

PRAGMATIC ENCROACHMENT AND EPISTEMIC VALUE

Pascal Engel

University of Geneva

Pascal.Engel@lettres.unige.ch

Does knowledge matter ? There are actually at least two questions behind this broad one. The first is whether the value of knowledge is independent from other epistemic values, such as the value of truth, or the value of having true beliefs. The second is whether knowledge, as an epistemic value is independent from other values, such as the good or freedom, which are practical or ethical values. If we think in terms of a distinction between the theoretical and practical realm, and between epistemic values and practical values, there should be no special connexion between these questions. We have reasons to believe, and we have reasons to act, and they differ. Our justifications in the theoretical domain and in the practical domain are quite different matters, and there is no reason to expect that the structure of values in the two domains is similar. But if we hold that there specific links between the two domains, the matter becomes different. “Pragmatism” is a word which covers many views, but in general it is the view that there are substantial relations between our epistemic reasons to believe and our practical reasons to act. In its strongest forms it is the view that the latter can sometimes override the former, and in an even stronger form it is the view that epistemic reasons and values can be reduced to practical reasons and values. There are descriptive as well as normative arguments in favour of forms of pragmatism. On the descriptive side, one can invoke the close link between belief and action, which is encapsulated both in dispositional conceptions of belief and in the decision theoretic conception : to believe a proposition is to prefer as if it were true. Or one can emphasise connexions between theoretical and practical reasoning , or consider the practical effects that our epistemic dealings with the world make upon our practice in general, etc. On the normative side, there are arguments to the effect that it is sometimes rational to believe on the basis of insufficient evidence, such as Pascal’s wager and James’s will to believe doctrine, which all are meant to suggest that the evidentialist thesis that one ought to believe only on the basis of one’s evidence can have exceptions. And there is the so-called pragmatic theory of truth, according to which truth itself can be defined in terms of practical value.

Here I shall not deal with the strongest arguments in favour of pragmatism. I am interested in weaker or more modest arguments which have surfaced recently in epistemology. These are arguments of three sorts for three sorts of views:

(1) There are first, arguments to the effect that the value of true beliefs, or the value of *truth* in general, is a practical value, which purport to defend the thesis that:

(TP) The value of truth is a practical value

(2) Second there are arguments to the effect that *justification* is a matter of practical reasons, which purport to establish (a kind of) *pragmatism about justification*

(JBP) S is justified in believing that p only if S is justified to prefer as if p

(3) Third there are arguments to the effect that knowledge matters more than any other epistemic property ascriptions of knowledge are based not simply on epistemic reasons, but on pragmatic reasons having to do with the success and outcomes of our actions, which we may call (a kind of) *pragmatism about knowledge*

(KP) What makes someone's true belief a case of knowledge is partly determined by facts from the domain of practical rationality

Depending upon whether one intends to explain the value of knowledge in terms of the value of true beliefs or in terms of the value of justified beliefs one will lay emphasis on either type of argument. For instance reliabilists tend to explain the value of knowledge in terms of the maximisation of true beliefs; so they would seem to need only arguments of kind (1). If one considers that justification is the main property, one will consider mostly (2), and if one considers that knowledge is the main property, then one will consider (3). Type (3) arguments, however, provide more: they do two things at a time, since they purport to show that knowledge matters *because* there is what Fantl and McGrath call "pragmatic encroachment" on knowledge¹. In that respect they provide a link between the two kinds of questions that we distinguished at the outset,

¹ Fantl and McGrath 2004. I consider mostly their 2002. The term pragmatic encroachment, they tell us, is Jon Kvanvig's.

that of the value of knowledge and that of the dependence of the value of knowledge on other values. An important feature of their arguments is that they rely upon features of our ascription of knowledge along contextualist or sensitive invariantist lines.

The philosophers who defend a type (3) view of pragmatic encroachment intend to argue against what they call “purism” or “intellectualism”:

For any two possible subjects S and s' if S and S' are alike with respect to the strength of their epistemic position regarding a true proposition p , then S and S' are alike with respect to being in a position to know that p .

Purism is a form of evidentialism, or of the view that the only matters which are relevant in evaluating a belief or in assessing whether someone has knowledge are epistemic matters. Anti-purists insist on the contrary that knowledge is in part a matter of practical interests. The problem is whether it is true, and to what extent.

