Twitter Thread by Scott Hamilton

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Belief is a marriage between two functions of mind - emotion and explanation. It associates a feeling of confidence with an idea about how things are or should

> Belief is an affective reflection on what one knows that applies some kind of inductive guess/bet as to what related knowledge will be discovered in future.
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> — Scott Hamilton (@DoqxaScott) December 7, 2020

Why should we be wary and cautious about our sense of confidence about what we know?

For the same reason Bertrand Russell's (metaphoric anthropomorphic) chicken should have been wary about the benevolent farmer (see quote at end of thread).

Had it conceived alternative theories about the farmer feeding it, it may have acted differently and had a better life outcome.

Although unlike in Russell's chicken metaphor, belief is not necessarily a consequence of the error of induction. Strictly speaking, it never is (again, refer to quote at end thread).

However, when one believes without an accompanying explicit argument (theory), it prevents any possibility for critically questioning the reasons for the belief.

Therefore if we are mistaken, we deny the possibility of seeing how. This is particularly important when advocating for a course of action, and where predicted consequences from the belief are not easily and safely testable, as is the case for many social theories.

Of course, having an explicit argument is no guarantee the belief is correct. And it is no guarantee we will critically question our own argument. But it does at least present opportunity for someone else to show us, through argument, where they see we are mistaken.

Now, if I insist on having good reasons (a good argument) for holding a belief, what then is the difference between saying I believe compared with stating the claim or saying I know ?

In this way, it is possible to do away with the ambiguity in the concept of belief, and more importantly be able to separate a truth claim from a feeling of confidence about its truth value.

Furthermore, it liberates one's thinking such that one may entertain and follow an argument that one feels ought not be true. Thus opening opportunity to discover counter intuitive or paradoxical knowledge.

It shifts one from a mode of motivated reasoning to a mode of explorative objective reasoning. Temporarily unencumbered from our feelings about the problem situation.

What about when you want to express you are willing to bet (in principle) that a claim is true without having a great argument that it is?

No problem, there are alternative phrasings that communicate that idea: "I guess is true because ", "If is true, then might be true", and so on.

On the inductivist misconception from The Fabric of Reality, Ch3 by David Deutsch:

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Furthermore, even mere predictions can never be justified by observational evidence, as Bertrand Russell illustrated in his story of the chicken. (To avoid any possible misunderstanding, let me stress that this was a metaphorical, anthropomorphic chicken, representing a human being trying to understand the regularities of the universe.) The chicken noticed that the farmer came every day to feed it. It predicted that the farmer would continue to bring food every day. Inductivists think that the chicken had 'extrapolated' its observations into a theory, and that each feeding time added justification to that theory. Then one day the farmer came and wrung the chicken's neck. The disappointment experienced by Russell's chicken has also been experienced by trillions of other chickens. This inductively justifies the conclusion that induction cannot justify any conclusions!