

## **25. How can we distinguish between knowledge, belief, and opinion?**

The stages of knowledge and the knowledge lifecycle are represented by knowledge, belief, and opinion. This exhibition reflects on the theme of knowledge and the knower, specifically examining the selected objects concerning the culture of Syria. Distinguishing between knowledge, belief, and opinion is challenging due to the nature of claims, which evolve over time and space.



*Object 1: Painting by Yaser Mansour in my room.*

The first object I've selected is a painting by Yaser Mansour, a Syrian artist, located in my bedroom next to my desk. I admire his art, as it enables me to have a new perspective on ideas and experiences. Hence, his art is important to me.

An opinion is the first stage in the knowledge life cycle. An opinion is a type of knowledge, personal knowledge. An opinion is a judgment, viewpoint, or statement. It is often based on perspective, beliefs, and knowledge<sup>1</sup>. The nature of an opinion makes it subjective, as it is not based on truth or fact. Its foundation is an individual's unique view of an idea or feelings.

This example of personal knowledge is acquired through firsthand experience. My opinion could be regarded as true or false. Nonetheless, my opinion does not have consequences, and consequently whether it is right or wrong, as there is no power due to the lack of supporters. Many individuals may agree with me that Yaser Mansour is a great artist, but their opinions could change when viewed from another perspective, hence an opinion is not absolute.

This painting definitely relates to the IA prompt on distinguishing fact from opinion. The use of phrases such as "I think" or "I feel" demonstrate that an individual's perspective is influenced by emotion rather than fact.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/opinion>



*Object 2: My family's incense distributor.*

My second object is my family's Incense distributor: a unique handmade Syrian Incense distributor that is used for parades and prayers in the month of Ramadan: The Muslim holy month. The Incense distributors are paraded through the streets with noise and torches to cleanse the natural environment of spiritual influences. The Incense distributor distinctly illustrates the belief and spiritual aims inspired by Muslim philosophy. Every year, my family and I attend these parades because we believe that it cleanses the soul from previous mistakes, establishing a pure and positive year ahead.

A belief is a mental state characterized by an attitude of acceptance toward a proposition, even though there may not be complete intellectual certainty to ensure its truth<sup>2</sup>. In the context of the knowledge life cycle, belief represents the second stage, during which claims are disseminated and absorbed by individuals, and thus also represents personal knowledge. An opinion can evolve into a belief when it garners sufficient support and acceptance from various groups of people. As a claim attracts more followers, it gains credibility and influence within these communities. However, with this increased influence also come greater consequences and significance.

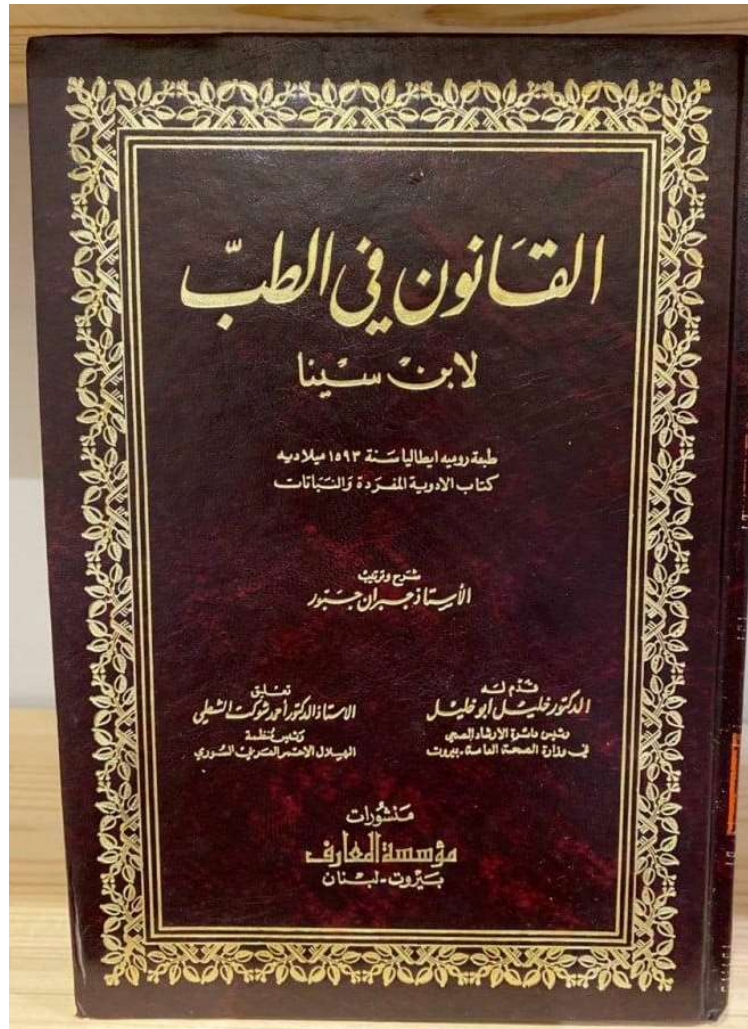
This object evidently links to the IA prompt, regarding signifying how a community of knowers have acceptance toward a proposition not immediately susceptible to proof. Unlike knowledge, beliefs are not based on fact - they cannot be proved nor disproved, or even challenged in a rational or logical manner.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american\\_english/belief](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american_english/belief)



