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Theory of Knowledge **Glossary**



ahimsa: the principle of doing no harm

abductive reasoning: reasoning that infers the best explanation based on the evidence available

absent-mindedness: inattentiveness that leads to lack of memory

absolutism: belief in absolute truth and absolute cultural, religious, political and moral standards against which all other views can be judged

abstract: conceptual, nonrepresentational, independent of concrete specific physical existence

aesthetics: the branch of philosophy that studies beauty and the arts; principles concerned with beauty and artistic taste

affiliation: having a connection with a specific group or organisation

agnostic: a person who believes that nothing can be known of the existence or nature of God

alien: a person who is not a citizen of the country that they live in or a species that is not native to the environment it is found in

allegory: a text or artwork that can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning, usually moral or political in nature

AlphaZero: a computer that can play the game Go and beat human world champions

alternative facts: in the context of post-truth politics, alternative views to more widely-accepted and verified beliefs

ambiguity: when a word, statement, image or situation can have more than one meaning or interpretation

amoral: outside the scope of morality; lacking any moral framework

anarchist: a person who believes there should be no people or organisations who rule as a matter of right

anchoring bias: where a particular concept or idea is mentioned before a question is asked - this has a 'priming effect' which may affect the response given

anthropology (cultural and social): the study of the development of culture and society

antithesis: the negation of a thesis

applied artificial intelligence: also known as weak AI or narrow AI, the use of software for a specific problem solving or reasoning task

Argand diagram: a geometric representation of complex numbers that uses a real x axis to represent the 'real' part of the complex number, and the real y axis to represent the 'imaginary' part of the complex number (the Argand diagram is also called the complex plane or z-plane)

arithmetic: the process of counting and calculating in numbers

art brut: the 'raw art' movement began by Jean Dubuffet (1901-1985), which recognised the value of primitive or low art that belonged outside the conventional tradition of fine art

Arte povera: An Italian art movement that used ordinary but unconventional materials to create art works

artificial general intelligence (AGI): also known as strong AI or full AI, the capacity of a machine to perform the same intellectual task that a human, can including the full range of human cognition

artisan, craftsman: a worker skilled in a particular trade or craft

assent: an expression of agreement

assimilation: integration

astrology: a belief that the movement of the planets affects human behaviour in predictable ways

asylum: shelter and protection; in a political context, protection granted by a state to persons who are political refugees

augmented reality: the technology that overlays a computer simulation onto the real world

authenticity: validity, genuineness

authoritarian: relating to a government that imposes its authority over people and limits their freedom

authority: the moral or legal right to make decisions in, and take responsibility for, and exercise power within a particular field of knowledge or activity; the word can also be used to denote a person or group who has that authority

autocracy: a government based on one person with supreme authority and power

automation: the use of robots and machine systems to replace human work

autonomous: self-governing

availability heuristic: a bias where recent or easily remembered examples affect our judgement

avant-garde: innovative ideas considered to be at the forefront of new developments and techniques in the arts

axiom: a starting assumption, often regarded as a self-evident truth or, more loosely, something we assume to be true or accept as true within a particular system

bacteriophage: a virus that destroys bacteria

ballpark: estimated, rough, imprecise

barbarian: Herodotus refers to the Persians as barbarians. For Herodotus 'barbarians' denoted all non-Greeks, and the word originally meant a speaker of an incomprehensible language. The word did not have the same negative connotations that people might associate it with today

belief: a confident opinion; something thought to be true

benevolent: kind, well-meaning

benign: harmless, non-threatening, innocent

bias: prejudice, unfairness, favouritism, one-sided preference

bioavailability: the measure of drug absorption over time

Big Bang: the theory that the universe began with an infinitely dense singularity 'exploding' in a rapid expansion 13.8 billion years ago

big data: the vast amount of varied digital data sets, which can be analysed to identify patterns, associations and trends

bit: a binary unit of information in a computer

bitcoin and Ethereum: types of cryptocurrency

blind faith: faith without evidence, understanding or discrimination; faith that is not open to evaluation or critical thought

block chain: a decentralised distributed ledger of transactions which is permanent

blocking: when there is an obstruction to your ability to recall information

bodhisattva: a Buddhist who has achieved enlightenment, but delays reaching nirvana out of compassion for those who are suffering

body language: conscious or unconscious body movements and positions that communicate our attitudes and feelings

bot: an automated computer programme

bourgeoisie: the middle class - Marx thought that they benefited most from a capitalist economic system

breadth of knowledge: a span of knowledge covering many aspects of a subject

bureaucratic: overly concerned with procedure and administration at the expense of efficiency

canon: a collection of works considered by scholars to be the most important and influential; in the context of religion, a body of authorised religious works accepted as authoritative within that religion

