Chapter 5: Epistemic Value, Duty, and Virtue

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Chapter Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this chapter, readers will be able to:

1. *Identify* questions about value associated with the pursuit of knowledge and justified belief.
2. *Critically evaluate* claims about epistemic entitlement, claims such as that a person's beliefs or attitudes are either responsibly or irresponsibly held.
3. *Demonstrate* analytic writing and reasoning skills in articulating philosophical concepts of epistemic "value," "duty," and "virtue"/"vice."

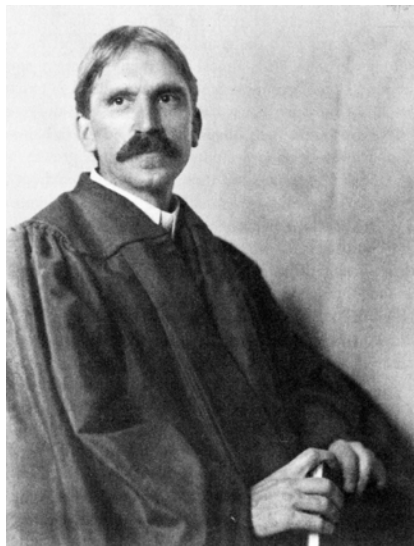
Epistemic Value and the Value Problem

You need very much to go to Larissa but do not know the way. If you asked one who knows, we can agree this person would be a good guide. But what about one who has "a true opinion about which way is the right way," but who hasn't gone there and isn't directly acquainted with the path? Socrates asks his friend Meno, in the Platonic dialogue by that name, whether such a person with "right opinion concerning that which other people know … will not be a worse guide than one who knows." Meno concurs that this person would not be a worse guide, for the conveyed belief, or guidance, would be essentially the same. But upon receiving this response, Socrates observes an oddity: if true belief can serve just as well our practical purpose of successfully guiding action, then why do we value knowledge over true belief? Indeed, why (and how) do we try to distinguish knowledge from *merely* true belief?[1]

These searching questions leave Meno in the uncomfortable, perplexed state of mind the Greeks termed *aporia*. Meno now seems to be without resources to answer Socrates' initial question about the nature of knowledge. But Socrates immediately offers Meno a way out. It seems correct that an assertion or transmitted belief, insofar as it *is* true, would serve practical ends as well as would knowledge. But for the testifier in our example the belief lacks justification, and in sharing it that testifier would be "offering guess-work in lieu of knowledge." If we abstract from the single-iteration cases in which the belief happens to be true, we find that relying upon luck, guesswork, or weakly supported beliefs is quite *unlikely* to serve well. If so based, our own beliefs are not likely to "stay put" even for us. So, "True opinions, for as long as they remain, are fine things and do nothing but good. But they don't hang around for long; they escape from a man's mind, so that they are not worth much until one tethers them" with a *logos* or "account" (Plato 2002, 97–98).
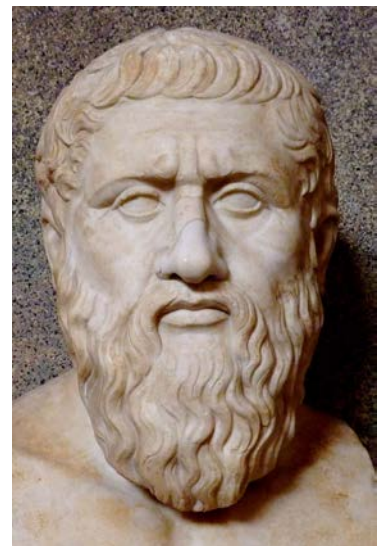
Socrates does not say much about the nature of this *logos,* whether it is good reasons for one's belief that an agent finds available upon self-reflection, or something more like an explanation which makes salient why the belief was reliably formed in the agent, such that their having come to hold this true belief, rather than some other false belief, is not merely a matter of extreme good luck. But it is clear, firstly, that Socrates is talking about something like "justification" or "warrant," to use terms debated in contemporary epistemology (see Chapter 2 of this volume, "Epistemic Justification" by Todd R. Long). Secondly, it is clear that he takes this "tying" or "chaining down" of the belief by a *logos,* and the resulting *stability* it enjoys*,* to both provide what differentiates knowledge from true belief, and at the same time to affirm why it is *not* mistaken that we should value knowledge above merely true belief. Hence, Plato is seen as a source of the traditional, justified true belief analysis of knowledge (or JTB account; see Chapter 1 of this volume, "The Analysis of Knowledge" by Brian C. Barnett).

