

# PRAGMATIC ENCROACHMENT AND EPISTEMIC VALUE

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## *1. Pragmatic encroachment and the value of knowledge*

When in the *Meno* (97a-c) Socrates asks whether knowledge is more valuable than true belief, the notion of value which he has in mind seems clearly to be that of *practical value*. In 97a he asks whether “good men” or “men of value” (*agathoi androi*) will be “useful” (*ophelimoï*) and when in 97c he raises his famous question about the difference between having a true belief about the road to Larissa and knowing the road to Larissa, this question is directly couched in terms of what is correct with respect to practice (*pros orthothèta praxeôs*) and the example is clearly meant to ask something about the respective roles of belief and knowledge in guiding our actions. Contemporary approaches to the problem of the value of knowledge, however, have investigated other senses of the notion of value or worth of knowledge, in terms of various notions of epistemic virtue (Sosa 2007, Greco 2002, Zagzebski 1995), or in terms of moral appraisal (Brady 2006). Although many of these accounts involve the idea that the worth in which knowledge consists has to do with some kind of practical achievement or success, most of them accept the traditional view that knowledge is an epistemic good, and that its value is mostly of a theoretical, not a practical nature.

Let us, following Duncan Pritchard (2007), distinguish *the primary value* problem for knowledge – the *Meno* problem of whether and why knowledge is more valuable than true belief – from the *secondary value* problem – the problem of whether knowledge is more valuable than any proper subset of its parts, *i.e.* whether knowledge is more valuable than justification, or true belief, for instance- on the view that the components of knowledge are true belief and justification. The claim that some subparts

of knowledge can be valuable because of their role in action surfaces in the writings of some virtue epistemologists. Thus Jonathan Kvanvig writes: “Belief is valuable because it is action guiding” and he tells us that true beliefs are valuable because they lead to actions that “are successful in satisfying desires and in achieving purposes” (Kvanvig 2002: 30). All such claims, however, like parallel claims about the value of knowledge, imply that knowledge, or some subpart of it, is *instrumental* in bringing some good for action (true belief). In other words, they take knowledge, or some subpart of it, to be *extrinsically* related, as a means, to an end which is valuable, and to get its value from the nature of this end. This is also the case when one takes knowledge, or some subpart of it, to be a means towards an intellectual or theoretical value.

A quite distinct conception emerges from the thought that knowledge, or some subpart of it, might be *intrinsically* associated to action, and valuable because of such association. Such a conception surfaces in Timothy Williamson’s (2000), John Hawthorne’s (2004), and Jason Stanley’s (2005<sup>1</sup>) claim that knowledge, and not simply belief, is action guiding. Williamson (2000:62) insists that knowledge, and not simply true belief, plays a role in the explanation of action and in particular, that action may not be as well explained in terms of a true belief than it would be in terms of knowledge. We ask why a burglar spends the whole night ransacking a house, risking to be discovered by staying so long, and we get a much better answer if we say that he *knew* that there was a diamond in the house rather than that he believed it. Very often, when we evaluate an action we do it in the light of the agent’s knowing something rather than simply in terms of his having the corresponding true belief. For instance if you drive your car while drunk and provoke an accident, you will elicit almost automatically the reaction: “You knew that it would happen”. Hawthorne (2004: 30) uses a different argument, through lottery considerations, to the effect that in a lottery situation a subject does not know whether he will win, and therefore should not base his actions on this lack of knowledge. Such arguments seem to show not only that knowledge is practically relevant, but also that it is valuable *because* it is practically relevant.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See also Hawthorne and Stanley, *to appear*

<sup>2</sup> Williamson 2000: 78 comments upon the road of Larissa example in the *Meno*, but he is mostly concerned with whether knowledge explains and does not address specifically the issue of the value of knowledge in this context.

