

# What is the relationship between knowledge and culture?

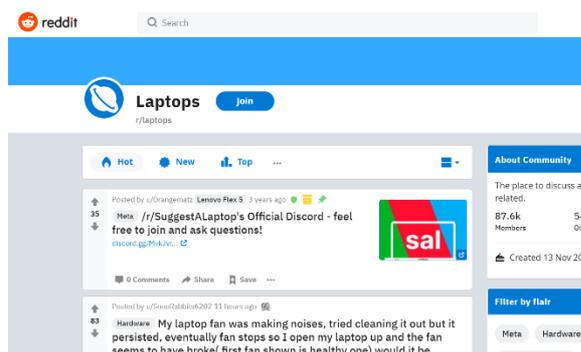
Knowledge and culture have various relationships with culture ranging from a mutually complementary one to a contradictory one. Culture is defined as ideas, customs and social behaviours of a collective thus often including religion and nationality, and knowledge as facts, information and skills acquired through experience or education. Through this exhibition I will be discussing the relationship between knowledge and culture with reference to three specific objects, where I will find that it often contrasts from situation to situation.

## Northern Ireland Football Shirt<sup>[1]</sup>



Northern Ireland has a famous cultural divide based of religion and political view<sup>[2]</sup>, creating its own culture surrounding this divide. This football shirt was gifted to me for my birthday a long time ago as I began enjoying football. My dad is Northern Irish, which is why it was given to me. At the time, I was completely oblivious to the cultural meanings of the shirt, involving the huge overlap between political orientation and identity in Ireland. In the region, whether you identify yourself as Northern Irish, Irish or British, even through a football shirt, can warrant assumptions about your political beliefs and religion. As a child, unaware of this, I was under the impression that wearing the shirt provided no significant knowledge to an onlooker. This is evidently not the case, and since passively learning about Northern Irish culture through membership, it became evident to me that wearing this shirt had social connotations as it implied that I would be more inclined towards Northern Irish independence, indicating that I would likely be a catholic rather than a protestant, and thus indicating political orientation. In this case, it shows the complementary relationship between knowledge and culture, where if the knower is a member of the cultural community, they will share assumptions and beliefs that allows them to learn more about certain objects, such as this shirt. However, this raises questions about the validity of knowledge gained through this method. In most cases similar to this, the knowledge comes from judgement based off cultural assumptions, which has issues regarding truth. Nevertheless, this can be argued to have more value than the no knowledge that would be found from someone without the cultural knowledge or membership.

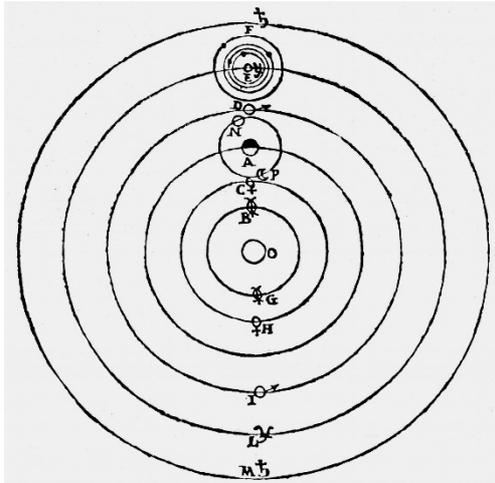
## Online Subreddit<sup>[3]</sup>



In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, cultures are found in areas that are detached from nationality, religion and ethnicity. The most prominent example is the culture surrounding technology, where, fitting with the definition of culture, ideas, customs and social behaviours have arisen from it. This technological or online culture, though I have been previously exposed to it, really became apparent to me when doing in-depth research for buying my current

