

Belief, Knowledge and Action

Abstract

In this thesis, I explore a number of epistemological issues concerning the relations between knowledge, belief and practical matters. In particular, I defend a view, which I call *credal pragmatism*. This view is compatible with *moderate invariantism*, a view that takes knowledge to depend exclusively on truth-relevant factors and to require an invariant epistemic standard of knowledge that can be quite easily met.

The thesis includes a negative and a positive part. In the negative part (Ch. 1-4) I do two things: i) I critically examine some moderate invariantist accounts of the intuitive influence of practical factors on knowledge ascriptions, and ii) I provide a criticism of the idea that knowledge is the norm of practical reasoning. In Chapter 1, I provide a general overview of the issues that constitute the background for the views and arguments defended in my thesis. In particular, I provide a thorough discussion of two aspects of the relation between knowledge and practical matters: one is constituted by the practical factors' effects on knowledge ascriptions; the other is the intuitive normative role of knowledge in the regulation and assessments of action and practical reasoning. In Chapter 2, I consider and criticize Timothy Williamson's account according to which an alleged failure to acknowledge the distinction between knowing and knowing that one knows generates the intuition that knowledge ascriptions are sensitive to practical factors. In Chapter 3, I argue against the idea that practical reasoning is governed by a knowledge norm. The argument generalizes to other candidate epistemic norms of practical reasoning. In Chapter 4, I criticise a number of accounts which explain effects of practical factors on knowledge ascriptions in terms of the influence of practical factors on belief. These include the accounts of Brian Weatherson, Dorit Ganson, Kent Bach and Jennifer Nagel.

In the positive part of the thesis (Ch. 5-6), I develop and argue for credal pragmatism, an original account of the nature and interaction of different doxastic attitudes and the role of practical factors in their rational regulation. On this view, given a certain fixed amount of evidence, the degree of credence of an adaptively rational agent varies in different circumstances depending on practical factors, while the threshold on the degree of credence necessary for outright belief remains fixed across contexts. This account distinguishes between two kinds of outright belief: occurrent belief, which depends on the actual degree of credence, and dispositional belief, which depends on the degree of credence in normal circumstances. In Chapter 5, I present the view and

I show how credal pragmatism can explain the practical factors' effects on knowledge ascriptions. In Chapter 6, I develop a fallibilist account of several features about knowledge ascriptions including i) why in folk epistemological practices knowledge is often taken to be a necessary and sufficient epistemic condition for relying on a proposition in practical reasoning; ii) concessive knowledge attributions and related data; and iii) the infallibilist intuition that knowledge excludes error possibilities.