

# Available information

— preparatory note for a theory of epistemological space

Lars-Erik Janlert

Department of Computing Science

Umeå University, Sweden,

[lej@cs.umu.se](mailto:lej@cs.umu.se)

## Abstract

We can imagine how in the distant past the epistemological space of sentient beings more or less coincided with physical space: to know some contingent fact of the world you would have to be there and at that particular moment and actually sense it. In the age of information, the shape of epistemological space is brought to deviate more and more from the shape of physical space. Establishing a telegraph or phone connection brings objects distant in physical space close in epistemological space. Books draw together information scattered in physical space, making it available at each point in physical space where a copy is at hand. Epistemological space is warped by information technology, and the newest information technologies bring this development to a head. We may dream of having all epistemic resources instantly available, but the goal of making all information equally and instantly at hand (not to mention everywhere) is self-defeating. It is not just unattainable, it is not even an approachable ideal, it is *impossible in principle*. In order to make better use of epistemological space we need to understand it better. *Epistemological distance* is suggested as a basic conceptual tool needed in order to begin to explore the shape and laws of epistemological space. Intuitively, the distance to a piece of information is its virtual availability: the time it takes to access it, to bring it to the fore, to produce it, irrespective of implementations and methods used. Two basic issues when you want to measure the distance to some kind of entities are what the appropriate kind of entity is, and how the presence of such an entity can be determined. In this case: What does it mean to “have” knowledge, and what is it that you have when you have it?