

Knowers & Knowing

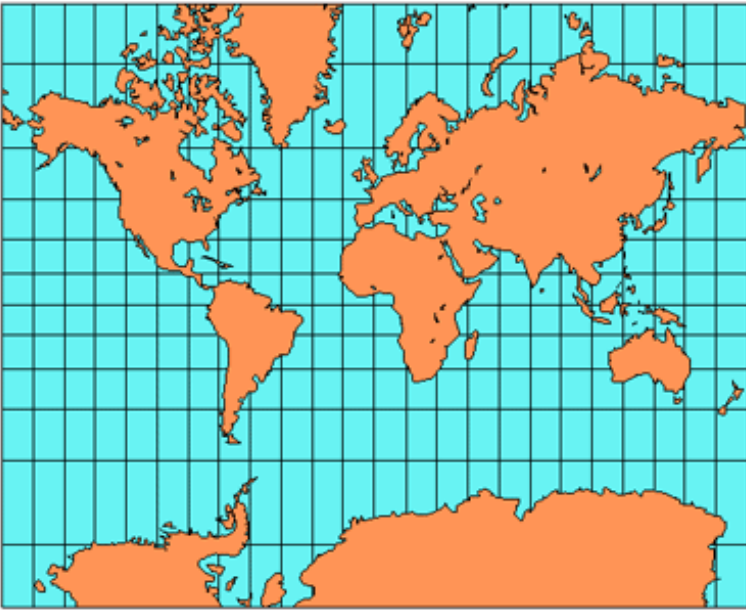
Understanding Knowledge Questions

TOK L8



Mental Map:

A personal mental picture of what is true and false, reasonable and unreasonable, right and wrong, beautiful and ugly



The Mercator Projection:

What's wrong with this picture?

- It is *inaccurate*. It distorts the relative size of the land masses; in reality, Africa is 14x bigger than Greenland!
- It is *based on arbitrary conventions*. Note that the northern hemisphere is at the top of the map. Does the earth come with a sign that reads: “This Way Up”?
- It is *culturally biased*. It exaggerates the size of Europe, which is also in the middle of the map.

The “Paradox of Cartography”

If a map is to be useful, it will necessarily be imperfect. A perfect map would need to be drawn on a 1:1 scale...how useful is that?

We each have a mental map we use to navigate the world; it also must be imperfect in order to be useful.

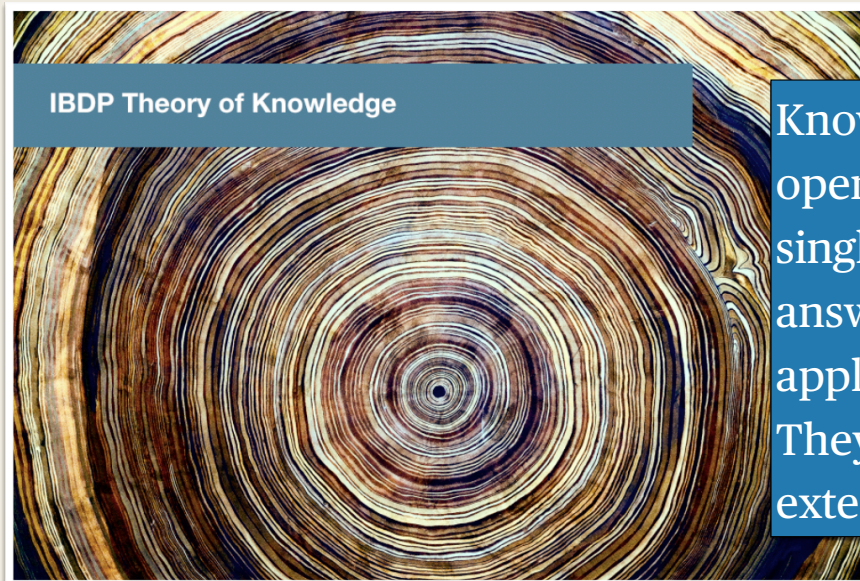
In terms of knowledge, though, we need to know what shortcuts we may be taking. The formal name for this analysis of our knowledge is *epistemology*.

Epistemology: the philosophical study of how we know what we know, and the exploration of the difference between justified belief and opinion



Revising the Map: Knowledge Questions

Knowledge Questions force us to challenge assumptions and validate claims; in what sense can something be said to be “true”?



IBDP Theory of Knowledge

Knowledge Questions are about knowing; they are open-ended and contestable, therefore there is no single correct answer, but rather a range of possible answers. In this way Knowledge Questions may be applied to many scenarios within specific subjects. They are often phrased in the context of “to what extent” their answers may be true.

What's the Difference?

- **Subject-Specific Question:** Why do historians have differing views of the causes of the Civil War?
- **Knowledge Question:** To what extent can we still have reliable historical knowledge if, given access to the same facts, historians can disagree?
- **Subject-Specific Question:** Why does the mass of some elements increase when heated?
- **Knowledge Question:** To what extent can we make accurate measurements that lead to reliable knowledge in the natural sciences?

For Homework:

*Try to answer one of these two knowledge questions. Or this one: **To what extent can knowledge be both accurate and useful?** One written page should suffice.*