A pragmatist, therefore, in the sense here given to the general view that there is pragmatic encroachment either on true beliefs or on knowledge, has two available strategies:

- (a) on the one hand, she can hold that the value of knowledge is nothing over and above the value of true belief, and give a pragmatic account of the value of true belief
- (b) on the other hand, she can hold that the value of knowledge is distinctive and give a pragmatic account of the value of knowledge

Here I intend to defend purism, by arguing that none of the reasons alleged by the neo-pragmatists are convincing. My plan is the following. I shall first deal with the arguments of type (1), which purport to show that the value of true beliefs, and their rationality is not purely epistemic. I shall consider only two such arguments: one by Horwich (1998) based on a deflationary conception of belief, to the effect that truth has a value just because in figures in the explanation of the success of our actions, the second one by Gibbard (2005). If these arguments do not succeed the route from arguing in favour of the pragmatic account of true beliefs to the reduction of the value of knowledge to the value of true belief (a) is blocked. I shall then consider the main arguments of Fantl and Mc Grath (2002, 2004) in favour of pragmatic encroachment, and the similar arguments in Stanley (2005). None of the arguments will be found convincing. So there

is no argument from a neo-pragmatist conception of belief or of knowledge to a pragmatist conception of epistemic value. I shall briefly at the end of the paper return to the question of the reduction of the value of knowledge to the value of true belief.

1 Pragmatic encroachment on truth

Purism about the value of truth is usually expressed as the thesis that truth is a purely epistemic concept, which is the object of a disinterested search, or that belief “aims at” truth. This is not simply the view that truth is the “aim of inquiry”, but the view that it is the aim of inquiry *regardless* of any other aim. Many philosophers find this talk of a search for truth for its own sake unintelligible, either because they do not see how the goal can be fathomable, or because they do not see how it can regulate our inquiries². Let us put such doubts on the one side. This that interests me are those which are associated with the view that the value of truth is *never* the only value that regulates our beliefs, but that our beliefs are regulated by other values and concerns, practical ones.

There are several versions of this view. One can grant that truth is valuable, in the sense that it is good to have true beliefs, and try to reduce this value to a practical value. This would be a version of the thesis that epistemic reasons *are* practical reasons. Arguments such as Pascal’s wager or James’s will to believe doctrine are classical expressions of this view³. I shall not consider it, and shall be concerned only with the view that there is no epistemic value like truth at all, over and above the fact that our true beliefs play a role in our actions. The strongest form of this view just denies that truth is a value, over and above the fact that our beliefs lead to the success of our actions.

Horwich (1998: 44-46, 2006) defends this second view. He proposes to explain the value of belief simply in terms of the action theory of beliefs, according to which to believe that P is to prefer as if P were true. Horwich tells us that

“True belief is valuable because it *pays*; it has practical benefits; you are more likely to get what you want if you base your deliberations and actions on true beliefs than if you base them on false ones “ (2006: 348)

If we consider “action guiding beliefs” of the form :

² See e.g. Rorty 1995, Davidson 1999

³ There is a simple straightforward argument against this thesis, to the effect that it leads to a vicious regress (Zemach 1997). But the argument itself has strong internalist presuppositions and can be resisted (Percival 2002: 139).

(D) If I believe that D , then that D is true

It will benefit us if we have such beliefs and if they are true, given our desires. Generalising we can say

(D*) All our action guiding beliefs are true

The schema (D*) is correct because we have good practical reasons to want our action guiding beliefs to be true.

So it will be desirable, all things considered, to have action beliefs of this kind. From this Horwich derive the value of truth, encapsulated in two principles:

(VT1) Other things being equal, it is good to believe that P if and only if P

(VT 2) If something is true, then it is undesirable to disbelieve it and desirable to believe it

Horwich admits that VT1 and VT2 do not explain the norm of truth, why it is correct to have true beliefs , nor the specific epistemic norms, but he claims that this kind very well explain why we want to have such principles, and why we value truth. This is a sort of explanation of norms and values of the same kind as that given by Gibbard 1991: although we cannot directly explain the nature of values, we can explain at least why we accept them, and if there is no more to the values than our accepting them, they are explained.

Horwich's idea has some bite: he wants to say that truth is incorporated in the pragmatic conception of belief and that aiming at truth, or the value of truth, or the norm of truth (all these things should of course be distinguished, but we do not need here to distinguish them ⁴) it is nothing over and above the ordinary explanation of action through our beliefs and desires. To take an example of Gibbard's (2005) suppose I face two doors, one behind which there is tiger, one behind which there is my true love one⁵. If I believe that the tiger is on the door to the right, I aim to avoid it by going to the left to find my true love. Suppose that, in such a case, I want to believe the truth according to VT1 and VT2. If I believe that the tiger is on the right, I shall pursue my aim by believing that the tiger is on the right. But the aim is such that no matter what I believe, I have chosen my belief with the aim of believing the truth. In other words there is no more to my belief that, if true, it leads me to act successfully. Could we say more by saying that to aim at truth is to

⁴ For an account of the difference, see Shah 2003, Engel 2005

⁵ the lyrics of the song "My true love one" says aptly : "The truth is my love, I have only ever desired one such as you."

aim at being guided by the evidence that we have for the truth of our beliefs? But what is it to consider a given datum as evidence? It is to respond to the data in such as one's actions are successful. Such is the deflationist's line on the value of truth.