The sufficiency of this traditional analysis has been challenged in recent years, and some have questioned even the necessity of reflective justification for knowledge possession. But we owe Plato (c. 428–347 BCE) for having vividly presented the concern about what we *mean* in attributing knowledge to someone, together with a question about why we *value* different epistemic standings as we do. While the **value problem** as just introduced is understood and answered in different ways by proponents of different accounts of our epistemic aims, facing these questions head on has arguably added much depth to contemporary epistemological debates. It has helped the field to expand beyond a mere spectator theory of knowledge, which John Dewey[2] (*Later Works* 4.19) characterized as an account which makes the metaphor of vision primary, such that knowing is fundamentally a passive, or "beholding" relation between an individual "subject" knower and an external "object" known. For as Alvin Goldman points out, while a few decades ago epistemology and ethics were "positioned in opposite corners of the philosophical establishment, the former the epitome of 'theoretical' philosophy and the latter the epitome of 'practical' philosophy, with little contact made between them, today an active interest in both analogies and disanalogies between ethics and epistemology abounds" (Goldman 2015, 132–3).[3]

A "normative" task is one that does not aim at description or causal explanation, but rather at assessment or guidance of some kind, according to values (norms) deemed pertinent to some practice (the value of art or particular artworks, for example), or the domain of discourse (ethics, politics, economics, epistemics, aesthetics, etc.). What has been discovered—or perhaps recovered—through recent interest in the value problem is that normative epistemology and normative ethics have important parallels. This is why duty, consequentialist, and virtue theories in ethics each have analogues in contemporary epistemological theories.[4] The study of **epistemological axiology** helps to highlight the similarities of ethical and epistemic evaluation, but also the differences. Moreover, similarities or analogies imply something quite different from identity: their claim is weaker than the claim that we can *reduce* the one kind of value to the other. The value problem is best addressed by carefully distinguishing the kinds of value in play, rather than reducing value to a single kind. So, Duncan Pritchard insists that to understand and respond to the problem we first recognize that different kinds of value (epistemic, ethical, practical) are in play.

The claim of **veritism** (or **T-monism**) is that truth is the natural aim of belief, and true belief is the fundamental epistemic good. While truth is, as on the traditional account, a condition on knowledge, the value of truth is not grounded in knowledge or anything else. Other epistemic states or standings are good as they promote the epistemic value of true belief. T-monism has many critics as well as defenders. Linda Zagzebski (1996) for example argues that (externalist) reliabilism offers an inadequate account of epistemological axiology, or epistemic value. Pritchard, although he defends reliabilism and T-monism, makes the useful methodological point that authors on both sides of the debate are sometimes guilty of confusing "epistemic value" (associated with truth or other epistemic ends) with "the value of the epistemic" (the instrumental value of holding true beliefs, knowledge, understanding, etc., for realizing our moral or practical ends).[5] Epistemic value does not imply value proper, or value for life (Pritchard 2014, 112).[6]

Opposed to epistemic value monism is **epistemic value pluralism**. This axiological thesis denies the T-monist claim that the natural aim of belief is truth. The pluralist finds no straightforward hierarchy among epistemic goods, but rather an *un-unified* order of values. A Jamesian point often discussed as a challenge to veritism is that "truth" as the fundamental epistemic good is ambiguous between a positive and negative good: "Believe truth! Shun error!" (James, Section VII, 18).[7] Seen as prescribing how to conduct inquiry, these two commands are not the same.[8] If, instead of marching in lockstep they can sometimes come apart, leading to different prescriptions, then the epistemic good of true belief is not as unified as it may at first appear.[9] Further, if there is no single best way for agents to balance these two ideals of inquiry (the councils of intellectual courage and of caution, as William James describes them), then recognition of the range of ways to achieve a balance becomes an argument in support of the possibility of reasonable disagreement even among evidence-sharing epistemic peers (Kelly 2013).
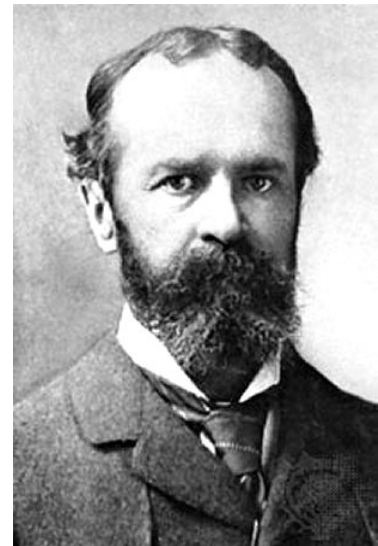
Critics of veritism have either (a) maintained a monism but elevated to final value status a *different* aim, such as understanding; or (b) jettisoned monism's "primary aim" thesis in order to embrace "radical pluralism about both the nature of the epistemic and about epistemic value" (Pritchard 2014). On this latter, pluralist view, "there is no base-level account of the epistemic available, and nor is there a fundamental epistemic good—i.e., fundamental in the sense that the epistemic value of other epistemic goods is reducible to the fundamental epistemic good." Here we are presented with a smorgasbord of the epistemically desirable—truth, knowledge, understanding, wisdom, justification, reliability, cognitive agency, explanatory power, and so on—but "with no straightforward hierarchy in play."[10]

