



Why is knowledge more valuable than true belief?

Pascal Engel

Professeur ordinaire de philosophie
contemporaine

University of Geneva

Pascal.engel@lettres.unige.ch

<http://www.unige.ch/lettres/philo/enseignants/pe/>



**UNIVERSITÉ
DE GENÈVE**

FACULTÉ DES LETTRES

Main research topics

Epistemology, theory of knowledge

Philosophy of mind, philosophy of logic

Project FNS *Knowledge, reasons and norms* (2007-2009)

Main recent publications

Truth, Chesham Acumen 2002

Va savoir! Hermann,

Nom conf / date **Paris 2007**



Summary

- ***Why does knowledge add value to mere true belief ? A classical philosophical answer is that knowledge implies the reliability of method. A more elaborate answer is that the value of knowledge is attached to the intellectual virtues of the knowers as agents. The aim of this paper is to compare these approaches with respect to some issues about the production and transmission of knowledge in a social setting.***
- **Key words : knowledge, belief, truth, epistemology, value, reliability, intellectual virtue, testimony, expertise**

The Plato problem

Meno 97c Is knowledge more valuable than true belief? Why is it better to know the road to Larissa than to have merely a true belief about it? True belief seems to have as much practical value as knowledge.

Plato's answer: because true opinions have a tendency to fly away from the human mind, and are not worthy until one has given an explanation with knowledge comes reason, *logos*.



UNIVERSITÉ
DE GENÈVE

FACULTÉ DES LETTRES

Knowledge and justification

Knowledge is *true belief with justification*.

If it were merely true belief, there would be no difference between hitting upon true belief by chance and having knowledge. Knowledge excludes *epistemic luck*.

Two conceptions of justification

- a) Internal (*internalism*) : to have a justified belief the agent must be in possession of a reason, to which he or she has access and of which she is *responsible*
- b) External (*externalism*): no accessibility of reason needed , the existence of a causal process linking belief to truth is enough. Compare: animal knowledge

Knowledge is reliable belief

On the externalist conception of knowledge, knowledge is reliable true belief. It has to be produced by a *reliable causal process* and a reliable method.

Compare with utilitarianism: maximisation of reliable true belief (Goldman 1986, 1996)

At the social level: maximisation of true belief in a community

But the *Meno* problem backfires

If the objective is to maximise *true* beliefs, why does knowledge matter? Why should a coffee produced by a reliable machine be more valuable than a coffee produced by a non reliable coffee machine, provided you get the coffee anyway? Reliable true belief *swamps* the value of knowledge.



Two solutions

A virtue perspective on knowledge :

a) Knowledge is the actualisation of intellectual virtues (Aristotelian idea, Mertonian ideals)

problem : virtue is neither necessary nor sufficient

a) A revision of reliabilism : reliabilist knowledge promotes future true belief and makes it more probable

Knowledge first : Applications

- 1) Dynamics of information in computer assisted reasoning : knowledge is not merely information
- 2) Testimony : the social spread of knowledge
- 3) Argument and dialogical argumentation
- 4) The technology of communication
- 5) the marketplace of ideas

Science

Science is the production of knowledge, not of true belief, and even less of relative world views.

Primacy of scientific realism

Towards a truly alethic and knowledge-based epistemology of scientific knowledge

Law, democracy and education

Scientific expertise and the scientific distribution
of knowledge

Legal expertise

Democracy

Education

Conclusion

