

**The wiser you are, the more worries you have; the more you know, the more it hurts.  
For in much wisdom, is much grief; and he that increases knowledge increases sorrow.**

Ecclesiastes 1:18. Good News Bible. American Bible Society. 1976

The extract discusses the implications of gaining knowledge on one's conscience. From personal interpretations, the extract can be split into two parts, which I will proceed to analyze. Moreover, extract can be used to address different questions about the pursuit of knowledge, some of which will be discussed in this essay.

I “For in much wisdom, is much grief, and he that increases knowledge increases sorrow.”

The statement at first glance seems argumentatively sound and it is the main message of this passage. It is an intuitive thought, which for example can be shown in the process of upbringing: The child will know less about the cruelties of the world than the adult. The proposed sentiment is that knowledge can have a negative impact on one's conscience. This can be exemplified as such: Learning about the suffering that occurred in World War 2 will indeed make one more sophisticated and wiser. Nonetheless it will affect one's conscience and sympathy as long as this knowledge is retained. When we learn about the World War 2, we acquire knowledge that can make us more perceptive and understanding, however, we also have to carry the moral burden of knowing the suffering of fellow humans. In other words, the extract suggests that knowledge can carry saddening thoughts. Yet this begs the question if this is applicable to all types of knowledge? Will the mathematician be harmed by learning more about mathematics? Will the linguist be harmed by knowledge of languages? The logical inclination is to answer no. But then, what types of knowledge will carry grief and sorrow?

I can start by analyzing my aforementioned example of World War 2. One could categorize this as historical knowledge. So perhaps it is historical knowledge that can carry such burdens? To that a counterargument can be: Is the historian harmed by learning about the history of, for instance, maritime travel in different civilizations? I would suggest that the historian would be rather fascinated by such. So, it would be incorrect to say that all historical knowledge carries negative implications on the conscience. Then perhaps it isn't a specific area of knowledge, but rather a specific characterization of knowledge. Let me introduce another example, from a different area of knowledge. Let's consider the discovery of nuclear fission. Were scientists

saddened by the discovery itself? No, I would believe they were jubilant due to their astonishing discovery. However, this does not mean that the acquisition of this knowledge had no harm. From historical records it is evident that the discovery prompted insecurity and grief amongst many scientists. Why so? It is likely due to the lack of control of the implications of that knowledge. Upon this discovery, scientists realized that they had revealed significant powers to the world, that could be harmful for humanity, and I presume this was the source of the grief.

“The lack of control of the implications of knowledge” can also be applied to my first example, so perhaps it is an apt characterization of knowledge that causes grief. However, this isn’t a sufficient description, due to this objection: Linguists have negligible control about a language, and yet the knowledge of it presumably doesn’t cause any harm. Thus, I would append the following description: “...that one would wish were otherwise” such that knowledge that causes grief can be categorized as: “Knowledge that has implications that one cannot control, and that one wish were otherwise.” I have found this to be the most appropriate characterization, since it is sound for many different examples. An example that can support this is that the news of a murder bears more grief for a friend than for the murderer. This is because the friend could not control whether this person died or not, but would want it not to happen, whereas the murderer had control over the circumstances, and would likely not wish it was otherwise. Likewise, we are hurt by the knowledge of the suffering of people during World War 2, because we would want it to be otherwise. The scientists that discovered nuclear fission were saddened because they couldn’t control what happened with that knowledge and wouldn’t want the implications to materialize.

## II Ignorance vs Omniscience

The extract suggests that knowledge will bear sorrow, and hopefully I have also provided some support for that claim so far. Then, another question is imperative: Why do we continue seeking knowledge if we know it can cause us harm?