capitalist: employing an economic system where there is limited government intervention, and the production and distribution of resources depend on the investment of private capital

cardinality: the number of elements in a set; for example, the set {0, 1, 2} has three elements and so has cardinality 3

caricature: comic exaggeration

ensorship: the suppression or limitation of any material or views and beliefs that are considered to be unsuitable or inappropriate

centipede effect: over-consciousness of your performance in a way that interferes with what you are doing

certain knowledge: a state of affairs when we can be definite that something is the case

certainty: the quality of having no doubt

chatbot: a computer that simulates human conversation

cherry-picking: picking out sections of a text that appear, at face value, to support a particular opinion, while ignoring the context and other sections of the text that might promote a different view

circular reasoning: the fallacy of assuming the truth of what you are supposed to be proving

clickbait: content deliberately designed to encourage you to click on the link, which will take you to another web page; for example a visual image or an attention-grabbing headline

cognitive (knowledge) tool: the mental process of acquiring knowledge, for example via the senses, memory, imagination, experience and rational thought

cognitive bias: when bias affects the process of acquiring knowledge and understanding

cognitive science: the study of the mind and its processes through an interdisciplinary approach that involves philosophy, psychology, linguistics and the natural sciences

coherence theory (of truth): the theory that a proposition is true if it fits in with our overall set of beliefs

collaborative: produced by two or more people working together

communism: a social, political and economic ideology in which there are no class divisions, all property is communally owned, and the government directs all economic production

competency: capability; the possession of sufficient knowledge or skills

complex: complicated, multifaceted

complex number: in mathematics, a combination of a real number and an imaginary number, for example $3 + 4i$

compound interest: the addition of interest to the principal sum of a loan or deposit to make that sum larger, and therefore make subsequent interest greater; or in other words, interest on interest

concept: an abstract idea or something conceived

conceptual: relating to abstract ideas

confirmation bias: the tendency to believe evidence that supports your opinions, and ignore or discount evidence that goes against what you believe

conjecture: a guess or imaginative hypothesis

connotation: the ideas and associations a word evokes in addition to its literal meaning

consensus theory (of truth): the theory that truth is based on a set of beliefs that the majority of people agree on

consistent: noncontradictory, not permitting the proof of two statements that contradict one another

conspiracy theory: either a denial that an event took place, or the belief in an explanation for an event based on the idea that there was a deliberate and secret agency of people or organisations

constructivism: the theory that mathematical truth and proofs should be positively constructed

contestable: where there are different possible answers, opinions or views on the same question or topic; a contestable knowledge claim or question is one that can be argued about, where there is more than one possible interpretation or answer

contingency: something that is dependent upon chance

contra-indication: a situation when a particular remedy or procedure should not be used

controlled experiments: experiments that are performed with carefully regulated variables to provide a standard of comparison for similar experiments with just one differing variable

conviction: a firmly held belief

correspondence theory (of truth): the theory that a statement is true if it corresponds to a fact

corroborate: to confirm or support a statement or theory

corroboree: an Australian Aboriginal dance ceremony

cosmogony: the study of the origins of the universe

cosmology: the study of the universe

countability: in mathematics, a set is *countable* if it can be put into a one-to-one relationship with the natural numbers {1, 2, 3, ...}

coup d'état: when a small group of people seizes power by force

covenant: an agreement or promise of commitment

creation science: treating the theory that God created the universe as recorded in the Book of Genesis as a scientific theory

creativity: the ability to bring something into being through the imagination; the ability to generate ideas or produce objects that are original, surprising and valuable

critical: involving objective analysis and evaluation

crofter: traditionally, a tenant farmer of a small agricultural land holding in the Scottish Highlands

and islands, although since 1976, it has been possible for crofters to purchase their crofts to become owner occupiers

cryptocurrency: a medium of exchange and store of value which can be used like money

cubism: an artistic movement in which objects were analysed, broken up and reassembled in an abstracted form

cultural appropriation: the adoption of elements of one culture by members of another culture

culture: the shared ideas, beliefs, customs and practices of a community or society

cyborg: a cybernetic organism, which combines organic and mechanical parts

datum (plural data): in the context of technology, 'something given' - usually any facts and statistics gathered together for investigation; an unstructured collection of facts and figures

decode: decrypt, decipher, translate

deductive reasoning: reasoning from the general to the particular

deep learning: a technology at the centre of artificial intelligence that uses big data to predict or decide

deepfake: the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to create fake videos creating the false impression of authenticity

deism: the belief in an impersonal creator god, who is evident through reason and the laws of nature, but does not intervene in human affairs

deity (plural deities): a god or supernatural being

dematerialisation: when technology loses its physical substance

demographics: the characteristics of human populations

denomination: a distinct religious group within Christianity (for example, the Anglican, Georgian Orthodox and Lutheran churches)

denotation: the literal meaning of a word

deontological ethics: the belief that ethics is fundamentally a matter of doing your duty and fulfilling your obligations

depth of knowledge: knowledge that focuses on, amplifies and explores specific topics

descent: as an adjective, dependent on parentage or ancestry

designer baby: a baby genetically engineered *in vitro* with specially selected traits, which can vary from lowered disease-risk to gender selection