But this deflationist line cannot explain away the value of truth, for at least two reasons. In the first place, it is not clear that, as it presupposed by the move from (D) to (D*) that there is no more to the belief that in general our successful actions rest upon true beliefs than a simple list of instances of kind (D). To aim at true beliefs implies that we consider a property that all our true beliefs share, and this property does not simply amount to the presence of true beliefs in our successful actions. In the second place the very appeal of a principle like (VT2) rests upon something more than the fact that our actions are successful when they are guided by true beliefs, namely the fact that we have good reasons to think that our successful actions are guided by true beliefs. So we need the notion of truth to articulate why it is rational to adopt (VT2). So if the hope of the deflationist is to avoid mentioning truth in order to explain its value through the action theory of belief, this hope is vain. At most what the "pragmatist" derivation of the value of truth from the action theory of belief shows, is that we both value truth and successful action, hence the weaker thesis that there are other values than the pure truth value. But that does not show that the value of truth can be reduced to the value of acting successfully.⁶

We can have something like a counterproof of this by considering attempts to reformulate decision theory in such way that it becomes purely epistemic, or cognitive. The basic principle of cognitive decision theory is to replace the maximisation of utility of standard Bayesian decision theory by the maximisation of cognitive utility, or of truth, in the version where truth is the ultimate cognitive end. Standard Bayesian decision theory holds that a rational agent uses a utility function defined over consequences of practical acts, and a credence function defined over these consequences conditional upon performances of the acts, with respect to which his acts respect expected utility. Cognitive decision theory holds that a rational believer uses a cognitive utility function defined over the possible consequences of cognitive acts, and a credence function defined over these consequences conditional upon performances of the acts with respect to which his acts respect cognitive utility. There are several versions of the view, which would imply, with respect to epistemic values a form of "epistemic consequentialism", the analogue in the cognitive domain of ethical consequentialism (Percival 2002)⁷. It is quite important that the thesis in question be

⁶ For a general criticism of Horwich's line, see Lynch 2004.

⁷ Isaac Levi's conceptions to formal epistemology can also be counted among cognitive decision theory in a sense. See e.g. his 1980 for instance

formulated in terms of a Bayesian framework, with degrees of beliefs, for the Bayesian framework presupposes the action theory of belief. In particular the view is distinct from what Kaplan (1996: 109) calls the assertion view of belief:

“You count as believing that p just if, were your sole aim to assert the truth, and your only options were to assert that p , assert that not p or make neither assertion, you would prefer to assert that p ”

The point is that we want to know whether our only option is to assert the truth, or to form belief on the basis of our evidence, *given* the Bayesian framework, which implies that we have partial beliefs. The Assertion view deals only with full beliefs;

A prominent version of cognitive decision in Bayesian (or quasi-Bayesian) clothing is James Joyce’s (1998) “non-pragmatic vindication of probabilism”. Joyce reformulates the norm of truth for full beliefs as

The Norm of Gradational Accuracy (NGA): An epistemically rational agent must evaluate partial beliefs on the basis of their gradational accuracy, and she must strive to hold a system of partial beliefs that, in her best judgement, is likely to have an overall level of gradational accuracy at least as high is that of any alternative system she might adopt. (1998: 579)

The problem for an integration of the idea of a purely cognitive goal into the Bayesian framework is that we have to ensure that, when forming their degree of beliefs, agents only frame them in terms of the *epistemic value* of having a high degree of credence. But it is by no means guaranteed by the pragmatic Ramseyan scheme, since by definition degree of belief is as sensitive to high expected utility as it is sensitive to high degree of credence. We have to ensure that in some sense there is *coincidence* between beliefs that elicit a high degree of credence and beliefs which elicit a high expected utility. In other words, the aim of “truth”, or of the high credence which approximates truth in the best possible way has to be aligned on the aim of desirability, or it has to be pure, so to say, whereas in the classical Ramseyan picture, it is always mixed. Of course a pragmatist about reasons for belief will consider that the Bayesian scheme is perfectly in order if it mixes high credence function and desirability function, for it is precisely the gist of a pragmatist conception of values that the value of truth is a utility value, and that in some cases utility can override pure epistemic worth. In order to avoid this result we have to

ensure that the two kinds of values either coincide or can be separated sharply so that only the epistemic goal is satisfied. In other words, we have to make a distinction, which the Bayesian Dutch book argument does not make, between prudential or pragmatic reasons for believing (believing that P when it pays to believe that P) and epistemic reasons for believing. In order to show that we can aim for a purely epistemic goal while at the same time ensuring that our degrees of belief are measured by probability functions, we must restrict the class of functions in a certain way. And Joyce shows that there are such functions, the Brier rules.

Now, suppose that there are such non pragmatic rules of accuracy satisfying the norm NGA as an analogue of the norm of truth. The problem, raised by Gibbard (2005) about this scheme, is: does this rule capture the pure concern with the truth? It is not evident. The concern for truth is represented only by a small subset of the possible functions.