The Ethics of Belief

The **ethics of belief** raises questions of our responsibility (praiseworthiness or blameworthiness) for how we conduct our inquiries and settle our beliefs. It is a broad and perhaps ambiguous term, which Andrew Chignell (2018) describes as referring to a cluster of questions at the intersection of epistemology, ethics, philosophy of mind, and psychology. Susan Haack (2001) defends an Overlap model relating epistemic and ethical evaluation. On this model we should not reduce epistemic value to ethical values; but having first properly differentiated them, we can then go on to acknowledge a good deal of overlap or traffic between them. *Moral* responsibility is widely held to have an epistemic

condition, the failing of which is the reason why not knowing something, when the ignorance is non-culpable, is generally an excusing condition for one's wrongful action.[11] **Doxastic responsibility**, the kind of responsibility one has for what they believe, seems similarly to draw from the other side, in that even though we lack the direct control over our beliefs that we often have over our actions, we have enough *indirect* control over how well or poorly we inquire that some portion of our beliefs are subject to moral evaluation.

Haack argues that the portion of our beliefs which are properly censured on moral grounds is substantially smaller than the full set of our epistemically unjustified beliefs. For there are numerous cases where one's belief may lack epistemic justification, but where the agent is not vicious or blameworthy for believing something on scanty evidence. This may occur because the person's believing something unjustifiedly is due to "cognitive inadequacy" and does not involve willed ignorance, negligence, or the covert (self-deceptive) operation of hopes or fears. To show this, Haack revisits the classic debate between the evidentialist William Clifford and the **permissivist** William James.[12] The focus of James' rebuttal of Clifford (highlighted in Table 1 below) was the latter's bold, **impermissivist** claim:[13]

Clifford's Principle: "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence."

It is clear that Clifford's presupposed sense of "wrongness" in Clifford's Principle is an ethical sense. But the idea of doxastic responsibility, and accordingly, of projects of guidance, also raise issues about "ought implies can" (control as a precondition of responsibility) and about the degree of control humans have over their doxastic attitudes: If all beliefs are completely involuntary, it would hardly make sense to speak of doxastic responsibility. That we are responsible for our actions does not mean we are responsible for, or can change our beliefs in just the same way. This would likely be false. Differences over these issues help explain why debate over the ethics of belief often involves competing models of the relationship between epistemic, ethical, and pragmatic value. But Haack (21) provides a quite helpful taxonomy of five models of the relationship between ethical and epistemic evaluation:[14]

(1) that epistemic appraisal is a subspecies of ethical appraisal—henceforth, for short, the *Special-Case Thesis*;
(2) that positive/negative epistemic appraisal is distinct from, but invariably associated with, positive/negative ethical appraisal—the *Correlation Thesis*;
(3) that there is, not invariable correlation, but partial overlap, where positive/negative epistemic appraisal is associated with positive/negative ethical appraisal—the *Overlap Thesis*;
(4) that ethical appraisal is inapplicable where epistemological appraisal is relevant—the *Independence Thesis*;
(5) that epistemic appraisal is distinct from, but analogous to, ethical appraisal—the *Analogy Thesis*.

Haack's taxonomy brings a good deal of clarity to an oft-muddled debate. Zagzebski's early "pure virtue theory" is a clear instance of the *Special-Case Thesis*. Clifford can be seen to presuppose the *Correlation Thesis* in coining the term "ethics of belief," yet other evidentialists like Trent Dougherty (2014) criticize that thesis and appear to endorse the *Independence Thesis* instead.[15] *The Overlap Thesis* is the most plausible according to Haack, who goes on to argue that it helps to clarify and properly restrict the domain in which instances of believing may be judged on ethical as well as epistemic grounds. Clifford's Principle presupposes the *Correlation Thesis*: It assumes, Haack points out, that "whenever a person believes unjustifiedly, his so believing is always also subject, all things considered, to unfavorable moral appraisal" (24). But, Haack argues "there is, not an invariable correlation, but partial overlap, where positive/negative epistemic appraisal is associated with positive/negative ethical appraisal" (129). "Unlike the correlation thesis, which requires that unjustified believing be always (at least prima facie) harmful and always something for which the subject may properly be held responsible, the overlap thesis requires only that unjustified believing *sometimes* causes (at least prima facie) harm and *sometimes* be something for which the subject may properly be held responsible" (125).