Deuteronomic cycle: a cycle of rebellion, oppression and repentance as a way of interpreting historic events

diagonalisation argument: a mathematical proof published by Cantor in 1891 which demonstrated that there are infinite sets which cannot be put into one-to-one correspondence with the infinite set of natural numbers

dialectics: a method of argument that involves a disagreement between opposing sides

diaspora: people who have been dispersed from their homeland or have spread out from their homeland, while maintaining a close connection with it

discernment: the ability to use sharp perceptions to judge well

disinformation: intentionally false or inaccurate information spread as an act of deception

disinterested: free from bias and self-interest, which may help us to make objective judgements

dissent: disagreement; nonconformity

Distributed Denial of Service: flooding the bandwidth of a target (usually a web server) to prevent it from conducting normal business; this is an illegal practice in many countries

divine: something of a supernatural nature that is sacred or godlike; as a verb, it can also mean 'to discover something in a supernatural way'

dogmatism: a tendency to lay down principles as undeniably true without consideration of evidence or the opinions of others

Dunning-Kruger effect: a cognitive bias where we find it difficult to know the limit of our knowledge and expertise. If we have a little knowledge in a particular area, we may overestimate our level of knowledge and competence in that area. In this way, a little knowledge may lead to an unjustified illusion of greater knowledge

echo chamber: a space in which sound reverberates, so any sounds made are repeated over and over as they bounce from the walls; an environment in which people only encounter beliefs or opinions like their own, so they don't consider alternative ideas and their own ideas are reinforced; in the context of technology, the effect created by social media and news whereby people only encounter ideas that are the same as their own, reinforcing their existing perspective

economic determinism: the theory that history is determined by economic factors

efficacy: effectiveness

eisegesis: reading meaning into a text

elegant: concise; stylish and graceful

emotive meaning: the aura of favourable or unfavourable feeling that hovers about a word

emotivism: the view that ethical claims are an expression of feeling and emotion

empathy: the ability to imagine and understand the feelings and viewpoint of another person

empirical: based on and verified by observation and experience

empiricism: a school of thought which claims that all knowledge must ultimately be based on sense perception

empiricist: a supporter of empiricism

enlightenment: a state of perfect knowledge about existence, perfect wisdom and infinite compassion

epidemiology: the study of the origins and spread of diseases

epistemic injustice: injustice that happens when knowledge is ignored, not believed or not understood

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

equality: the state of being equal in terms of status, rights and opportunities

equity: the quality of being fair and impartial

espionage: the practice of spying to obtain political or military information

ethical: conforming to accepted moral standards

ethics: the branch of knowledge to do with right and wrong, and the study of the moral principles that govern our beliefs and behaviours

ethnolinguistics: a field of linguistics that studies the relationship between language and culture

ethology: the study of animal behaviour

Eucharist: a ritual in which Christians remember Jesus's last supper and sacrifice by breaking bread and drinking wine, as symbols of Jesus's body and blood

Euclidean geometry: a system of mathematics attributed to the Greek mathematician, Euclid, based on five axioms

euphemism: a softer-sounding word or phrase used to disguise something unpleasant or not usually talked about in polite conversation

evidence: signs that you can see, hear, experience or read to support the truth of an assertion

evolutionary epistemology: the theory that knowledge evolves by natural selection

exegesis: drawing meaning from a text in a critical way

exegete: a person who engages in exegesis

experiential: based on experience

experimental subjects: the individuals who are experimented on

expert: a person with specialist skills and/or knowledge

expertise: specialised skills and knowledge

explanation: an account or statement that makes something clear; in the context of the study of history, a justification or reason that makes sense of why an event or action took place

explicit: clear, made obvious, openly expressed

extremism: an ideology in which people are prepared to take extreme actions including the use of violence for their religious or political causes

extrinsic religiosity: participating in social worship to conform to a social norm or convention

fabricate: manufacture, make up

factual: containing facts

factual memory: our memory of meanings, facts and information

fallacy: a mistaken belief, an invalid argument

fallible: capable of making mistakes or being wrong

false dichotomy: when a situation is presented as having just two possible options, when other perspectives are not only possible, but highly likely

falsehood: a lie or misrepresentation; something that is put forward as a fact or a truth, but it is not

falsify: to prove something to be false

fantasy: the imagination of impossible or improbable characters, situations or narratives

fideism: reliance on faith for all knowledge; a belief that faith is superior to reason