These intuitions about the relevance of knowledge in practical reasoning and in rational action are meant to show that knowledge “matters” more than any of its subparts, in particular more than rational belief or justification. The intuitions, however, can also be extended to the subparts of knowledge. Belief, justified belief, and other epistemic states can be said to “matter” because of the role that they play in action. Let us call, following Jonathan Kvanvig, “pragmatic encroachment” this phenomenon of the relevance of an epistemic state to practical rationality. Recently a number of writers, in particular Fantl and McGrath (2002) and Stanley (2005) have defended the view that there is such a pragmatic encroachment not only on knowledge, but also on other epistemic notions such as rational belief, justification, and evidence. The thesis that there is such a phenomenon of “pragmatic encroachment” is in general based on the view that knowledge, and other epistemic notions, are not “purely epistemic”, and depend upon other factors which are not epistemic, in particular upon their relevance to rational action. Fantl and McGrath (2002) call “purism” the view that epistemic notions are not pragmatically encroached, and Stanley (2004) calls the same view “intellectualism”. On the view that pragmatic encroachment is a genuine and significant phenomenon, whether a belief constitutes knowledge depends, in an essential way, upon factors which are not truth-conducive or purely epistemic, but “practical”. As we shall see below (§5), this view is distinct from, and stronger than, Williamson’s view that knowledge is relevant to action. It says that epistemic notions by themselves have a pragmatic dimension and are in part “practical”. This looks like a form of pragmatism, although it is not clear in what sense it resembles the more traditional forms of pragmatism.<sup>3</sup> Such claims elicit two kinds of questions:

- 1) to what extent is there a pragmatic encroachment on epistemic notions?
- 2) to what extent does this pragmatic encroachment show anything about the value of knowledge or of other epistemic notions?

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<sup>3</sup> I take pragmatism to be the view that epistemic reasons and justifications – such as our reasons for taking a belief to be true or well confirmed – are either determined or can be overridden by practical or prudential reasons or justifications. In its strongest sense, pragmatism is the view that epistemic reasons are reducible to practical reasons. In this article I shall not examine how the “pragmatic encroachment” view is related to more traditional forms of pragmatism.

It has to be noted at the outset that the writers who give a positive answer to the first question do not, explicitly at least, pretend to give an answer to the second question. They are not interested in the value problem about knowledge, but in the problem whether knowledge is more important or more fundamental, than rational belief, or justification. In other words, they raise a question about the *epistemic* priority of certain notions. The question 2) of what makes knowledge valuable is a distinct one. This second step is problematic, for it is by no means evident that the practical relevance of knowledge explains its value. After all a traditional philosophical theme is that the value of knowledge does *not* reside in its relevance to action or in its consequences for actions. Moreover, not all actions are valuable: will knowledge which guides agents to perform disvaluable actions be itself valuable?<sup>4</sup> But one can envisage an argument purporting to show that knowledge is valuable because of its particular relevance to rational action.

In this essay, I try to show that one has to give a negative answer to both questions. I do not deny the phenomenon of pragmatic encroachment upon knowledge and other notions, but I disagree about the extent of this encroachment and about its significance. So I defend a kind of purism. There are actually various kinds of pragmatic encroachment, on belief, on justified belief, and on knowledge, which we have to examine in turn. I shall conclude by noting even if we agreed on the existence of pragmatic encroachment upon knowledge, there is no legitimate step from it to a claim about epistemic value.

## ***2. Pragmatic encroachment on belief and truth***

In order to understand the notion of pragmatic encroachment, it is necessary to distinguish several forms of it along two dimensions: first depending upon the kind of epistemic notion with which we are dealing, and second depending upon the strength of the encroachment, that is upon the degree of dependence of an epistemic notion upon pragmatic factors.

Let us, for the time being, start from a very general notion of pragmatic encroachment. Let us say that there is pragmatic encroachment on an epistemic state

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<sup>4</sup> This doubt is raised by De Paul (unpublished) in a review of Kvanvig (2002)

(belief, rational belief, knowledge) if the practical consequences of being in that state are relevant to the epistemic evaluation of that state. Since belief is the most simple epistemic state, and since it is at least part of more complex states such as justified belief and knowledge, let us consider it first.