laptop. As I researched and gained a knowledge on computers and technology, I learnt about 'Subreddits'<sup>[4]</sup> as shown here, where r/laptops is composed of people knowledgeable and interested in technology and computers. Here, jokes, new terminology and knowledge sharing occurred, giving the sense of a close-knit community of knowers, inevitably forming a culture around it. This demonstrates how knowledge, in this case about laptops, gave me access to membership of a niche culture of technology. This proves a further complementary relationship between knowledge and culture, where, this time, knowledge can lead to membership of a culture or sub-culture rather than the other way round. This is more exclusively for non-nationalist, ethnic or religious cultures, as membership in this culture is non-exclusive. Overall, this strongly links to the concept of a community of knowers, where this website suggests that if a community of knowers becomes well defined, culture may emerge from it as a result. It can even be argued that its possible each community of knowers has its own culture within, since most interactions between members of the community would be different and unique, a key characteristic of culture. Overall, its evident culture and knowledge are complementary both ways, where knowledge can lead to cultural membership, and cultural awareness can lead to further knowledge.

## Heliocentric Model of the Solar System<sup>[5]</sup>



This heliocentric<sup>[6]</sup> model is Galileo's first depiction of the theory based on Nicolaus Copernicus' <sup>[7]</sup> drawing. The theory and this model were strongly denounced by the Catholic Church at the time, with geocentrism<sup>[8]</sup>, having been promulgated by the church hundreds of years before<sup>[8]</sup>. Under the assumption already introduced that religions are a form of culture, these events led to an interesting situation where the continent-spanning culture of Christianity was intertwined with the knowledge of geocentrism, with the theory complying with the key Catholic concept of humanity being the centre of all. The heliocentric counter theory, sparked a paradigm shift within astronomy, pioneered by Italian

astronomer Galileo<sup>[9]</sup>. This however, did not occur seamlessly. In this case, culture became a barrier to new knowledge, with Catholicism emphasising the geocentric theory and paired with the prominence of the religion in Europe, contradiction was a challenge. What ensued was the Galileo affair, where he combatted Catholic obscurantism, resulting in a trial that officially branded heliocentrism as heretical. Only 359 years later<sup>[10]</sup> did the pope admit to the theory, and what's more surprising is that heliocentric theories dated back to 390BC<sup>[11]</sup>, yet due to the power and prominence of the Catholic culture, new knowledge was revoked in place of outdated knowledge due to its cultural ties. Whilst this argument relies on whether un-factual knowledge can still be considered valuable, it is undeniable that the new knowledge of heliocentrism was better as it is more likely to be factual than geocentrism. Overall, this is an example of where culture, this time in the form of religion, became a direct barrier to knowledge by preventing the spreading of newer and more truthful knowledge indicating a contradictory relationship.

- [1] – 2021, Northern Ireland shirt, from my own possessions.
- [2] – 2017, Two Tribes: A divided Northern Ireland, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/two-tribes-a-divided-northern-ireland-1.3030921>, accessed on 18/5/2021
- [3] – 2021, Reddit r/laptops community, screenshot from the internet - <https://www.reddit.com/r/laptops/>
- [4] – 2021, Subreddits, <https://www.reddit.com/subreddits/>, accessed on 28/05/2021
- [5] – 2021, Galilean Heliocentric model, taken from the internet - <https://cdn.britannica.com/15/147415-050-9C100022/illustration-Copernican-system-universe-Galileo-tolemaico-e-1632.jpg>
- [6] – 2016, What is the heliocentric model of the universe? <https://phys.org/news/2016-01-heliocentric-universe.html>, accessed on 18/5/2021
- [7] – Robert S. Westman, Nicolaus Copernicus, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Nicolaus-Copernicus>, accessed on 18/5/2021.
- [8] – Geocentrism, <https://www.scripturecatholic.com/geocentrism/>, accessed on 7/5/2021
- [9] – Elspeth Lewis, 09/05/2019, <https://spacecentre.co.uk/blog-post/galileos-telescope-changed-our-view-of-the-solar-system/>, accessed on 7/5/2021
- [10] – 7/11/1992, Vatican admits Galileo was right, <https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg13618269-600-vatican-admits-galileo-was-right/>, accessed on 7/5/2021
- [11] – Heliocentrism, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/heliocentrism>, accessed on 7/5/2021