Fields medal: an award made every four years by the International Congress of Mathematics to recognise outstanding mathematical achievements; it is sometimes described as the equivalent of a Nobel Prize for mathematics

filial piety: showing love, respect and support for one's parents

forest produce: things other than timber that can be found in the forest, including wild honey, fruits, edible plants and firewood

formal system: in mathematics, a system used to deduce theorems from axioms according to a set of logical rules

futurism: an artistic movement that began in Italy and emphasised speed, technology, youth, violence and objects such as the car, the airplane and the industrial city

general revelation: knowledge of God that is discovered through natural ways, such as observing the natural world, observing patterns in history and applying reason

generalisation: making statements that apply to all cases, on the basis of some specific cases

genre: an artistic style or type; it can apply to any of the arts

Gettier case: an example of a justified true belief that does not appear to be knowledge

go native: to adopt the attitudes and behaviour of a foreign group with whom one has lived for an extended period

God's eye view: when a knower assumes that they have access to knowledge that only an omniscient god could have KEY

golden ratio: image a line - divide it into two unequal parts in such a way that the ratio of the whole line to the big part is the same ratio as the big part to the small part. The ratio is 1:1.618; which is known as the golden ratio

Google effect (or Google amnesia): the tendency to forget information that can easily be found online

Gospel: the teachings or revelations of Jesus, meaning 'good news', originally set out in the four gospels in the New Testament, *Matthew, Mark, Luke and John*

grammar: the rules for constructing meaningful phrases and sentences out of words

'great man' theory of history: the belief that history is driven by great individuals

Gross Domestic Product: a measure of the goods and services produced in a country to estimate the size and growth rate of the economy

hactivism: gaining unauthorised access to computer files or networks to further social or political ends

hegemon: the dominant group, class or state that exercises hegemonic power and promotes hegemonic ideas

hegemony: the dominance of one group supported by a set of ideas, or the dominance of a set of ideas that become the norm in a way that inhibits the circulation of alternative ideas

heretic: a person within a group who has unconventional or unorthodox beliefs

hermeneutics: the science of interpretation

heterogeneous: mixed; composed of different parts

heuristics: when a person finds, discovers or learns something

hindsight bias: mistakenly thinking, after something has happened, that you had known it would happen

historiography: the study of historical perspectives

history from above: also known as 'top-down' history, this focuses on the perspectives of the leaders, rulers and those in power, and the social and cultural elites of the time

history from below: also known as 'bottom-up' history, this focuses on the perspectives of the ordinary people, such as the working class, women, ethnic minorities or

any other voices that may have been neglected by a 'top-down' approach

holism: the belief that the best way to understand some things is by looking at them as a whole rather than by analysing them into separate parts

holistic: considering all factors of any situation, in the belief that all aspects are interconnected and can only be understood in relation to the whole

homeopathy: a system of alternative medicine that believes in treating ailments with minute concentrations of substances that in larger amounts would cause the same symptoms of the ailment; it is based on the principle that '*like cures like*'

homogeneous: consistent; of uniform structure throughout

host state: a state that governs the national territory in which an indigenous society lives

hyperthymesia: a condition in which a person can remember an abnormally large number of their own life experiences in detail

hypothermia: unusually low body temperature

hypothesis (plural hypotheses): a proposed explanation or starting point, based on limited evidence that can be tested in an investigation

icon: a symbol or representation often uncritically venerated. In Eastern churches, these figures usually represent Christ, the Virgin Mary, or a saint

identity: how a person, group or nation sees themselves in relation to other people, groups, nations, ideas, and the world

idiom: a colloquial expression whose figurative meaning cannot be deciphered from its literal meaning

ignorance: lack of knowledge

illusion of explanatory depth: the illusion that you understand something in detail when you do not

implicit: implied, hidden

in vitro fertilisation: a laboratory procedure in which an egg is fertilised outside the body; the term *in vitro* means 'in glass'. In the past, IVF babies have been called 'test-tube babies'

inadvertent: not deliberate, happening without design or intention

indigenous people: literally, 'people belonging to a place', the term is used to refer to people who inherit and practise unique cultures and ways of relating to people and their environment

indigenous rights: the rights of native people who originate from a particular place

inductivism: the use of and preference for inductive methods of reasoning to develop natural laws

infallible: not capable of being wrong or making mistakes

infer: to come to a conclusion reached on the basis of evidence and reasoning

inference: a conclusion based on evidence and reasoning

infinity: something without bounds, often treated as an unreal number

information theory: the mathematical study of the coding of information, and how that information can be quantified, stored and communicated reliably through computer circuits and telecommunications