Joyce (1998) gives a way of narrowing down the possible functions so that pure concern with the truth is captured. Joyce proves that gradational accuracy can be measured by a function which respects various formal conditions.⁸ When accuracy is measured in this way, Joyce shows that conformity with the axioms of probability is a norm of epistemic rationality, whatever its prudential merits or demerits can be. In other words, this forces the Bayesian into the straightjacket of the disinterested research for truth, and vindicates probabilism *non pragmatically*.

Gibbard (2005) argues that it is not evident that we can isolate a pure concern for truth. What distinguishes the Brier score rule is the equal urgency of getting the credences right at every probability from 0 to 1. Then the difference between a credence of 0.47 and a credence of 0.56 is as urgent and important as the difference between 0.90 and 0.99. But that sounds odd. As Gibbard notes, the accuracy in degrees of beliefs can matter in the case of a scientific hypothesis – such as the hypothesis of Continental Drift in geology – after it has been widely established (some residual doubt can remain), but it does not matter in case of acting on one's beliefs (it does not matter whether I have 0.63 or 0.62 chances of being hit by a car when I cross the street; in either case the risk is high, and I'd better not cross the street). Gibbard objects that there is no

⁸ In particular: *structure* (accuracy should be non negative, i.e small changes in degree of belief should not engender large changes in accuracy), *extensionality* (there is a unique correspondence between the degrees of credence of a person and the truth values of the propositions she considers), *dominance* (the accuracy of a system of degrees of belief is an increasing function of the believer's degree of credence in any truth and a decreasing function of her degree of confidence in any falsehood), *normality* (differences among possible worlds that are not reflected in differences among truth values of propositions that the agent believes should have no effect on the way in which accuracy is measured), *weak convexity* (if a certain change in a person's degrees of belief does not improve accuracy then a more radical change in the same direction should not improve accuracy either), and *symmetry* (when two degrees are equally accurate, there is no ground, based on consideration of accuracy to prefer one to the other). I cannot deal with these conditions here.

reason, even in the case of the purest and the most disinterested scientific beliefs, to suppose that they will not affect our actions. Indeed on the classical pragmatic picture, the truth of our beliefs guarantees the fact that they guide our actions. How can we be sure that the pure aim of truth is our only concern? At best, it is our concern only when in some way – that determined by the special score functions or by Joyce’s non pragmatic vindication – concern for truth coincides with utility. But that is not guaranteed to be always the case. In other terms, even when one measures beliefs in a way which would ensure that they respect the Norm of Gradual Accuracy, we have no guarantee that it will be always so. At most, as Gibbard says, pure concern for truth can have a *side value* for an inquiry which is not governed by a concern for truth as a *guidance value*. There is no “epistemic purity”.

But this conclusion by no means implies that we could dispense with the value of truth. It only shows that the value of truth, and epistemic value in general, for degrees of beliefs, cannot be “pure”. Now could there be a *purely pragmatic* version of probabilism ? For the same reasons as those for which, if Gibbard is right, there cannot be a purely non pragmatic versions of probabilism. But in neither case that shows that the epistemic values of truth and evidence are determined by purely pragmatic factors.

2. Pragmatic encroachment on justification

Jeremy Fantl and Matthew McGrath (2002) argue that there is a “pragmatic necessary condition on epistemic justification”

(JBP) S is justified in believing that *p* only if S is rational to prefer as if *p*

This is meant to be the analogue, for the epistemic property of justification, of the (PB) principle above. Fantl and McGrath intend to give an argument against evidentialism which they understand as the “purist” view that :

Evidentialism For any two subjects S and S’, necessarily, if S and S’ have the same evidence for/against *p*, then S is justified in believing that *p* iff S’ is, too. (Fantl/McGrath 2002: 68)

Fantl/McGrath make their case on the basis of an example similar to those familiar in the literature on contextualism in epistemology, such as the airport example used by Cohen 1999 or deRose’s (1996) bank cases.

Case 1. You want to know whether the approaching train from Boston to Providence stops in the intermediate stop in Foxboro or whether it is an express. It does not matter very much to you whether it is the express or not, although you mildly prefer it was. You ask a guy waiting for the train, and he says that the train does stop in Foxboro. You believe him.

Case 2. You have the same evidence as in Case 1 and the same fundamental preferences. But here it is very important for you to be in Foxboro. Your career depends upon whether the train stops in Foxboro. You overheard someone say that the train stops in Foxboro. But you think “that information might be wrong, I have to check further.”

According to Fantl and McGrath our intuition is that in case 1, you have good enough evidence to know that the train stops at Foxboro, whereas in case 2 you do not have enough evidence to know that the train stops at Foxboro. The difference is due to the fact no much is at stake in case 1, whereas a lot is at stake in Case 2, *although in both cases you have the same evidence.*

In case 1, you are rational to prefer to board the train without inquiring further (A) to boarding the train and inquiring (B), given that the train stops at Foxboro (p), because B would involve a cost (spending time to inquire and risking to miss the train). In case 2, the preference is the reverse.