Haack's application of the Overlap Thesis to the ethics of belief functions by (a) restricting the domain in which instances of believing may be judged on ethical as well as epistemic grounds; by (b) identifying circumstances that serve to exonerate individuals from unfortunate epistemic failures; and by (c) distinguishing appraisals of character from epistemic and ethical appraisal, and role-specific responsibilities from those more generally appropriate to all of us.[16] This approach arguably delivers an ethics of belief that is moderately permissivist and supportive of William James' plea for a "spirit of inner toleration" and of what the political philosopher John Rawls[17] (1921–2002) termed "reasonable pluralism." Barring more specific objections, Rawls' form of belief permissivism can agree with Thomas Jefferson in *Notes on the State of Virginia* [*Query XVII, "Religion"*], when he held, "It does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods or no God. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg." This is an advantage in that we are not bound to over-easily associate disagreement with error or irrationality. The view also appreciates the holistic and trait-dependent reasoning that attends our deepest-held or "worldview" beliefs—the many different *kinds* of evidence and the many contextual factors including upbringing or early educational influences. These tend to weigh heavily upon reasoning in the domains of morals, politics, philosophy, and religion, which are referred to in the literature as domains of controversial views. But another advantage is that this approach remains concerned as was Clifford with the many harms and injustices that bias-mirroring us/them or ingroup/outgroup beliefs, as a prime example, inflict upon others. It remains what I call a permissive yet *risk aware* ethics of belief (Axtell 2020).

This leads directly to our next topic, but the ethics of belief remains a topic of lively debate, so I conclude our discussion of it with a table describing the key issues and arguments between Cliffordian moral evidentialism and proponents of a more permissive ethics of belief, as James presented them in his famous 1896 paper "The Will to Believe." James was primarily intending to rebut Clifford's maxim as it appears to demand agnosticism (belief withholding or suspension) in a wide range of cases, and to rule out virtuous faith ventures including belief in a broad, philosophically stated "religious hypothesis."

Table 1 – William James' "The Will to Believe"[18]

	The Evidentialist as "Faith Vetoer"	The Jamesian Believer
A. Primary Aim	*Avoid believing what is false!*	*Believe what is true!*
B. Risk of Losing the Truth	*Remaining in ignorance; through skeptical paralysis, never coming to believe something that is true.*	*Falling into error; through credulous manner of uptake, coming to believe something that is false.*
C. Guiding Rule or Prescription	*Evidential reasoning should always prevail in our deliberations:* "The rightness or wrongness of belief in a doctrine (proposition) depends only upon the nature of the evidence for it, and not upon what the doctrine is" (Clifford, *EOB* 102). Stated negatively, "It is wrong, always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence" (*EOB* 77).	*In specific instances, pragmatic reasoning should be treated as a normal element in making up our minds*: "The thesis I defend is, briefly stated, this: *Our passional nature not only lawfully may, but must, decide an option between propositions, whenever it is a genuine option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds*" (James, *WB,* Sec. IV).
D. Applied to the Religious Hypothesis (RH)	Withhold assent to the RH, as to more particular overbeliefs, until sufficient evidence is present. An agnostic stance of suspension is uniquely rational, and deontologically required.	"The lawfulness of voluntarily adopted faith," since the option between the alternatives of accepting or doing without the RH are argued to meet the conditions of a "genuine option."[19]
E. Justifying Moral Argument	*Public duty:* There is a public duty to withhold assent, based on harm done by irresponsible and dishonest habits of belief-acquisition.	*Private right:* There is a private right to "faith ventures," and there is value in a robust marketplace of spiritual and philosophical "overbeliefs"; we ought to promote an "inner tolerance" for them when they are tolerant themselves.
F. Risk-related Primary Intellectual Virtue	*Intellectual Caution*: Since "we must avoid error," we should maintain the "skeptical balance," and remain uncommitted until sufficient evidence is presented either for or against a belief.	*Intellectual Courage*: Since "we must know the truth" on some questions of existential concern, we may have to dare to be wrong. Under the conditions of the genuine option, we may commit to belief "in advance" of sufficient evidence, yet continue to inquire.

| G. Motivating Passion | *Fear:* "Better risk loss of truth than chance of error, —that is your faith-vetoer's exact position" (*WB* sec. 10). [But Clifford would reverse this, with the evidentialist exemplifying *fearless* open inquiry into truth, and his opponent *fear* and intellectual dishonesty]. | *Hope:* "If religion be true and the evidence for it still be insufficient, I do not wish . . . to forfeit my sole chance in life of getting upon the winning side" (*WB* sec. 10). |

Virtue & Vice Epistemologies

Study of the value problem and of epistemological axiology more generally has been part of a broader trend that includes the development in recent decades of social, feminist, performance, and **virtue epistemologies**, accounts which themselves display numerous overlaps not just in what epistemological views they claim to supersede, but also in what they affirm as the proper scope of normative epistemology (see also this volume Chapter 7, "Social Epistemology" by William D. Rowley; Chapter 8, "Feminist Epistemologies" by Monica C. Poole). Authors associated with these trends have explored the relationship between knowledge and power, the relationship between individual and group knowing, and the relationship between coming to know and performing inquiry responsibly.