information: data that has been processed and structured, and can be used to answer *who, what, when* and *where* questions; in the context of technology, facts about something, or the process, storage and spread of data by a computer

inherent: existing in something as a permanent characteristic

innate: something we are born with

instantiation: the representation of an abstraction by an example of the abstraction; for example, 'apple' is an abstract idea; this particular apple is an instantiation of the idea

intangible: nonmaterial and unquantifiable

intellectual property: the ownership of knowledge or unique products that have been created

intellectual capital: the collective knowledge of people in an organisation or society

intellectual virtues: virtues that are required for the pursuit of knowledge

interpolate: to insert something of a different nature into something else

interpretation: an explanation of the meaning

intrinsic religiosity: where religion is the organising principle of an individual's life; a central and personal experience

introspective: looking inside oneself

intuitionism: the theory that mathematical objects are mental constructions, and that as we create mathematical objects, so we create the reality of them

invalid: an argument that does not follow logically from the premises

irony: a figure of speech in which words are used to say one thing and mean the opposite

irrational number: any number that cannot be written as a fraction with one integer over another (e.g. $\sqrt{2}$, π)

judiciary: the system of courts and collection of judges in a country

justification: in the context of truth, a reason or reasons for a belief or support for a truth claim

justify: to show that a belief or decision is well-founded and reasonable

key concept: in the context of a TOK essay, the central TOK idea specified in the essay title, for example 'certainty', 'justification', 'interpretation' etc.

kitsch: derivative, clichéd art

law of large numbers: a statistical principle which says that random variations tend to cancel out when a population is large enough

law: a generalised description of observations about a relationship between two or more things in the natural world; often the description is mathematical

layperson: a person not from the profession; in a religious context, a person without professional or specialised knowledge in their religion

legitimate: genuine; conforming to acknowledged standards

liberalism: an ideology that regards protecting and enhancing individual freedoms to be a central issue for politics, and strives towards social changes that bring about equality and freedom for all

linguistic determinism: the idea that our language and its structures limit and determine what and how we think, and what we can know

linguistic relativity: the idea that language shapes and influences the way we think and what we can know

logic: the principles of – or a system of – rules that govern reason, and a branch of philosophy

logical empiricism: the belief that all human knowledge should be reduced to logical and scientific foundations (it is often regarded as synonymous with logical positivism)

logical positivism: the belief that all knowledge comes from logical inferences based on observable facts, and that a statement can only be meaningful if it can be determined to be true or false

logicism: the theory that mathematics can be derived from logic, without the need of any specifically mathematical concepts

manifest: as an adjective, clear or obvious; as a verb, to become clear, obvious, visible, evident or noticeable

mathematical empiricism: a form of realism that says that we discover mathematical facts by empirical research, just like facts in any of the other sciences

mathematicism: the theory that everything in the universe is ultimately mathematical

matrilineal: passed down through the mother

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

meta-analysis: analysis of data to establish trends based on various different studies

metacognitive: relating to your own thought processes

metaphor: a figure of speech which describes something using words that are not literally true, for example, '*she is an angel*', '*he is a book-worm*' or '*knowledge is a map*'

metaphysical: abstract, beyond physical, supernatural, independent of physical reality

mimetic: from *mimesis*, the Greek word for 'imitation', associated with the idea that art copies reality

misattribution: when credit is given to the wrong person or source, whether deliberately or mistakenly

misinformation: incorrect information, unintentionally false information

modifier words: words that qualify a seemingly clear and precise statement, and make it vague or ambiguous

monarchy: a form of government that has a monarch (king, queen or emperor) as the supreme authority

monolithic: relating to one large, unchanging entity

monotheistic: having one personal god

moral: following one's personal principles of what is right or wrong

moral absolutism: the belief that there is at least one universal moral principle, which should always be followed, irrespective of the context or their consequences

mother tongue: the first language that you were brought up to speak

myth: an ancient, traditional story about gods, heroes or groups of people, usually concerning the history of a people or explaining a phenomenon. Myths often, but not always, involve supernatural beings

mythology: a collection of traditional stories usually belonging to a particular religious or cultural tradition

nanotechnology: a branch of technology that manipulates individual atoms and molecules

narrative: a story that tells about a series of events. It can be factual, fictitious or a blend of both

natural number: often called the counting numbers, they go from 1, 2, 3 ... infinity (∞)

neutral: unbiased, impartial, not supporting either side of an argument

neutrino: an uncharged sub-atomic particle with zero mass when at rest

noise: unwanted disturbances in electrical signals; meaningless data, including data that cannot be understood or interpreted by machines