Fantl and McGrath begin by laying down a pragmatic condition upon knowledge:

(1) S knows that p.

(2) S is rational to prefer A to B given p (A & p to B & p)

Therefore, (3) S is rational to prefer A to B in fact.

This seems intuitive enough. What you know determines what you should rationally prefer. Here the reasoning seems to be justified by the factivity of knowledge. That S knows that p implies that p, so if p is true, and if S is rational to prefer A to B, it follows that S is rational to prefer A to B. This principle is related to the plausible principle, also advocated by Hawthorne (2004: 29), Williamson (2005) and Stanley (2005), that what one knows is directly relevant to, and can be used as a premise in, practical reasoning:

(PR) If S knows that p, S is justified in using p as a premise in his or her practical reasoning

Fantl and McGrath defend, however, the stronger principle, of a pragmatic condition on justification:

(1*) S is justified in believing that p.

(2*) S is rational to prefer A & p to B & p.

Therefore, (3*) S is rational to prefer A to B in fact.

The reason why (1*)-(3*) is stronger is that justification is not factive, and the inference is much less obvious. But it seems to be motivated by the train cases. Our intuitions in these cases, according to Fantl and McGrath justify the following reasoning:

“Suppose a subject S, is justified in believing that p, but does not know that p. Suppose further that S is rational to prefer A to B, given p. Compare S to a second subject S', who has the same evidence and fundamental preferences as S but who does not know that p. S' is rational to prefer A to B. What one is rational to prefer is determined by one's evidence and fundamental preferences. Since S and S' have the same evidence and fundamental preferences, they will be rational to prefer the same states of affairs. Thus, S, too, is rational to prefer A to B. Whatever it is rational to prefer for a knower is also rational for an otherwise identical subject who is merely justified in believing to prefer. (2002: 76)

This thesis is supposed to be backed by the intuition in cases 1 and 2, and by the idea that if something is true in the case of knowledge it will be true as well in the case of justification.

Thus Fantl and McGrath formulate the following pragmatic condition on justification:

(JBP*) is justified in believing that p only if, for any states of affairs A and B, if S is rational to prefer A & p to B & p, then S is rational to prefer A to B in fact.

In the train cases, the principle is used in the following way. In case 1, since what it is rational for you to prefer in fact coincides with what it is rational for you to prefer conditionally on the truth of p, you satisfy the pragmatic condition on justification (JBP). So “...you may have enough evidence for justification” (2002: 80). That is, the testimony you have for believing that p (The train stops in Foxboro) may well justify you in believing that p.

In case 2, you have the same evidence as in case 1 and the same fundamental preferences. But in case 2, the stakes are high, not low as in Case 1. Your career hangs on whether the train stops in Foxboro. In this case, as in 1, you are rational to prefer A & p to B & p. But given the stakes that are involved, you are not rational to prefer A to B in fact. You need to inquire further to make sure that the train will stop in Foxboro. So in Case 2, what it is rational for you to prefer in fact diverges from what it is rational for you to prefer conditionally on the truth of p. Hence you do not satisfy (JBP). Hence you are not justified by your evidence in believing that p. Supposing that you are justified by your evidence in believing that p in case 1 (in which (JBP) is satisfied, evidentialism is false. The difference in stakes engenders a difference in justification.

In the first place, I must say that I do not share Fantl's and McGrath's intuitions (nor, for that matter, Stanley's intuitions about similar examples). My own intuitive response to the train cases is that the individual in case 1 and in case 2 has exactly the same justification because they have the same evidence (the testimony of another traveller in the station to the effect that the train stops at Foxboro). The fact that more is at stake in the second case does not seem to me to show that the individual is less justified in the second case than in the first. I would say the same thing if the property attended to is knowledge instead of justification. It seems to me that what happens in these cases is that the cost of information is more salient in case 2 than in case one, and that it is more important to be justified about p in case 2 than in case 1. But the fact that it is more important, practically or pragmatically or prudentially, to be justified does not mean that we are more or less justified depending upon the stakes. The fact that we say, loosely speaking that one is "not justified" to believe that p when the stakes on believing that p affect importantly one's preferences and the consequences of one's actions does not imply that one is not justified *simpliciter*.⁹

But intuitions are not foolproof, neither in philosophy nor elsewhere. But even if the intuition were correct, and if we recognised that the individual in case 1 is justified to believe that p whereas he is not justified in the second case, it would remain to be shown that the difference in justification is due to the "pragmatic" factor in question. It is not. Up to now I have not considered the formulation of the problem in terms of degrees of belief. If we suppose that degrees of belief reflect the degree of confidence that one can have towards a