Character epistemology, or what has also been called **virtue responsibilism**, has arguably led to expansion of the field of epistemology, whether in the sense of studies independent from but complementary to the analysis of knowledge, or as directly or indirectly informing/transforming that traditional epistemological project.[20] Virtue epistemologies both reliabilist and responsibilist break with mid- and late-twentieth century analytic epistemology by making agency and responsibility in inquiry primary, and hence also by repatriating diachronic (latitudinal/across time) in contrast with synchronic (time-slice) concerns from their unjust banishment from epistemic significance. Heather Battaly and others argue that this puts "active" knowledge (or perhaps "reflective" in contrast to "brute" or "animal" knowing) back on the epistemological map in a way that simple reliabilism and anti-luck epistemologies cannot. Certainly it encourages thick descriptions of particular virtues and vices and their effects on inquiry, and on individual and group beliefs.[21] Virtues such as intellectual humility have received a good deal of attention in character epistemology, along with open-mindedness and others.[22]

While most character epistemology has focused on virtues (whether in the broader "intellectual" or the more restrictive "epistemic" sense), a good deal of interest has recently been shown in the complementary focus on intellectual vices, often directly informed by studies in social and/or cognitive psychology. Quassim Cassam's[23] *Vices of the Mind: From the Intellectual to the Political* (2019) somewhat ironically mirrors the title of Zagzebski's *Virtues of the Mind* (1996), noted for having spurred a great deal of initial interest in virtue or character epistemology. Cassam defines **vice epistemology** as "the philosophical study of the nature, identity, and epistemological significance of intellectual vices. Such vices include gullibility, dogmatism,

prejudice, closed-mindedness, and negligence. These are intellectual character vices, that is, intellectual vices that are also character traits."[24]

Epistemic Paternalism

Social epistemology studies how social relationships and interactions affect the epistemic properties of individuals, groups, and collectives (see this volume Chapter 7, "Social Epistemology" by William D. Rowley). These relationships may include existing or ideal divisions of labor in the search for knowledge, and questions of power relations. Social epistemology raises socially significant questions both about our epistemic agency in the world, and about the efficacy of our epistemic practices. Some of these questions involve the improvability of our habits of inquiry. Education of course offers this, but there is controversy about the need and justification for more overt policies or interventions to correct for flawed or biased thinking. "Paternalism" is a term referring us to actions or policies intended to aid others for their own good, but without their consent. Helmet and seatbelt laws, for example, require something of us for our own safety, and we aren't free just to ignore them. But our inquiry and access to information can be similarly interfered with on the paternalistic ground that this is for our own epistemic benefit. Indeed, epistemic practices which have a paternalistic profile affect our private and public lives, often in ways of which we are not aware. **Epistemic paternalism** (EP) provides a rationale for such interferences; in its primary sense EP is a normative thesis, a thesis of *advocacy* for (or justifiable participation in) some specific interferences or limitations in the ways in which we might seek knowledge. Restricted access to information sometimes improves people's reasoning and supports veritistic outcomes, as for instance in "blinded" scientific experiments, and in judicial rules prohibiting the disclosure of a defendant's past criminal profile to a jury. But what entities are entitled to undertake a paternalistic practice, and in virtue of which features does such entitlement accrue to them? For example, are media sites like Facebook *permitted* to paternalistically tag or remove "fake news" or extreme content? Should they be *expected* to have policies to filter out certain potentially harmful content, and to remediate the ill-effects of "echo chambers" where biased and polarized ideologies are fostered?

The debate over justified EP at times leans on interpretation of findings in psychology, findings which are often claimed to suggest intractable human irrationality, biases, and problematic heuristics. But while biased reasoners might be one threat to the legitimacy of democratic practices, so might be certain censoring or coercive testimonial practices rationalized by the epistemic improvements they promise. So, paternalistic epistemic practices and their proper limits are today a topic of interest, at least where contemporary social epistemology and concerns for political legitimacy overlap. Alvin Goldman[25] introduced and defended EP early in social epistemology's emergence (1991). While there is an apparent tension between epistemic paternalism and **epistemic justice**, EP's defenders think that the tension is only apparent, and that intelligent interventions can in fact be a form of epistemic justice insofar as applications of epistemic paternalism respect persons as actual knowers, and facilitate their epistemic capacities.