non-putrifying bacteria: bacteria that do not help to decompose dead or decaying matter

non-theistic: having no personal god or no gods at all

nuance: subtle difference or shades of meaning

objectivity: a detached way of looking at the world, largely independent of personal feelings or opinions, that expects to be corroborated by a knowledge community

observer effect: in the natural sciences, the observer effect refers to the principle that the act of observing a phenomenon changes the phenomenon being observed (in the human sciences the observer effect refers to the tendency of people to behave differently when they are being observed)

ochlocracy: mob rule, majoritarianism

omnipotent: all-powerful

omnipresent: present everywhere and at all times

omniscient: all-knowing; having an intuitive, immediate awareness of all truth

optical telescope: a telescope that gathers and focuses light, mostly from the visible light spectrum, to create a magnified image that can be viewed directly

outlier: a value or datum very different from others

outrage: intense anger and shock

panacea: a solution or remedy for all difficulties

pantheon: an overview of a culture's gods and goddesses that reflects the culture's values

paradigm: a pattern, model or example that provides a framework of understanding

pathogen: a virus, bacterium or other micro-organism that can cause disease

patrilineal: passed down through the father

peer: a person of equal standing, usually a member of your own tribe

peer review: the evaluation of academic or scientific work by experts working in the same field

percept: what we notice via the process of sense perception

perception: an awareness of something in and through the mind

personal memory: the internal recollection of the various events that make up our lives

perspective: point of view, a particular way of seeing or considering something

pharmaceutical: related to drugs

phenomenon (plural phenomena): an event, experience or occurrence

phlogiston: a hypothetical component of combustible substances

place-value system: a numerical system in which the position of a digit indicates its value as well as the digit itself; therefore in '9', the digit 9 denotes only 'nine'; in '90' because its place has shifted left, it denotes 'ninety' in a decimal system

plagiarism: passing off someone else's idea or work as your own

plane: a flat surface that extends forever in two dimensions but has no thickness

Platonist: relating to the ideas of the Greek philosopher, Plato (c 427-348 BCE)

pluralist theory (of truth): the theory that there are multiple truths, and various meanings of the word 'truth'

pluralistic: relating to a system in which multiple groups, ideas, or practices coexist. In the context of religion, having many different beliefs and practices

pluralistic history: accepting that there are various different perspectives that may be justified, and multiple possible accounts of the past

polarising: in this context, dividing people into two main groups with opposite views

political science: the scientific study of the state, governments, power and political activity

political spectrum (plural spectra): a system of classifying different political positions in relation to different political values

political values: abstract ideas about the needs of the people that drive political positions, for example, equality, freedom, tradition, progress, etc

polymath: a person with expertise in several different fields of knowledge

polytheistic: having many gods

population: in the context of mathematics, the entire group of objects, measurements or events from which a sample is drawn

portrait: a painting, photograph, or other artistic representation of a person which tries to show the personality of the person portrayed

positivism: the belief that the only authentic knowledge is that which can be scientifically verified or proven through logic or mathematics

post hoc ergo propter hoc: the fallacy of confusing a correlation with a causal connection

post-colonial age: the period of time after colonial rule has ended

post-modern: a movement of 20th-century thinkers who thought that knowledge, reason, ethics and truth are a social, cultural and political construction

post-truth: relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief

postulate: a statement underlying a theory; something assumed to be true (they are slightly different to axioms but the two words are frequently used interchangeably)

power: control, influence, strength; the capacity to control and influence situations and people

practical memory: the remembered ability to know how to do something, such as playing the piano

practical or material (knowledge) tool: the device used to complement or enhance cognition, such as a microscope or an iPad

pragmatic theory (of truth): the theory that a proposition is true if it is useful or works in practice

precession: a slow and continuous change in the orientation of the axis of a rotating body pre-colonial (to be added at first proof of Decoding?)

premise: assumption on which an argument is based, or from which a conclusion is drawn

prescriptivism: the view that ethical claims are imperatives

primary emotions: universal emotions which are usually said to comprise happiness, sadness, anger, fear, disgust and surprise

primary source: Any object or written source from the time or based on the time being studied, for example the eyewitness account of a soldier fighting in the Second World War would be a primary source even if it was written fifty years after the event

procedural: related to actions

proof: generally refers to conclusive evidence, leaving little place for doubt; however, a mathematical proof is more than just a general proof - it is a conclusive deduction from axioms that leaves no room for doubt or argument

propaganda: the deliberate manipulation, distortion and spreading of information in order to influence what people think, usually for political purposes

proselytising: evangelising, persuading others to join a particular group or religion

pseudoscience: a system of beliefs and practices that are claimed to be scientific but which are incompatible with the scientific method

