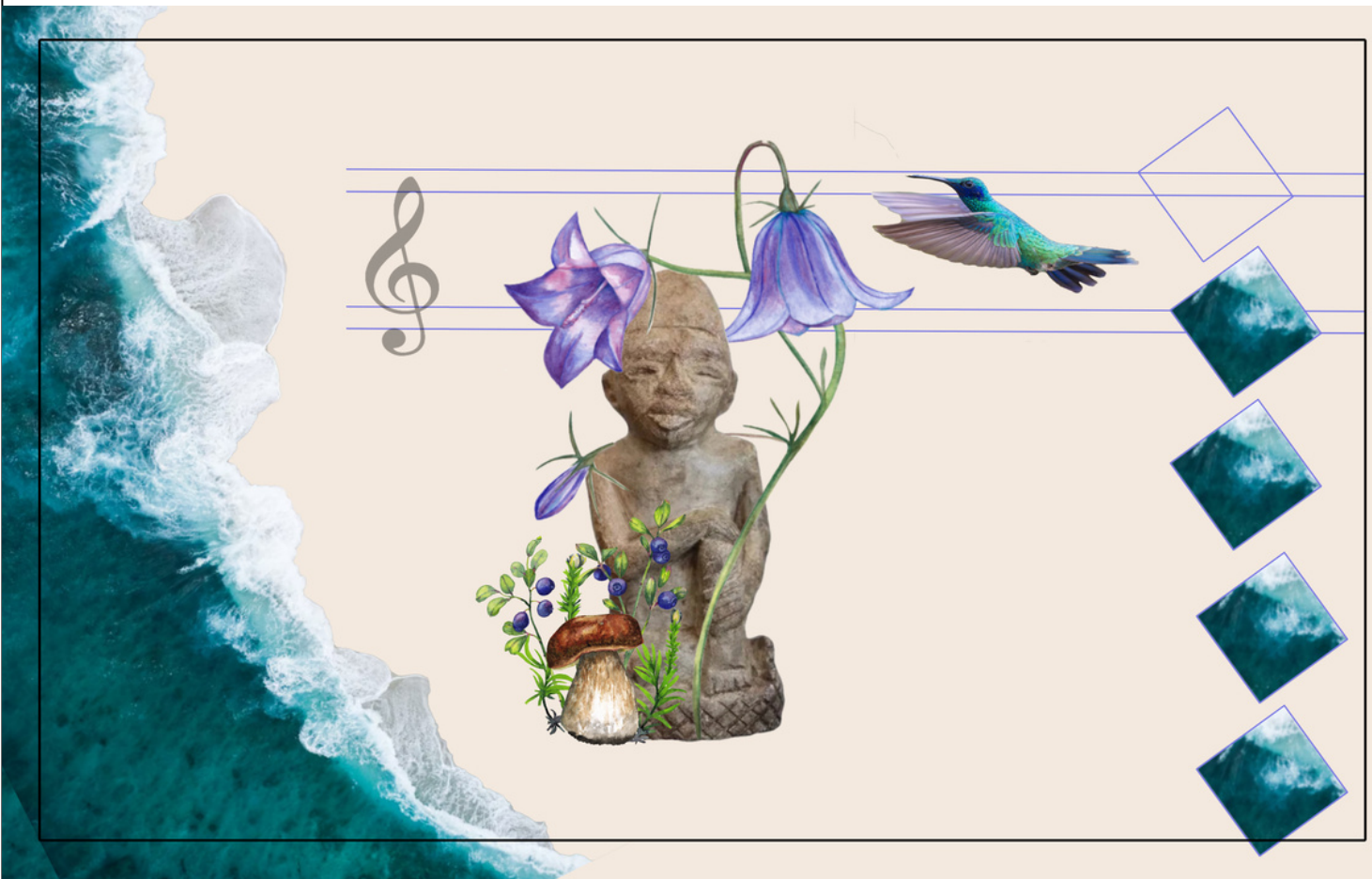
It's here to help you notice the philosophy you're already living – the one that shows up in what you value, what you seek, what you trust, and what you ignore.

The excerpts below are provocations drawn from the wild:philosophy newsletter. They're not comprehensive or systematic. They're breadcrumbs for a conversation. Read them slowly. Notice what makes you resistant, curious, or alive. Bring that to our session.

You don't need to agree with anything here. You don't even need to understand it all. You just need to notice what it stirs in you.

Provocation One

The Knowledge That Doesn't Stick



I still remember the torture of memorizing quality management guidelines when I studied mechanical engineering. The information just sat there, dead on the page. It was such a pain to make it stick. And once it did for the exam, it immediately unstuck itself afterwards.

Quality management guidelines leave me completely mute. I am unable to respond, unable to connect, unable to care.

Sociologist Hartmut Rosa calls this "muteness" – the inability to respond to information. When knowledge doesn't resonate, it remains dead data. You can force it into your brain temporarily, but it won't become part of you. It won't shape how you see or act. You need resonance in order to be transformed.

But other knowledge feels different. It lands. It changes something.

You can't forget it even if you tried.

The question isn't just "what do you know?" but "what knows you?"

The Knowledge-Action Gap

We know what needs to be done about climate change. We have the data, the models, the solutions. Yet we don't act.

- We know we shouldn't use so much plastic. We continue.
- We know we should be active in our neighborhoods. We aren't.
- We know the planet is heating. We fail to act.