The idea that belief is, at least in part, determined by factors having to do with their relevance to rational action is not new. It is part an parcel of the dispositional theory of belief, according to which to believe that P is to be disposed to act as if P. It is incorporated in what Stalnaker (1984: 15) calls the “pragmatic picture” of belief: to believe that P is to be disposed to act in ways that would tend to satisfy one’s desires, in a world in which P. The picture is itself part and parcel of the functionalist conception of belief which is often formulated as a preference conception of belief:

(B) S believes that P if and only if S prefers as if P

which can itself be translated in terms of degrees of belief and desirabilities within a Bayesian framework. On this view of belief, degrees of belief are a function of degrees of desires and of preferences, as they are revealed in an agent’s action. So the epistemic notion of a degree of belief (of subjective probability) is itself a function of degrees of desires or utilities. When he first introduced this picture into contemporary philosophy, Frank Ramsey called it a form of “pragmatism”, which he took to be the view that “the meaning of a sentence is to be defined by reference to the actions to which asserting it would lead, or more vaguely still by its possible causes and effects” and that “the degree of a belief is a causal property of it which we can express vaguely as the extent to which we are prepared to act on it” (Ramsey 1927: 51; 1926: 65).

It seems clear, on the functionalist-Bayesian notion of belief, that an epistemic notion, that of degree of belief and subjective probability, is a function of the role that it plays in practical reasoning and in preferences towards certain actions. But does that imply that the very notion of degree of belief or subjective probability is determined by pragmatic factors such as the desirability or utility of action, and the preference towards action manifested by an agent? Can we say that an agent’s degree of belief could be in some sense dependent upon its utilities and preferences? The answer is negative. In Bayesian decision theory, beliefs depend upon desires and actions, but this dependence

does not imply that degrees of belief should be fixed in function of degrees of desire, or that both could be in some sense merged. On the contrary they are independent. I take it that it is what David Lewis (1988, 1996) has shown against the so-called “belief as desire” thesis, according to which there could be “besires”, states which would be a mixture of beliefs and desires and which could motivate our actions. Values and credences cannot collide without decision theory being crippled. So there cannot be pragmatic encroachment on the notion of degree of evidence or degree of belief which is used by the standard Bayesian framework, if we keep this notion apart from utilities.

Now it is true that 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 conform to expected utility. In this sense there is indeed a pragmatic justification of the concept of rationality which is used by standard Bayesian theory. Dutch book arguments *are* pragmatic proofs of rationality, since they show that violating the laws of probability in one’s degrees of belief would lead one to be less well off. So the norms of prudential rationality, not those of epistemic rationality, are what justifies the conformity of the degrees of belief to the laws of probability. But this does not show that the notion of degree of belief is *dependent* upon that of utility. In fact there are ways of justifying the notion of degree of belief which do not appeal to prudential rationality but to epistemic rationality only.<sup>5</sup>

So no functionalist conception of belief along the lines of (B) can give us an appropriate notion of pragmatic encroachment in the sense of a reply to question (1) in § 1, because the functionalist conception does not affect the *epistemic* character of belief. Can such a functionalist theory give us an answer to question (2)? In other terms, can

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<sup>5</sup> Joyce’s (1998) “non-pragmatic vindication of probabilism” is precisely meant to integrate a purely cognitive, and non pragmatic ideal or goal into the Bayesian framework, through the formulation of a “Norm of Gradational Accuracy” instead of a Norm of Truth : 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) 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 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. Percival’s (2002) “cognitive decision theory” is meant to have similar effects.

the pragmatic involvement of belief in action give us an account of the *practical value* of beliefs? For that, we would have to show that some epistemic values at least are practical values, in other words we would have to show that they owe their epistemic standing to their relevance to action. Truth is indeed a property of our beliefs that we value. Can we say that it is a value because, and only because, of the role it plays in our action? This would, of course, amount to some form of pragmatism, in the sense of a reduction of theoretical and epistemic reasons (and values) to practical reasons (and values).