psychology: the scientific study of the human mind and behaviour

pulsar: a small, dense, spinning neutron star

Purchasing Power Parity: a standard of measurement used to compare the economic productivity and standards of living of different countries

quaint: pleasantly, amusingly or interestingly strange

qualitative: relating to, measuring or measured by the quality of something, rather than its quantity; qualitative studies use a method to give a detailed narrative about a human phenomenon that describes a culture or shares a story

quantitative: relating to, measuring or measured by the quantity of something, rather than its quality

quantum mechanics: a branch of mechanics describing the motion and interaction of subatomic particles

quantum theory: a theory in physics which explains the behaviour of subatomic particles

radicalism: a political desire to change social structures in radical ways

radio telescope: a telescope that detects radio waves and microwaves which lie outside the visible spectrum

rational number: any number that can be written as a fraction, that is, a ratio of integers

rationalist: a supporter of rationalism, a school of thought which relies on deduction rather than sensory perception to determine truth

rationality: the ability to reason and think clearly, sensibly or logically

reactance: the tendency of people to react against advice, rules and regulations perceived as a threat to their freedom

real number: any number that can represent a position on a number line; real numbers include all rational and irrational numbers

realistic imagination: imagination which is informed and guided by the relevant facts

reductionism: the belief that some subjects can be explained in terms of other more fundamental ones

reductive fallacy: the fallacy of saying that just because *A* is composed of *B*, it follows that *A* is nothing but *B*

redundancy theory (of truth): the theory that truth has no essential property, and the word can be substituted for another or left out altogether

refute: to prove a statement or theory wrong

relativity: recognising that knowledge claims are dependent on contextual factors or frames of reference

religious experience: a temporary experience that defies normal description, in which the person having the experience feels that a power from outside themselves is acting to reveal a truth that could not be reached by reason alone

religious fundamentalism: a belief in the absolute authority of a particular sacred text, religious leader and/or god

replication: the process of repeating

response bias: the tendency to try and please a person interviewing us or a person carrying out a questionnaire, by choosing the answer we feel will please them

responsibility: a duty or moral obligation

retaliatory killings: killings made in revenge for killing people or livestock

retribution: punishment inflicted in response to an action

revelation: something that has been revealed or disclosed, usually by God or God's representatives or messengers

rigour: strictness; the quality of being extremely thorough and careful

ritual: a prescribed ceremonial action or set of actions that have a symbolic meaning for the individual and the community

rule of thumb: an approximation based on experience

rule worship: blindly following moral rules irrespective of whether or not they are appropriate

sacrament: a special ritual which is said to impart God's grace

sacred: holy; entitled to reverence and respect; set apart for the worship of a god or gods

sacrifice: to give up something valuable to help others, or to appease a god or spirit

sage: a wise person

Sapir-Whorf hypothesis: the claim that the language you speak influences or determines the way you see the world

scepticism: an attitude of doubt; a method of obtaining knowledge through systematic doubt and continual testing

scholasticism: a method of learning characteristic of the Middle Ages, and based on logic and traditional beliefs about what is true

scientific method: a method of procedure for the way scientific investigations are conducted

scientific paradigm: a worldview that underlies the theories and methodology in a particular field of science

scientism: an exaggerated trust in the efficacy of the methods of the natural sciences applied to any and all areas of investigation

scriptures: sacred writings; religious texts

secondary emotions: complex emotions which can be thought of as mixtures of primary emotions

secular humanism: a system of belief that believes in human values, consequentialist ethics based on reason, and a commitment to science, democracy and freedom

secular: not concerned with religion

semantic: relating to the meaning of language

sentient: conscious, capable of feeling

shaman: a priest or priestess who uses magic to cure the sick, divine the hidden and control events

Shulba Sutras: a body of Hindu writings regarded as appendices to the Vedas; they are arguably Hinduism's most authoritative scriptures

singularity: in the context of AI, the point when computer intelligence will surpass human intelligence; a moment of irreversible change for humans and human knowledge

social contract: an actual or implicit agreement between rulers and the people they rule, that defines the rights and responsibilities of each

social justice: the idea that all people should have equal access to - and opportunities for - wealth, education, health, and justice

social media: websites and apps that allow people to form a network, and create and share digital content and information with one another, such as Facebook™, Twitter™, WhatsApp™ or Instagram™

socialism: a social system based on public ownership of the means of production, and an equitable distribution of wealth

sociology: the study of the structure and function of society

sound: the property of a syllogism that contains two true premises and a valid argument

special revelation: knowledge of God that is not available through reason; knowledge of God that is revealed in a supernatural way

spin doctor: a person whose role it is to portray a political party in a favourable light, especially to present the media with a positive interpretation of a particular event