⁹ In a review of Stanley's book in *Notre Dame Reviews in Philosophy* (2006), Duncan Pritchard expresses similar intuitions. Stanley (2005: 12) envisages that one reaction we can have to his bank cases is to "challenge the claim that these are the intuitions we have in these cases", but he does not attempt to discuss these intuitions or to counterbalance them by others.

proposition, given a certain amount of evidence, by hypothesis, in the train cases 1 and 2, there is no reason to suppose that the individual has a different degree of belief in situation 2 than he or she has in situation 1. By definition she has the same evidence, and she should therefore believe exactly to the same degree that the train stops at Foxboro. So what explains that one can have the intuition that our subject is “more justified” in case 1 than in case 2? What explains our intuition that there is a difference is of course that the evidence that is needed for believing that the train stop at Foxboro is greater in case 2 than in case 1, because of what is practically at stake. In Stanley’s terms (2005: 88), the greater the practical investment one has in a belief, the stronger one’s evidence must be in order to know it”. Stanley, as we shall see in the next section, talks of knowledge. If we transfer this to justification, the point is the same. But from the fact that one’s evidence must be stronger, or that one needs to look for more evidence than one has in case 2 than in case 1, it does not follow that one *has* more evidence in the first case than in the second. The principle that

(JBP**) the greater the practical investment one has in a belief, the stronger one’s evidence must be in order to know it”.

is much weaker than the principle (JBP), that one are justified in believing that p only if it is rational for one to prefer as if p , or than (JBP*). Actually (JBP**) is quite plausible. The reasoning (1) – (3) above and the principle (PR) are plausible too. There are pragmatic limitations on the collection of evidence, but it does not imply that evidentialism is false. But they does not amount to a pragmatic conception of justification. David Owens makes the point quite well in describing the pragmatic limitations :

“Practical considerations determine whether we should form a view about the truth of p but given that we want a belief on the matter, evidence alone determines whether we ought to believe or believe not p . Here the pragmatist is claiming that we should form a belief about whether p just in case the costs of having such a belief are outweighed by the benefits. On this view, belief formation is an activity constrained by the state of evidence – it wouldn’t count as an act of belief formation unless it reflected how we perceive the balance of evidence (just as certain words don’t count as a sincere assertion that p unless p is believed) but, being governed by practical norms, it is something we do nevertheless.” (Owens 2000: 31)

The pragmatism about justification has nothing to do with whether *evidence* counts as justification of a belief . It has to do with whether we *form* a belief or not depending on the cost of doing so. In the train case, the subject in has exactly the same evidence, but in the second case unlike in the first he cares very much about how he should form his belief. This has nothing to do with the falsity of evidentialism. It has to do with whether he should form an opinion or not, or make a corresponding assertion.¹⁰

There is a second reason why Fantl's and Mc Grath's argument is not convincing. By definition the individual's evidence in case 1 and in case 2 for the proposition *p* is the same. But his or her preferences are different. How can this be, given that the preferences are themselves determined by the amount of evidence that he has? That seems an incoherent description of the situation. But perhaps here there is some equivocation on "evidence". The individual in case and case 2 has the same evidence *for proposition p* in both cases, but the global evidence is distinct in case 2, because it includes the fact that he does not care very much about whether the train is an express or not , whereas it matters in the second case. But we could express the same idea as above by saying that what Fantl and McGrath have described is not a case where one's evidence is affected *as such* but a case where one's attitude towards the evidence is affected.¹¹ So I do not see any reason to defend the strong claim JBP* and the pragmatic encroachment of justification , hence the falsity of evidentialism from these considerations.

4. Pragmatic encroachment on knowledge

As we saw Fantl's and Mc Grath's argument is formulated first about knowledge, in reasoning (1)-(3), and then applied to justification. Stanley (2005) applies it directly to knowledge, on the basis of similar series of examples as DeRose's banks cases. Stanley is concerned with a defense of the view which he calls "interest relative invariantism" (IRI) , in particular against contextualism. The main difference between subject sensitive invariantists like Hawthorne or interest relative invariantists like Stanley on the one hand and contextualist on the other hand, is that the latter claim that attributions of knowledge are relative to the

¹⁰ In the light of what Owens actually says, it is surprising that he should be recruited among the pragmatists by Fantl and McGrath. Schaffer 2006 says that it is rather the relevance of the possibility of error which is driving our intuitions in the cases. This is plausible. But that does not in any way disprove evidentialism.

¹¹ Weatherson 2005 has a similar diagnosis, but his specific point is that the difference between the two cases is that "interests matter not because they affect the degree of confidence that an agent can reasonably have in a proposition's truth. (That is, not because they matter to epistemology.) Rather, interests matter because they affect whether those reasonable degrees of confidence amount to belief. (That is, because they matter to philosophy of mind.)"

ascriber, whereas the former say that they are relative to the subject. The view counts as invariantist because it claims that meaning of *knows* is constant across contexts, although our attributions of knowledge can be true in some contexts, and false in others. Stanley gives a series of examples which are variations on the train cases. I am not going to detail these examples and the discussion he directs at contextualism, because my concern here is not which theory of our knowledge claims is correct, but whether this views threaten purism or evidentialism (or intellectualism, as Stanley calls it).