Horwich (1998: 44-46, 2006) proposes just this: to explain the value of belief simply in terms of the action theory of beliefs (B). He 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)

Horwich’s point is the following, familiar, one. Beliefs have the potential to guide action aimed at satisfying our desires. Successful action is action that satisfies our desires. Beliefs are more likely to lead to successful action if they are true than if they are false. So there is reason to value believing what is true and only what is true.

Suppose we consider “action guiding beliefs” D of the form “If I do thus and thus, I get this”, and formulate the schema:

(D) If I believe that D, then D

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 derives the value of truth, encapsulated in the principles:

(VT1) It is desirable to believe what is true and only what is true

(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 can 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 the value or the norm of truth<sup>6</sup> is nothing over and above the ordinary explanation of action through our beliefs and desires. For instance if I have to choose between two boxes, one on the left which contains a bomb which will explode when I open it, one in which there is a million dollars, but I do not know which is which, if I believe that the bomb is in the box on the left, I aim to avoid it by taking the box on the right. Suppose that, in such a case, I want to believe the truth according to (VT1) and (VT2). If I believe that the bomb is in the box on the right, I shall satisfy (VT1) and (VT2) by believing that the million is on the left. But the aim expressed by (VT1) and (VT2) is such that no matter what I believe, I have the aim of believing the truth. In other words there is no more to the value of a true my belief that it leads me to act successfully. Could we say more by saying that to aim at truth is to 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 is presupposed by the move from (D) to (D\*), that

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<sup>6</sup> All these should of course be distinguished, but we do not need here to distinguish them. For an account of the difference, see Shah 2003, Engel 2005

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. The property that is shared by our beliefs is the one we take ourselves to be good to have, or that we ought to have. And this value or this prescription is not reducible to a simple list of instances of (D), that is of sentences to the effect that performing this or that action will satisfy our desires. 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 deflationist's hope 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, or in some sense explained by, the value of acting successfully, since not all true beliefs have effects which derive from their role in practical inferences.<sup>7</sup> Horwich later (2006) recognises this and actually disclaims having reduced the value of truth to a practical value. He agrees that VT1 and VT2 can be understood as bearing on truth as a theoretical value, intrinsic but not instrumental, and there is a long way from the acknowledgement of the pragmatic *relevance* of true beliefs in deliberation to the reduction of the value of truth to a practical value.

So I conclude that neither a functionalist theory of belief nor a decision-theoretic view can justify the claim that, as an epistemic notion, belief is pragmatically encroached. Neither can the action theory of belief give us the appropriate explanation of the value of true belief.

### ***3. Pragmatic encroachment on justified belief***

Pragmatic encroachment is primarily a condition on epistemic justification, hence not simply on belief, but on justified belief .

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<sup>7</sup> For a general criticism of Horwich's line, see Lynch 2004.

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  $p$

(JPB) is meant to be opposed to the thesis which they call “purism” and which they define as the following view :

(Purism) 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  $p$ . (Fantl and Mc Grath *forthcoming*)

Now strength of epistemic position is basically the evidence that one has in favour of a belief. *Evidentialism* is in general the view that a belief P is epistemically justified for a subject S at a certain time  $t$  if and only if the belief fits the evidence that S has for P at  $t$  (Conee and Feldman 2005: 83). Fantl and Mc Grath, however, address a somewhat different version of evidentialism which they characterise thus:

(E) 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 argument against (E) consists first in registering our intuitions from examples similar to those familiar in the literature on contextualism in epistemology, such as the airport example used by Cohen 1999 or de Rose'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. But here it is very important for you to be in Foxboro, since you are going to have there an interview on which your career depends. You overhear 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 that not 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 an 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 an application of the principle of epistemic closure, and of the plausible principle, also advocated by Hawthorne (2004: 29), Williamson (2005) et 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 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 less easily subject to closure than knowledge, 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 based on 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\*) S 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.