spirituality: a concern with the human spirit or soul, rather than with material or physical things

state: a legal entity that has one central government, which is sovereign over a defined territory and a permanent population

stereotype: a fixed, oversimplified and often negative picture of an individual or group, based on their membership of that group

subjectivity: looking at the world from a personal point of view, under the influence of feelings and emotions

subliminal: subconscious

subtle: precise and delicate distinctions

surrealism: an artistic movement that tried to release the creative potential of the unconscious mind by expressing imaginative dreams and visions

syllogism: a deductive argument with two premises and a conclusion

syntax: the arrangement of words to form sentences or phrases - an example of syntax in toddlers might be a word pair such as 'my bed' or 'biscuits gone'

synthesis: the placing together of different parts or elements (evidence) to form a connected whole; in the context of dialectics, a connected whole, a resolution, or a new idea which resolves the conflict between thesis and antithesis

tacit: unspoken; implicit but not expressed

tally: to keep count (of things or events)

Talmud: the book of Jewish law and theology

tautology: saying the same thing in two different but completely equivalent ways; repeating something already implied

taxonomy: classification system, categorisation

tenet: principle, important truth

terrorism: the use of violence, especially against civilians, intended to create a climate of fear in the pursuit of political aims

textual analysis: a data-gathering process that analyses choices of words and the ways in which they are used, to try to develop a greater understanding of the meaning of a text and the culture in which it was written

theist: a person who believes in a god or gods who interact with people and the world

theocracy: literally 'government by God' in which God is seen as the supreme leader, acting through religious authorities; in other words, government by religious authorities

theologian: a person who studies the nature of God and religious beliefs, usually within a particular religious tradition

theorem: a principle or statement that can be demonstrated or proved using logic, but is not self-evident

theory: an interconnected system of ideas intended to explain something in depth

tolerance: acceptance of different perspectives and behaviours, even if you disagree with them

totalitarian state: a state in which the ruling authorities have total political, social and cultural control over those living in the state

traditional knowledge: a body of knowledge that is developed, sustained and passed on over generations within a community

traditional medicine: the indigenous knowledge, practices and skills used by indigenous peoples (and others) to diagnose and treat illnesses and injuries, and to maintain health

transcendental power: supernatural power; in this case, the power of art to take us anywhere, show us anything including past lives and let us see into the minds of others

transient: temporary, fleeting

trans-theistic: beyond theism and atheism

treatise: a detailed written account

tribalism: the behaviours and attitudes that arise out of membership of or loyalty to a social group

trickle-down theory: the theory that lowering taxes for wealthy corporations and high-income earners will lead to greater investments, and will expand economic prosperity. The benefits of the expanded economy will then 'trickle down' to the workers

Triptika: a set of three texts that are said to record the words of the Buddha

truth: in accord with fact or reality, a belief accepted as true, or faithfulness to a standard

Turing Test: a test put forward by Alan Turing where if a computer can pass itself off as a human, it would constitute intelligence on the part of the computer

universal grammar: the idea that all human languages, no matter how different they appear, share some fundamental similarities

universals: qualities that can be shared by different individuals at the same time, for example redness, roundness, beauty

utilitarian approach: a perspective that values usefulness above all other considerations

utilitarianism: the belief that ethics can ultimately be reduced to the principle that we should maximise happiness

vagueness: when something is not clear or has no distinct boundaries, is imprecise and defies exact definition

validity: the property of an argument in which the conclusion follows logically from the premises

values: standards of behaviour; regard for things of important moral worth

veneration: the act of worship or showing great respect

verification: the process of establishing the validity or accuracy of something

Verstehen position: the belief that the main aim of the human sciences is to understand the meaning of various social practices as they are understood by the agents themselves

vigilante: a citizen who enforces the law in their community without legal authority, and often breaks the law when doing so

viral: spreading widely and quickly

virtual reality: the technology that generates a computer simulation of an environment, such as a headset that shows images of a 'virtual' world

virtue ethics: the theory that an ethical action is one performed by a virtuous person for the right reason

wabi-sabi (侘寂): finding beauty in the imperfect, impermanent and incomplete

wallet: in terms of cryptocurrency, a software program that allows users to send and receive digital currency and monitor their balance

weak artificial intelligence: also known as applied AI or narrow AI, the use of software for a specific problem solving or reasoning task

whistleblowing: when a person or group makes public or passes on information about wrongdoing usually by or within an organisation

wisdom of repugnance: the claim that we can validly appeal to our feelings of disgust to justify our moral beliefs

wise nature fallacy: the false assumption that because something is natural it is therefore good

worldview: an overarching theory about the nature of the universe and human beings' place in it

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