When he describes his view IRI at the beginning of his book, Stanley makes quite strong claims to the effect that “the factors that make true belief into knowledge include elements from practical rationality” and “ (p.2) what makes true belief into knowledge is not entirely an epistemological matter”. These are pretty ambitious claims give than interest relative invariantism is, like contextualism, initially supposed to be simply a theory about our knowledge *attributions*, not a theory of knowledge as such.¹²

But when he comes to formulate his view, Stanley is more prudent. Describing the case of two characters, Hannah and Sarah, who wonder whether the bank is open on Saturdays and in differing situations either have an impending bill or not, he voices the same intuitions as those which we have elicited from the train cases. But his point is that, when the stakes are high, i.e. when the question whether *p* is a serious practical question, the subject *does not know* that *p*, whereas when they are low, he or she knows that *p*. He reverses Fantl and McGrath order of priorities. For him IRI is a view about knowledge, and not necessarily about evidence or justification. Why is this so? Because actually, as we saw above, he formulates his view not has a pragmatist conception of justification in the sense of JBP or JBP* above, but as the idea that the greater one’s practical interests are, the stronger one’s evidence must be (JBP**). But as we saw, this kind of pragmatic encroachment is innocuous and does not threaten the purist’s notion of evidence. It does not say that pragmatic “factors” *enter* or determine the amount of our justification, but just that pragmatic factors impinge upon our need of more evidence.²²

All of Stanley’s examples have to do not with the whether evidence supports a proposition and is able to determine our knowledge of it, but with the question whether believing a given proposition is “a serious practical question” (2005: 91 ff), or whether it is legitimate to take it into account or to ignore it. For instance a number of propositions which

¹² see e.g Stanley’s declaration p. 89: “My purpose is to establish that knowledge is conceptually connected to practical interests. The point is compatible with many different approaches to the nature of knowledge.”

have no relevance for my present plans, such as whether Christine Todd Whitman cut her toenails on sept 1, 2003, or that a large asteroid might hit the earth in ten billion years have no relevance to my present cognitive interests. But if I were to learn that the asteroid will hit the earth next week, it would affect my plans. Stanley argues that “the fact that the negation of a proposition is an epistemic possibility for an agent in a situation prevents the subject from knowing that proposition in this situation.” (2005: 96). But he immediately adds:

“However the fact that a proposition is a serious practical question for an agent at a time does not automatically undermine the agent’s knowledge of that proposition. It would only undermine the subject’s knowledge of a proposition if, given her evidence, the probability of the negation of that proposition is not sufficiently low.” (ibid)

But that in now way detracts us from accepting evidentialism. If evidentialism is defined as above as the thesis that evidential twins have the same justification for their beliefs, the view is not touched at all by the pragmatic factors involved in belief formation and the seriousness of epistemic possibilities. It certainly does not show that “all normal epistemic notions are interest relative” and that “evidence is interest relative” (Stanley 2005: 124).

Stanley and Hawthorne make much of the principle (PR) that if one know that p, p is apt to figure in a practical reasoning, and as we saw this principle is relevant to Fantl and McGrath acceptance of the reasoning (1)-(3) in section 3 above. Hawthorne invokes it in particular in reasoning involving lottery propositions of the form :

I will loose the lottery
 If I keep my ticket, I’ll get nothing
 If I sell my ticket I’ll get 1 dollar
 So I ought to sell my ticket

PR is in my view correct. But the fact that knowledge of a premise is needed in practical reasoning no more shows that the notion of knowledge involves a pragmatic factor than the fact that a proposition is a serious possibility for an agent shows that evidence is an “interest relative notion”. It does not legitimate a condition on knowledge such as the one that Fantl and McGrath (2004) derive from (1)-(3)

(PCK) S knows that p only if S is rational to act as if p

4. Conclusion: value and value

If the foregoing is correct, none of the arguments for pragmatic encroachment of epistemic notions such as truth, evidence, justification and knowledge show that purism, or intellectualist, defined as the view “that knowledge is not a matter of practical facts” (Stanley 2005: 6) work. They do not show, contrary to what they announce, that evidentialism is false¹³. But one might protest at this point that I have not really addressed the question raised at the beginning: does knowledge matter? What is the value of knowledge? The issue that I have addressed is whether epistemic *evaluation* or epistemic norms are affected by pragmatic factors, and my answer has been negative. But I have not addressed the issue of the value of knowledge, in the form of the issues which are currently discussed, such as whether the value of knowledge is greater than that of true belief, or whether there are special features in knowledge which make it especially valuable. Neither I have addressed the issue, which looms large in pragmatism whether epistemic values can be reduced to practical values. Some versions of pragmatism, possibly James’, possibly Rorty’s, actually promote the thesis that epistemic and practical values are interwoven, and that it is very difficult to distinguish the question whether a belief is true from the question whether a belief is useful. Other versions of pragmatism, such as Peirce’s or Isaac Levi’s, maintain a sharp line between concerns about truth and epistemic matters on the one hand, and practical matters on the other. What they defend are more conceptions of *epistemic utility* than conceptions according to which epistemic utility is all of a piece with practical utility. In particular epistemic consequentialism, the view that true belief is the main epistemic value and that it should be maximised, is not touched by the arguments of the pragmatic encroachers, because it is perfectly evidentialist an “purist”.