Distinguishing Between Epistemology's Normative Projects

Questions about epistemological axiology which interest many philosophers today—questions of what epistemic *goals* there are, and why we *value* knowledge, understanding, and wisdom—were not always considered very central questions in epistemology. The traditional project of the analysis of knowledge of course remains one of epistemologists' primary tasks, but the turn to the study of knowing agents (rather than propositions known), and to collectives (rather than just individuals) broadens and transforms contemporary normative epistemology. It requires us to rethink issues about *how* we inquire, and about how we should conceive the relationship between epistemic and moral evaluation. Thus, epistemologists are increasingly concerned with agency both of individuals and collectives, and with thick descriptions of the role of particular virtues and vices (epistemic or moral) in inquiry. Contemporary normative epistemology also hosts lively debate over the importance of concepts of responsibility, reasonableness, willful ignorance, and epistemic justice/injustice. These and related concepts are important for projects of guidance aimed at addressing real-world agents and problems of diversity among beliefs: concerns discussed here under the *ethics of belief*. But these projects of guidance or amelioration (improvement of performance) involve human psychology and attention to the non-ideal agents we actually are. For these reasons it is important to clearly distinguish the forward-looking concerns with guidance from the project of conceptual analysis of knowledge.

Questions for Reflection

1. In what ways is the evaluation of responsible belief similar to the evaluation of responsible action? In what ways is the evaluation of belief different from the evaluation of actions?

2. What is the highest epistemic good? Is there one main good, or are there several?

3. How are norms of rationality connected with norms of the ethics of belief? Should our ethics of belief be permissive or impermissive? If permissive, does that mean any belief is a reasonable one, or are their limits to reasonable belief and reasonable disagreement?

4. William Clifford argued that "It is wrong always, anywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence," while Thomas Jefferson argued that "It does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods or no God. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg." Are Clifford the evidentialist, and Jefferson the permissivist, speaking about the same kinds of harms? Whose stance on the ethics of belief do you most agree with, and why?

5. Is the study of intellectual "virtues" and "vices" valuable? Can such virtues as intellectual humility and open-mindedness be taught? Are virtues simply skills, or is there a motivational component to virtues that distinguishes their acquisition from, say, acquiring the skills of riding a bike?

6. What examples can you find of epistemic paternalist practices, for instance, in medicine, in the law, in education? Are there justified instances of interfering with people's inquiry without their consent, for their own epistemic good, or does the value of personal autonomy always outweigh the interest in promoting truth?

Further Reading

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Glossary

Belief (im)permissivism: Impermissivist views in the ethics of belief are closely associated with broad application of the Rational Uniqueness principle (RU), and permissivist views with the rejection of this principle. (RU) holds that for a given set of evidence E and a proposition *p*, only one doxastic attitude about *p* is rational. Rational agents who share that evidence will hold this single attitude, and none other. The issues which divide impermissivists and permissivists are further complicated if one not in terms of "belief," "disbelief" and "suspension," but in terms of a spectrum of degreed credences. The debate is also complicated by questions concerning the legitimacy of "faith-based" belief as indicating something quite different from everyday belief, or belief based upon inference from logically sufficient evidence. Clifford's Principle is associated with impermissivism, and with an evidentialist ethics of belief, while James defends a (risk-limited) permissivism.

Clifford's Principle: "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence." The principle as defended by William Clifford (1877) is considered a strict statement of an evidentialist ethics of belief.

Doxastic responsibility: The kind of responsibility one has for what they believe.

Epistemic paternalism: Any practice that interferes with the inquiry of some or all persons, without their consent/consultation, for their own purported epistemic health or improvement.

Epistemic value pluralism: An axiological thesis that denies the T-monist claim that the natural aim of belief is truth; finding no straightforward hierarchy among epistemic goods suggests to the pluralist an *un-unified* order of values, or even a "smorgasbord" of epistemic goods.

Epistemological axiology: The study of the aims of cognition, and the value of epistemic states (knowledge, understanding, belief, suspension, etc.) and standings (justified, unjustified, etc.).

Ethics of belief: The philosophical project of providing guidance for morally and intellectually responsible *doxa* (belief, opinion), including how one should respond to recognized peer disagreement.

The value problem: The problem, at base, of why we hold a person's having knowledge to be more valuable than their having (mere) true belief. The problem introduced here with Plato's *Meno* is broken down into several sub-problems by some contemporary epistemologists.

Veritism or **T-monism:** The axiological thesis that the natural aim of belief is truth, and that epistemic value is rooted in holding true beliefs and avoiding false beliefs. The value of truth is not grounded in knowledge or anything else.

Vice epistemology: Complementary to (if not simply part of) the better-known trend of virtue epistemology, vice epistemology is the philosophical study of the nature, identity, and epistemological significance of intellectual vices.

Virtue epistemology: The philosophical study of the nature, identity, and epistemological significance of intellectual virtues. The term covers a range of recent approaches which grant characterological concepts (including specific habits, dispositions, or strategies which constitute excellences for agents engaged in inquiry) an important or even fundamental role in epistemology.