What do Fantl and McGrath's analyses actually show? In the first place, we should note that it is surprising that examples such as the train cases, which have been initially used by contextualists to show that there are variations in the sense of our ascriptions of knowledge (and here of justification) are used to show that there is an impact of pragmatic factors on knowledge and justification. I shall come back to this. I must say that I do not share Fantl's and McGrath's intuitions (nor, for that matter, Stanley's intuitions about similar examples, see below). My own intuitive response to the train cases is that the individual is 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 epistemically justified – in the sense of having the same evidence for his justification- in the second case than in the first. Now, one may reply to this that although the two individuals in each case are equally justified, they are not justified *in the sense required for their knowledge*.<sup>8</sup> Their point is that the weight imposed by the stakes elevates the amount of epistemic justification which is required for knowledge. Justification in this sense does not simply rest upon the evidence that one has at a given time, but also upon the evidence that one *might* have at a later time or at another time in general, if circumstances required that one should reconsider one's earlier evidence. Let us call *justification\** - or *enlarged justification* - this kind of justification, and let us call *counterfactual evidence* or *evidence\** the evidence that one *would* need to have if the stakes were higher . The

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<sup>8</sup> I thank Jeremy Fantl for having pointed this out to me.

reasoning above then purports to show that although justification in the evidentialist sense of (E) can be exactly the same, justification\* is not. Now one can certainly grant this, and if one understands the intuitions voiced in the train cases as showing a difference in justification\*, we can certainly agree with *this* sense of pragmatic encroachment. But the problem is precisely whether this is a pragmatic encroachment on (evidential) justification or upon justification\*. And it seems to simply beg the question to assume that the two notions of justification (and of evidence) are equivalent. It seems to me that what happens in the train 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 can say, 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* in the straightforward evidentialist sense<sup>9</sup>

Intuitions are not foolproof, neither in philosophy nor elsewhere. But even if our intuitions 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 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

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<sup>9</sup> In a review of Stanley's book (Pritchard 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.

believing that the trains stop at Foxboro is greater in case 2 than in case 1, because of what is practically at stake.<sup>10</sup>

The difference between justification (in the strict evidentialist sense) and justification\* or enlarged justification in what we may call the pragmatic sense is that in this second we are much more reluctant to attribute *knowledge*. What is happening in fact in the train cases is that in the second case we consider that although the subject has justification he does not have knowledge. 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*" [*my italics*]. Stanley, as we shall see in the next section, talks explicitly of knowledge in such cases, not of justification. The problem with the reasoning (1\*)-(3\*) above is that when the stakes are high, we lose grip on how much justification is needed for having knowledge. We are thus in a familiar situation: if on the one hand we raise too high the requirements for justification in order for it to amount to knowledge, we run the risk of scepticism, and if, on the other hand, we accept fallibilism we do not ensure knowledge. So the argument (1)-(3) above is much more credible because the state ascribed to the subject is the state of knowing, than the reasoning (1\*)-(3\*) which ascribes justification.<sup>11</sup> If what is ascribed is justification\* (i.e. enough justification to yield knowledge), the reasoning (1\*)-(3\*) is much more appealing. But we should not

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<sup>10</sup> As Julien Dutant as pointed out to me, one can translate the situation in decision theoretic terms. The agent has two options in case 2 : Act (A) on the basis of her best judgment or enquire further (E) to get an additional information  $i$ . Let  $P(R)$  the probability of being right,  $U(R)$  the utility of being right and  $C(T)$  the cost of being wrong. If  $U(T)$  is 5 then the utility of being wrong,  $U(T)$  is -5). One supposes that if the subject is not right, he is wrong. Let  $C(I)$  the cost of acquiring the information  $i$ , and  $P(R|I)$  the probability of having got the right information after having acquired  $i$ .