If knowledge doesn't translate into doing, what is it actually worth?

Or maybe the question is: What kind of knowing does translate into doing? And what's the difference?

From Knowledge to Wisdom?

We've built an entire system around the idea that the fundamental task of inquiry is to produce knowledge. Papers. Books. Theories. Data. And we tell ourselves that if we just produce enough knowledge, somehow, eventually, people will figure out how to act on it.

They won't. They haven't. And we keep producing more knowledge.

Academia accumulates knowledge, assuming that wisdom and right action will follow. But wisdom seems to be something else entirely. Not what we know, but how we know it. How that knowing lives in us and shapes how we live.

What if the worth of knowing depends entirely on whether it becomes wisdom?

Pause Here

Before reading on, notice:

- When has knowledge felt "dead" to you? When has it felt alive?
- What's one thing you "know" but can't seem to act on?
- Can you remember a moment when knowledge actually changed how you lived?

Don't answer these yet. Just let them sit with you.

Provocation Two

You Know With Your Whole Body



What if knowing isn't something that happens in your head?

Cognitive scientist John Vervaeke distinguishes four interwoven ways of knowing:

- Propositional knowing – knowing that something is true (Paris is the capital of France)
- Procedural knowing – knowing how to do something (riding a bike, chopping an onion)
- Perspectival knowing – knowing what it's like to be in a situation (what it feels like to grieve, to be cold, to be you)
- Participatory knowing – knowing by being part of something (a musician becoming one with their instrument, a caregiver deeply understanding the person they care for)

Most of our education focuses on the first type. But the others might be where the real action is.

Procedural knowing isn't learned from a book, it's the knowing of the hands, the feet, the spine. It's how a gardener knows the soil or how a dancer knows the floor.

Perspectival knowing is that felt sense of being a particular body in a particular place—it's the view from here.

And participatory knowing is the deepest of all: it is the knowledge that comes from being an inseparable part of a system, of co-creating a reality through our very entanglement with it.

Philosophy lives in your gut, your muscles, your relationships. Not just your head.

Knowing Changes the Knower (and the Known)

Physicist-philosopher Karen Barad argues that we don't observe a pre-existing world from the outside. We participate in how reality comes to matter. Every act of knowing is already an intervention.

When you measure something, you change it. When you know something, you change both yourself and what you're knowing.

Knowledge isn't neutral observation – it's entanglement, relationship, co-creation.

Philosopher Esther Lightcap Meek says that all genuine knowing requires "indwelling" – you can't truly know something just by collecting facts from a distance. You have to engage with it, live with it, let it live in you.

She likens all knowing to learning to ride a bike – integrating knowledge so deeply it becomes embodied wisdom.

Pause Here

- What's something you know how to do that you can't fully explain in words?
- When have you felt like knowing something changed you, not just your mind?
- What's a skill or practice that taught you philosophy without ever talking about it?

Provocation Three

Maybe Not- Knowing Is Worth Something Too



We don't know.

We don't know how to solve the climate crisis, not really. We don't know how to live well in late-stage capitalism. We don't know what happens after death. We don't know why we're here.

Our culture tells us this is a problem. That uncertainty is weakness. That we should find answers, get clear, eliminate ambiguity.

But what if embracing not-knowing is itself a form of wisdom?

Socrates: "I Know That I Know Nothing"

Socrates – supposedly one of the wisest people who ever lived – didn't claim to have answers. He claimed to know that he knew nothing.

This wasn't nihilism or false modesty. It was humility. Openness. Recognition of the limits of human understanding.

And paradoxically, this embrace of not-knowing became the starting point for genuine philosophical exploration.

Uncertainty as Potentiality

Process philosophers like Alfred North Whitehead saw reality as a "creative advance into novelty" – inherently open and indeterminate.

Complexity science shows how systems leap to higher organization through periods of chaos and fluctuation.

Sociologist Hartmut Rosa argues that a meaningful relationship with the world requires Unverfügbarkeit – unavailability, uncontrollability. When the world becomes completely predictable, it ceases to speak to us. It becomes a dead object.

It's the mystery, the part that resists our control, that allows for genuine dialogue and transformation.

Maybe real knowing can't be measured because wisdom isn't a quantity—it's a quality of relationship. Maybe it resists our instruments because it's trying to teach us something about the limits of instrumentation itself.

Living the Questions

The poet Rainer Maria Rilke advised: "Love the questions themselves."

What if the worth of knowing lies not in arriving at certainty, but in the quality of our dwelling in uncertainty?

Not paralysis. Not despair. But active, curious, courageous not-knowing.

Pause Here

- Where in your life is the pressure for certainty preventing you from learning or acting?
- When has admitting "I don't know" opened something up for you?
- What question are you willing to live without answering?

Closing

Not Concluding

So. What is knowing worth?

Maybe it depends on:

- The type of knowing (head, hands, heart, whole body)
- Its quality (resonant or dead data)
- Its outcome (does it bridge to action and wisdom?)
- The process (possession or ongoing practice)
- And perhaps most importantly: our willingness to not-know

This reader doesn't conclude the inquiry. It opens it.

In our PhilosophyGym, we won't try to answer the question definitively. We'll explore what happens when we sit with it together. When we bring our lived experience – not just our theories.

Final Provocation



If knowing isn't always inherently valuable, what makes the pursuit of knowing worthwhile?

Let's find out together.

See you at the Gym.

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