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Notes

[1] Image caption: Bust of Plato from the Vatican Museum. Photo by Dudva via Wikimedia Commons. License: CC BY-SA 4.0

[2] Image caption: John Dewey at the University of Chicago in 1902. Photo by Eva Watson-Schütze via Wikimedia Commons. This work is in the public domain.

[3] We should note that I am for simplicity introducing the value problem as a single problem, whereas Pritchard (2007) argues that we should really distinguish at least three overlapping sub-questions.

[4] See Goldman (2015) and Berker (2013) debating the relationship between T-monism and a consequentialist account of epistemic normativity. See also the Ethics book in the Introduction to Philosophy open textbook series for more on duty, consequentialist, and virtue theories of ethics.

[5] Pritchard (2014) finds a crucial ambiguity in the use of the term "epistemic value." He thinks it should be restricted to the "attributive" sense of something that is valuable in a specific way (in this case, a specifically epistemic way). But instead it is often conflated (he thinks by veritism's critics) with a "predicative" sense of something being "both epistemic and of value" (moral, practical, aesthetic, etc.).

[6] Similarly, we should not simply presuppose close overlap between issues in the "ethics of belief" and the "epistemology of disagreement" projects, even though both are often divided along lines of proponents of "uniqueness" and "permissivism." See Greco and Hedden (2016) for a defense of uniqueness and of impermissivism. See Jackson (2020) for a defense of a permissivist ethics of belief based upon *epistemic* permissivism and standpoint epistemology. See Axtell (2020) for further discussion of differences between epistemic assessment and guidance, especially in respect to beliefs in domains of controversial views.

[7] Image caption: William James in 1890 via Wikimedia Commons. This work is in the public domain.

[8] As an example, think about beliefs derived from testimony. If I take my epistemic aim as acquiring as many true beliefs as possible, then I should believe just about any claim made by any source of testimony (friends, books, media, etc.) and not worry that I will very likely acquire lots of false beliefs along with the true. If I instead think I am a better epistemic agent to avoid false beliefs as far a possible, I will be far more cautious and risk-averse in what I come to accept, even if I likely forego acquiring some true beliefs I would, were I more credulous in my style of belief-uptake. Can epistemology tell us just how to balance these aims? Does the same balance hold across domains, or are we apt to be more cautious in some matters, and more credulous in others?

[9] Zagzebski charges that Goldman, Pritchard, and other defenders of a reliabilist account of epistemic value with a "swamping problem." For if the value of an epistemic state is only instrumentally valuable relative to a further good and that good is already present in that item, then it can confer no additional value. The value of reliability will be "swamped" by these further values. Thus, that a belief, to constitute knowledge, must be reliably formed, seems unable to tell us why knowledge is more valuable than merely true belief. Reliabilism is inadequate for this reason. Pritchard defends the adequacy of a fairly traditional truth-centered monistic axiology, but doesn't think this implies a consequentialist way of thinking about epistemic value as its critics charge, and as the swamping problem assumes. Goldman (2015) relatedly endorses only a formal similarity between reliabilism and consequentialism. He urges us not to run together "(A) a theory of epistemic value called 'veritism' and (B) a theory of belief justifiedness called 'process reliabilism.'" Practices, rules, and institutional arrangements, Goldman argues, "should be evaluated [consequentially] in terms of 'downstream' effects such as the truth-ratio of jury verdicts." But this leaves open that agents and any particular beliefs they hold, are evaluated in other ways. Indeed, reliabilists like Goldman hold that epistemic standing is assessed by the reliable etiology or causal history of the belief, which is an "upstream" matter. So, both Goldman and Pritchard warn us not to associate too closely epistemic value truth monism with consequentialism.

[10] Epistemic value pluralists sometimes also reject the sweeping primacy claims which internalists and externalists respectively make about the relationship between propositional justification and doxastic norms. Propositional justification is a property of propositions and evidence, while doxastic norms apply to agents and their beliefs. These different norms seem to be intertwined (Melis 2016), but when epistemologists discuss their relationship they often present them in the more dichotomous way that fuels an incompatibility between internalism and externalism about justification (and defeat).

[11] See Robichaud and Wieland (2017) for an exploration of the epistemic condition on moral responsibility. Note also that it may be useful to take our believings as "actions" of a sort, and moral and epistemic responsibility as to some degree intertwined, even as one allows that beliefs have not nearly the same *voluntary* quality that most actions do. Virtue theorists and pragmatists have highlighted these connections, and regulative epistemology (Roberts and Wood) and performance epistemology are approaches which develop this. See Roberts and Wood (2007) and Vargas (2016) for exemplary work in this area.