the expected utility of A is :

$$G(A) = P(R).U(R) - (1-P(R)).C(T)$$

the expected utility of inquiring further is :

$$G(E) = P(R|I).U(R) - (1-P(R|I)).C(T) - C(I)$$

The agent maximises his expected utility in inquiring iff i:

$$G(E) > G(A)$$

$$P(R|I).U(R) - (1-P(R|I)).C(T) - C(I) > P(R).U(R) - (1-P(R)).C(T)$$

$$[P(R|I)-P(R)].U(R) - [(1-P(R|I)) - (1-P(R))].C(T) > C(I)$$

$$[P(R|I)-P(R)].[U(R) - C(T)] > C(I)$$

Let the increase of the probability of being right on the basis of  $i$  :  $d = [P(R|I)-P(R)]$ . Let  $D$  the difference in utility between being right and being wrong:  $D = [U(R) - C(T)]$ . And let the cost of information be  $I$ . The subject maximises his expected utility by inquiring iff :

$$dD > I$$

This validates our intuition that if the cost of error is important, and the information is not too costly it is important to try to argue one's probability of being right by inquiring further. For further elaboration of the situation in decision theoretic terms, see Weatherson 2005.

<sup>11</sup> Thanks to Jeremy Fantl for having attracted my attention on this point. I would thus accept closure when (1)-(3) mention knowledge, but not when it mentions justification.

equivocate between the two notions of justification and the two notions of evidence. In any case, from the fact that one's evidence\* must be stronger, or that one needs to look for more counterfactual 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.

What seems to happen, in the cases about justification\* that Fantl and McGrath discuss is this. The practical significance of the truth of a proposition does *not* affect the (evidential) justification of the subject, although it does affect our *attribution* of knowledge, and our judgement about the amount of justification needed for knowledge. There are pragmatic limitations on the collection of evidence, but it does not imply that evidentialism is false. This does not amount to a pragmatic conception of justification. David Owens makes the point quite well in describing the pragmatic limitations of collecting evidence:

“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.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> 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.

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 1 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.<sup>13</sup> But doesn't the evidence change if our attitude towards the evidence change, and is not evidentialism threatened just by this fact? Indeed, potentially their evidence changes, if they feel the need to gather more evidence than they actually have (in terms of my distinction above, their counterfactual evidence\* changes). But does that show that the evidence that one has at  $t$  is affected by what is practically at stake? No, the fact that one feels that one would need to have more evidence if there are high stakes does not change the relationship which exists between a belief and the evidence which justifies it. As I have proposed, we can use the concept of evidence\*, understood in the same manner as the concept of justification\*, in order to designate the evidence which the subject would feel to be required in a given situation. And there is no doubt that the corresponding doctrine of evidentialism\* would be false. But it does not imply that evidentialism in the sense of (E) is false<sup>14</sup>.

All of this is not to meant to deny the phenomenon which Fantl and McGrath are pointing to, only their interpretation of it. Let us call *pragmatic relevance* the fact that the conditions under which we are led to form our beliefs, which are often associated to practical interests, and to factors which are extra-epistemic, such as economy or gain of time and resources. Indeed such factors are present in the formation of belief, in

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<sup>13</sup> 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.)"

<sup>14</sup> For a similar reaction to Fantl and Mc Grath's case, see Conee and Feldman 2005: 103-104.

knowledge and in our judgements about justification. But they do not imply that these notions depend upon such pragmatic factors. Pragmatic relevance does not entail pragmatic encroachment of the epistemic by the non-epistemic.

#### ***4. Pragmatic encroachment on knowledge***

Having found reasons to doubt about pragmatic encroachment on justification, we can now turn to its application to knowledge. As we saw when Fantl's and Mc Grath's argument is formulated first about knowledge, in reasoning (1)-(3), it has much more plausibility than when it is applied to justification. Stanley (2005) applies it directly to knowledge, on the basis of similar series of examples as De Rose'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 contextualists on the other hand, is that the latter claim that attributions of knowledge are relative to the ascriber, whereas the former is a view about the nature of knowledge, which considers to what extent we can attribute knowledge from the subject's point of view. 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 have already noted above that the oddity is that such examples had been used by contextualists to defend a form of purism or intellectualism. Contextualists use the same examples but where interest-relative invariantists say that epistemic notions are pragmatically encroached but that their meaning is invariant, contextualists stick to purism and evidentialism, but they claim that the meaning of words such as "knows" varies across context. It is not my purpose here, by defending purism, to defend a form of contextualism. On the contrary, I accept invariantism about knowledge. But it is not my concern here to argue for this view. I am not going to detail the examples and the discussion that Stanley directs at contextualism, because my concern here is not which theory of our knowledge claims is correct, but whether this view threatens purism or evidentialism (or intellectualism).