In fact none of the writers who defend the view that there is a pragmatic encroachment in epistemic concepts dealt explicitly with the issue of the value of knowledge. They are only concerned with the question whether truth, justification and knowledge are to be ascribed on the basis of epistemic considerations alone. But their arguments have nevertheless an impact on the problem of the value of knowledge, in two ways. In the first place it has an impact because if it turned out that knowledge matters more, because of pragmatic considerations,

¹³ I have not, however, tried here to defend evidentialism as such. There are other difficulties with the view which I have not discussed.

than true belief, it would provide an argument in favour of the primacy of knowledge. In the second place if we accepted the view that pragmatic factors “affect” or “are relevant” to the assessment of knowledge, it may well be that these could explain why knowledge is valuable.

I have denied that these pragmatic factors affect the *epistemic evaluation* of beliefs or the attribution of knowledge, because I take, with the orthodoxy, the question whether one is justified or knows as a question to be decided on epistemic grounds alone. But I have not denied that, as the pragmatic encroachers say, interest relative or practical “factors” are *relevant* to knowledge. But how are they relevant? They are relevant *within the context of inquiry*. What is “at stake” affects whether one should, in a given circumstance, form, or maintain, a belief, or what amount of evidence one decides to take. In this sense, there is real pragmatic “sensitivity”. Now, in so far as these pragmatic factors affect inquiry, the decisions that an agent takes to suspend belief or go ahead, it can affect his actions. In sort far as these are part of his reliability as an agent, or his character, this sort of fact should be important for virtue epistemologists, and hence for the assessment of the value of knowledge as such. But, if I am correct, this has no bearing on the very epistemic evaluation of knowledge and belief, which depends as much on evidence as it ever did.

REFERENCES

- Conee E. & Feldman, R. *Evidentialism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press
- Davidson, D. 1999 "Reply to Pascal Engel", in L.Hahn ed. *The philosophy of Donald Davidson*, La Salle, Open court
- Engel, P. 2005 "Truth and the Aim of Belief", in D. Gillies ed. *Models in science*, London: King's College Publications,
- Fantl J. & McGrath 2002" Evidence, Pragmatics and Justification, *Philosophical Review*, 111, 1, jan. 2002, 67-94
- Fantl J. & McGrath 2004 "Knowledge and the Purely Epistemic: in Favor of Pragmatic Encroachment" MS
- Foley, R. 1987 *The theory of epistemic rationality*, Harvard, Harvard University Press
- Gibbard A. 1991 *Wise Choices Apts feelings*
- 2005 "Rational Credence and the value of Truth" ms
- Hawthorne, J. 2004 *Knowledge and Loteries*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Horwich. P. 1998, *Truth* , Oxford, Oxford University Press
- 2005 "The Value of Truth", *Nous*, 40 (2), 347-360.
- Joyce, J. 1998 "A non pragmatic Vindication of probabilism", *Philosophy of Science*, 65, 4, 675-603
- Kaplan, M. 1996 *Decision Theory as Philosophy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press
- Levi, I 1980 *The Enterprise of Knowledge*, Cambridge Mass, MIT Press
- Lynch, M. 2004 "Minimalism and the Value of Truth" *Philosophical Quarterly*, 57, 214, 497-517
- Owens , D.2000 *Reason with out Freedom*, London: Routledge
- Percival, P. 2002, "Epistemic Consequentialism", *PAS*, LXXVI, supp. Vol. , 121-151
- Rorty, R. 1995 " Is Truth a Goal of Inquiry?: Davidson vs. Wright" *Philosophical Quarterly* 45: 180 , 281-300
- Shaffer, J. 2006 "The irrelevance of the subject: against subject sensitive invariantism", *Philosophical Studies*, 2006, 127, 87-107
- Shah, N. 2003 " How Truth governs belief , *Philosophical Review* , 112, 447-482
- Stanley, J. 2005 *Knowledge and Practical Interests*, Oxford: Oxford university Press
- Weatherston, B. 2005 "Can we do without Pragmatic encroachment", *Philosophical Perspectives*, 19, 417-443
- Zemach, E. 1997 "Practical Reasons for Belief?" *Nous*, 31, 4, 525-27