The object was included to illustrate how belief is so powerful in influencing the thoughts and behaviors of the people around us. As it often takes months and up to make each Incense distributor, the object is highly significant in demonstrating belief because Muslim people dedicate immense amounts of time and to building each house's Incense distributor.



Object 3: "The canon of medicine", my parents' book about medicine published by Avicenna.

My third object is my parents' book "The Canon of medicine", an object they used to acquire knowledge about medicine. Knowing the core concepts of medicine is due to the knowledge they have acquired, through both experience and education. Regardless that the book was published in Arabic by a Muslim scholar, the concept of medicine is one of the most fundamental aspects of knowledge because based on sufficient evidence and justification, medicine has categorically been proved to be effective, thus, the book contains shared knowledge.

Knowledge: a justified true belief is the final stage in the knowledge life cycle<sup>3</sup>. Unlike belief and opinion, knowledge is based on fact and truth. Beliefs can be transmuted to 'knowledge' if the fundamental criteria are met and supported with a vast amount of evidence to justify that commitment. Plato, an ancient Greek philosopher, states that knowledge is attainable and must

<sup>3</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/de/worterbuch/englisch/knowledge>

fall under two main characteristics: it is infallible and of the real, if the knowledge claim cannot vindicate both characteristics it cannot be considered true knowledge<sup>4</sup>.

To categorically distinguish knowledge from belief and opinion, preliminary criteria are used: evidence, correspondence, and coherence. The knowledge claim must be justified with adequate evidence, providing fundamental support and reason<sup>5</sup>. Additionally, if the claim corresponds with facts about the world, it can be said to be true. Moreover, the claim must cohere with other true data, where the evidence should be in favor, thus there is no contradiction nor strong counterevidence<sup>6</sup>.

The object evidently links to the IA prompt in relation to the theoretical and practical understanding of a subject as medicine exists because of human thought.

High-quality empirical evidence is apparent: The depicted illustrations and descriptions of the human anatomy fit the way actual organs look in humans. Additionally, most depicted suggestions of therapy are effective in fighting the disease.

In short, it is often difficult to distinguish between knowledge, belief, and opinion because we do not have the skills, materials nor time and consequently are required to rely on information provided by others. Evidence is the basis of distinguishing between claims as it provides the justification for judgment and serves to establish the possibility to differentiate true from false.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-theaetetus/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://iep.utm.edu/evidence/>

<sup>6</sup> IB Theory of Knowledge Course Comapnion 2020 Edition p.21

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<sup>2</sup>Oxford's learner dictionary: "Belief"  
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<sup>3</sup>Cambridge: "Knowledge"  
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<sup>4</sup>Chappell, Sophie-Grace: "Plato on Knowledge in the *Theaetetus*"  
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<sup>5</sup>Internet encyclopedia of philosophy: "Evidence" <https://iep.utm.edu/evidence/> (Accessed: 22.05.2024)

<sup>6</sup>Dang, Marija Uzunova/Dang, Arvin Singh Uzunov: "IB Theory of Knowledge Course Companion 2020 Edition" p.20/21