When he describes 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”.<sup>15</sup> But when he comes to formulate his own view, Stanley is more prudent. Describing the case of his characters, Hannah and Sarah, who wonder whether the bank is open on Saturdays and in differing situations have high or low stakes, 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, ie. 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*. Unlike Fantl and McGrath he directly addresses the issue of a pragmatic encroachment on knowledge. For him IRI is a view about knowledge, and not necessarily about justified belief (although it can presumably be extended to it). Why is this so? Because actually, as we saw above, he formulates his view not as 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. 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.<sup>22</sup>

All of Stanley’s examples have to do not with 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 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

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<sup>15</sup> These claims would not be so ambitious if, in the spirit of some of his declarations, Stanley considered IRI as mostly a theory of knowledge *attributions*, and not as a theory of knowledge of its own. He seems to say this 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” but he actually thinks of his views as bearing on the nature of knowledge itself.

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, as well as Fantl and Mc Grath make much of the principle (PR) that if one knows that  $p$ ,  $p$  is apt to figure in a practical reasoning. Hawthorne (2004:30) gives examples such as the following. If someone is offered a penny for a lottery ticket and reasons thus:

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

everyone agrees that this reasoning is unacceptable because the agent is not entitled to assert the first premise, since he does not *know* that it is true before the winning ticket is drawn. By contrast if the person has just heard the winning number, seen it was not his, and sold the ticket to someone else unaware of the announcement, we would not criticize the reasoning. According to Hawthorne, this shows that “if the question whether  $p$  is practically relevant, it is acceptable to use the premise that  $p$  in one

deliberations if one knows it and (at least in very many cases) unacceptable if ones does not know it” (*ibid.*).

(PR) is in my view correct, although it has been contrasted by those who claim that practical reasoning does not need to be premised on knowledge, only on rational belief (Kaplan 1985). Although there is a lot of discussion of this principle, I shall not put it into question, because it does not seem to me to imply any pragmatic encroachment on the notion of knowldddge. 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”. Fantl and McGrath (2004) derive from their reasoning (1)-(3) a pragmatic notion of knowledge, according to which

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

But here we should note that there is an important difference between (PCK) and the principle (PR) that knowledge enters as premise in a practical reasoning. What (PCK) says is that when it is not rational to act as if  $p$  – for instance because the stakes are too high to run the risk of acting as if  $p$  were true – then the subject does not know that  $p$ . This *is* pragmatic encroachment on knowledge, since it says that a necessary condition on knowledge is that one’s actions and preferences should be practically rational. But the correct lesson of (PCK) goes in the opposite direction : PCK, properly understood, actually says that when one does not know that  $p$ , it is irrational to act as if  $p$  were true.<sup>16</sup> Again, let us put aside the issue whether (PR) is correct or not. It is quite a different thing to say that knowledge is a necessary condition of rational action and to say that acting rationally is a condition on knowledge. The second is indeed a form of pragmatism, but the first bears all the marks of what is usually considered to be an *intellectualist* view: in order to act well you have to be a knower. Indeed, to take up the formulation used at the end of the preceding section, (PR) says that knowledge is

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<sup>16</sup> Hawthorne and Stanley (*forthcoming*) note this in relation to Fantl and McGrath’s principle, and they say that it takes the order of explanation wrong. I approve, and claim that this shows that there is not pragmatic encroachment on knowledge with PCK, since it is, literally, knowledge which encroaches rational action, and not the other way round.