Human curiosity can be argued and explained in many different ways. One may suggest that it is evolutionary to want to learn about the world. But one may then wonder, what value does knowledge possess compared to the harm it implies? If we know that something can cause us grief, would we and why would we seek it? Consider, for instance, an analogy with the real

world: "If we see a dangerous animal, would we approach it?". I would suggest no, since it is likely to cause us harm and has no immediate value for us. Hence, it is implied that there should be some value that outweighs the harm associated with knowledge, in order for us to seek it. One can argue that it holds evolutionary value, since it is preferable for humans to know about the mistakes of the past in order to not repeat itself, and that this value outweighs the harm associated with knowledge. It can also be argued that it holds social value, for example through the pride of having your peers acknowledge your wisdom or perhaps through the sentiment of love and that one could help one's peers. I would argue that it is simply rooted in human nature to try to know. Imagine standing in a dark room, oblivious of everything around you and that you simply have the notion that there is or can be something around you. Would you want to turn on the lights to discover what is, or what isn't there? Or would you want to keep the lights off? I believe it would be unsettling to remain in the dark, and that it would be the tendency of the majority to turn on the light, even though it can turn out that there is nothing there. We do it simply due to the comfort of *knowing*, even if there is nothing there, rather than having the notion of *not knowing*. Perhaps the knowledge itself doesn't need to carry any value, but the act of *knowing* does. This can also explain why we pursue knowledge even if it can cause grief. For example, while we know that a war has occurred, we do not know what the consequences indeed were before seeking that knowledge. We therefore seek this knowledge to fill the void of *not knowing*, although it can have negative implications on our conscience. Either way, it seems that there has to be some value of *knowing* that outweighs harm associated with knowledge, in order for us to seek it.

Furthermore, with my example of a dark room I have alluded to another significant philosophical question: "If I don't want to live in ignorance do I want to live with omniscience?" With reference to the extract, the state of omniscience would be the culmination of the increase in knowledge, but also that one would also have to carry all the grief that is entailed in that knowledge. For the sake of argument, let me restrict "omniscience" to all the knowledge possessed by every person that lives and has lived.

My example of the dark room had one predication, namely, that we know of the *existence* of that room. However, what about other rooms? Rooms I don't know exists? Would I want to know about the contents of every room that exist? And moreover, would that give me any

comfort, and would I have use of that knowledge, or would I simply just jeopardize myself by making myself susceptible to all the knowledge of those rooms that can entail harm? Likewise, would I want to know about the harm and suffering of people whom I don't know? Would I like to know about what I don't even know exists? Considering this, perhaps we don't want to know everything. Maybe we simply want to know about what we are aware of, and that we have to be comfortable in the ignorance of everything else. Furthermore, with reference to the extract, this can suggest that there is some level of knowledge that entails sorrow and grief that is unendurable or does not make that knowledge worth it anymore.

### III “The wiser you are, the more worries you have; the more you know, the more it hurts.”

Though I stated in part I that the knowledge referred to in the extract is a specific type of knowledge, this part of the extract can be related to all types of knowledge. My father once told me the saying that: “the smart will always think he is dumb because of all that he doesn't know of, and the dumb will think that he knows everything”. Associated with increasing knowledge might also be the acknowledgement of ignorance. Another way to describe “The wiser you are, the more worries you have” is: The more you know the more concerned you are with not knowing. For every new thing you know you realize multiple other things you don't know. This can be a motivation to seek knowledge but also a curse of knowing.

One could then ask oneself if ignorance can be more comfortable than knowledge. Would one like to know little, with the notion that he knows all, or know more with the notion that you know none? A thought experiment can be deduced thereof: You have become aware that you are living in a simulation, that is, there is a real world you are oblivious about. Suppose you were given two options. Option one is to continue living your life in a simulation, ignorant of the fact that you put yourself in that world, in which you believe you know all there is to know about the world. Option two is to start living your life knowing that there is more about the world you don't know. Perhaps it is more comfortable to live in ignorance. Yet it feels like this contradicts mankind's inclination to seek knowledge, and that we would want to know despite the worries it causes. Either way, it is an idea that can be applied to all knowledge.

## Conclusion

The extract in focus raises multiple questions about the pursuit of knowledge. A shortcoming of the statement is that its proposal that knowledge induces grief generalizes knowledge and cannot necessarily be applied to all types of knowledge. However, I have suggested a more suitable characterization of that knowledge as: "Knowledge that has implications that one cannot control, and that one wish were otherwise". The reason we continue seeking knowledge in spite of its implications on our conscience can be argued for in different ways, though my examples have alluded to the idea that there should be a value associated with *knowing* that outweighs its harms. Lastly, the extract raises the question of whether it is preferable to know everything, or to know nothing. It is a question that cannot easily be answered, and one could argue for both.