[12] The permissivism/impermissivism debate has focused around whether or not there is ever any "slack" between a body of evidence and what propositional attitude it supports. Impermissivism, more formally, is closely associated with the Rational Uniqueness principle (RU) and permissivism with rejection of this principle. RU holds that for a given set of evidence E and a proposition *p*, only one doxastic attitude about *p* is rational. Impermissivists hold that only one doxastic attitude about *p* is epistemically rational, be it belief, disbelief, or suspension of belief. RU leaves little if any place for permissible beliefs that are not reducible to epistemic duties to believe, disbelieve, or withhold belief. One who does not exhibit the single appropriate doxastic attitude must be committing a performance error. So, is disagreement always, or regularly, evidence of a rational failing on the part of one or more party to the dispute? Permissivism, through rejecting RU, rejects this view of disagreement, and defends the possibility of reasonable or blameless disagreement, at least in domains of controversial views (philosophy, morals, politics, religion, aesthetics, etc.). Of course, there are more and less moderate versions of belief permissivism and impermissivism defended in the literature.

[13] Image caption: William Kingdon Clifford by Leslie Stephen and Fredick Pollock via Wikimedia Commons. This work is in the public domain.

[14] Image caption/description: Susan Haack at the University of Miami in Spring 2005 by Atfyfe via Wikimedia Commons. This work is in the public domain.

[15] Chignell (2018) points out that "Clifford's view is not merely that we must be in a certain state at the precise time at which we form a belief. Rather, the obligation always and only to believe on sufficient evidence governs our activities across time as well." Dougherty (2018) argues that the ethics of belief is "only ethics," and holds the Overlap Thesis to be ambiguous. The synchronic relationship of epistemic *fit* between an agent's attitude towards a proposition at time *t* and the evidence they possess bearing probabilistically upon that proposition, *exhausts without remainder the nature of epistemic obligation*. Haack would at least agree with Dougherty if he is, in her terms, asserting the inadequacy of the Correlation Thesis that Clifford assumes.

[16] I here paraphrase Christian's (2009, 468–9) useful elaboration of Haack (1997). James Pryor (2001) finds that personal justification and epistemic blamelessness can also "come apart," such that (a) being blameless does not necessarily make one justified (or rational), and (b) holding an unjustified belief does not necessarily make one blameworthy (or irrational). Recognition of the distinction between justification and blamelessness, Pryor goes on to argue, "militates against any deontological conception of justification" (115) which Clifford and most other evidentialists are committed to. Whenever normative concepts of belief assessment can come apart in such ways, epistemologists are invited to explore analogies and disanalogies in order to illuminate their entanglements, or what we termed the "traffic" between them. The Overlap Thesis, if correct, also undercuts the reductive ambitions of the Special-Case Thesis and the Correlation Thesis*, and the assumption of a fact/value dichotomy, as in the Independence Thesis.

[17] Image caption: John Rawls in 1971. Photo by son Alec Rawls via Wikimedia Commons. This work is in the public domain.

[18] This table is reprinted from Axtell (2001). By his term "religious hypothesis," James does not mean that religious belief is a mere hypothesis *to the believer.* But belief in a transcendent reality, a "more" as James put it, referring to a moral order to the universe (rather than to any one specific conception of this higher reality), can be placed aside its opposite, the "naturalistic hypothesis," for the purposes of bringing adherents of these different worldviews into philosophical dialogue and better mutual understanding.

[19] James placed three conditions on "genuine options" besides their being evidentially underdetermined. They must be "options" (choices) that are "live," "momentous," and "forced." "Live" options, James says, are ones which make some appeal to an actual agent A, and which A considers it a real possibility to accept. A "momentous" option presents a unique opportunity, an irreversible decision, or a decision with a highly significant stake. A "forced" option is one where there is "no standing place outside the alternatives" (so that not to accept A is for practical purposes to accept not-A, even if only by default (bring an umbrella today or do not bring an umbrella).

[20] On character epistemology through careful case studies, see Baehr (2011), Fileva (2016), and Battaly (2019).

[21] For development of contemporary virtue epistemology, including East-West connections, see Fairweather (2014), Fairweather and Flanagan (2014), Slote and Sosa (2015), Battaly (2019), and Kelp and Greco (2020).

[22] There is too much work on intellectual humility to mention, but see especially the journal special edition edited by Carter, Kallestrup, and Pritchard (2016), and the recent collection edited by Church and Samuelson (2017).

[23] Image caption: Quassim Cassam at Senate House by Philafrenzy via Wikimedia Commons. License: CC BY-SA 4.0

[24] Cassam (2016, 159). On intellectual vices and vice epistemology, see also Battaly (2010 and 2019).

[25] Image caption: Alvin I. Goldman, photo from University of Michigan News and Information Services Photographs, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. License: CC BY 4.0