*relevant*, or “matters” for practical reasoning and action. But that is not to say that what makes knowledge knowledge somehow *depends* upon the rationality of our actions. So I conclude that (PR), true or not, cannot serve as a basis for pragmatic encroachment understood as the view that practical constraints weigh on epistemic justification and knowledge.

### **5 . Can pragmatic encroachment confer value to knowledge ?**

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 false<sup>17</sup>. This answers question (1) above in the negative. What about question (2): could pragmatic encroachment explain, or at least could it give us some hint as to why knowledge is valuable, and more valuable than true belief?

Of course if the phenomenon of pragmatic encroachment reduces, as I have claimed, to that of pragmatic relevance, question (2) has to be answered in the negative too. But this does not prevent us from asking: if there *were* pragmatic encroachment on knowledge, would that show anything about the value of knowledge? It would, in a sense trivially, for if (PCK) were correct, the value of rational action, in some consequentialist sense, would confer automatically value to knowledge, since the existence of knowledge would depend upon conditions of rational action. In other words the more our rational actions, as based on knowledge, would be beneficial, the more our knowledge would have value. This would indeed be a form of pragmatism, in the sense that not only the value of knowledge would depend upon its effects through rational action, but also because our reasons to believe would not differ, or at least should be strongly affected, but our reasons to act. There are indeed less crudely pragmatist views that one can take, as Horwich’s examination of the value of truth shows. But in fact none of the writers who defend the view that there is a pragmatic encroachment on epistemic concepts deal explicitly with the issue of the value of knowledge. They are mostly concerned with the question whether truth, justification and knowledge are to be

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<sup>17</sup> I have not, however, tried here to defend evidentialism as such. There are other difficulties with the view which I have not discussed.

ascribed on the basis of epistemic considerations alone. They are interested in whether knowledge “matters” with respect to other epistemic notions, in particular justification<sup>18</sup>. So they are mostly interested in whether one can analyse knowledge in terms of belief, truth, or justification, and whether these notions are pure. But in order to deal with the value problem, in its primary or in its secondary form, we need also to ask whether a proper subpart of knowledge confers value to it, or whether it has more value than any of its subparts. In other words, it does not follow automatically from an analysis of knowledge and justification in pragmatic terms, that knowledge is valuable, either intrinsically or relatively.

But even if knowledge matters in this sense, and I agree with them that it does, that still does not give us any answer to the secondary value problem: is knowledge more valuable than any of its subparts? We would have the beginning of such an answer if it could be shown, for instance in the reliabilist way, that knowledge is apt to produce more true beliefs than sheer luck or absence of method, or if the way in which knowledge matters could be associated to some specific dispositions of knowers, as virtue epistemology proposes. But the very fact that our judgements about knowledge are relevant to our evaluation of actions, or that they are relevant for practical reasoning, to repeat, shows nothing, for it is the other way round : if knowledge is relevant to actions, if confers value to our actions, whereas an explanation of the value of knowledge would have to go in the reverse direction, or conclude that knowledge has a value of its own, independent of its role in action.<sup>19</sup> In particular, the kind of argument defended by Williamson about the role of knowledge in the explanation of action does not in any way show that there is pragmatic encroachment on knowledge, for it is quite open to someone to hold that knowledge is relevant to the explanation of action while denying that whether one knows that *p* or turns on practical matters. The latter is indeed the position which I myself accept.

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<sup>18</sup> This is perhaps to be qualified by the last sentence of Hawthorne and Stanley (to appear) article “Knowledge and Action”, where they say, after having addressed many of the issues about pragmatic encroachment: “The value of knowledge is due in part to its role as a norm for action”. They do not explain, however, in what part, nor why it is so.

<sup>19</sup> A different form of pragmatism – which one would rather call of form of relativism – is the view advocated by Matt Weiner (this volume), according to which knowledge is like a “Swiss army concept”, which can be used either in the true belief sense, or in the justified belief sense, or in some stronger sense, without any use being privileged. On this view, there is no such thing as *the* value of knowledge, or of one of its subpart.

I have denied that 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 so 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. \*

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