

Knowledge vrs. Belief

Knowledge is based on intuition or sensation of the relations of ideas

Belief is based on judgment of the relations of ideas

Since the scope of our knowledge is more limited than the range of concerns we are called upon to act on, we must rely mostly on judgment and belief.

The subject matter for belief

Matters of fact that pass beyond the reach of our senses

either because they occur at times when we are not there to observe them

or because they are too small or too remote to perceive

or because they are not of a nature to be detected by our senses

(e.g., causes of observable phenomena, existence, nature and operations of minds other than our own and God)

Basis of judgment

A third thing that establishes a merely probable connection between ideas

(one that holds for the most part)

Probable connections

Analogy with what has been experienced before

The testimony of others who actually demonstrated the relation of ideas or had the sensations

Remarks

“Traditional” testimony (history, hearsay) counts as testimony.

Expression of opinion does not

Factors influencing the likelihood of testimony

Conformity to one's own past experience

(The more extraordinary the event, the less likely it is to be true)

The number and character of witnesses

(Witnesses are ideally numerous, independent, expert, honest, disinterested, consistent with themselves and with other witnesses, etc.)

A further factor influencing the likelihood of “traditional” testimony

The number of links in the chain of transmission and whether the links were oral or written

(The more hands the story has passed through before coming to us, the less we can trust that the original message has been preserved uncorrupted.

And the corruption of messages occurs much more rapidly when they are transmitted orally rather than by copying and printing.)

However reliable the works of historians may be esteemed to be, they certainly cannot exceed the reliability of the witnesses who first reported the events.

(A story does not become more credible for having been repeated down through the ages.)

Degrees of assent

Assurance

- all the factors influencing the assessment of testimony are positive
- the event reported is analogous with what has always happened in the like circumstances in the past

Confidence

- all the factors influencing the assessment of testimony are positive
- the event reported is analogous with what normally or equiprobably happened in the like circumstances in the past

Lesser confidence

- the number and character of witnesses is not all it could be and/or the event reported is of a sort that is unusual or marvellous

A special case

Faith

- testimony is given by a witness who cannot be deceived and would not lie

Reasons why faith only produces belief and not knowledge

- it is always possible to ask whether the testimony has been correctly understood or accurately reported

(this factor by itself degrades faith to the level of confidence)

- it is always possible to ask whether the witness really is someone who would not lie and could not be deceived

(this factor by itself degrades faith to the level of assurance)

Means of obtaining assurance that testimony was given by God

Personal sensory experience or assured testimony to the occurrence of miracles

(The ability to work miracles serves as a “sign” of God’s presence)

Why testimony to miraculous events should not automatically be discounted because the event is marvellous

Testimony to the occurrence of events that are disanalogous with past experience is normally grounds for lesser confidence

But miracles can be expected to have occurred in early times

This is because we know that a benevolent and intelligent God exists

Such a being would have wanted to communicate important truths to us,

would have done so earlier rather than later,

and would have needed to use miracles to prove himself

Locke vrs. Hobbes

Locke claimed that analogy should lead us to be assured that there are orders of intelligent being of all sorts of degrees intermediate between us and God.

Presumably, higher orders of such beings could also perform miracles

Consideration of this possibility led Hobbes to declare that a miracle is not enough by itself to prove that a witness really is divine.

and gave him an excuse to claim that no miracle employed to verify a revelation that is inconsistent with accepted authority in religious matters could be accepted as having come from God

Locke did not even raise the problem.

Locke's ethics of belief

Ideally, we should not place more confidence in a proposition than the evidence warrants.

However, *practically*, assessing the strength of evidence is difficult and time-consuming

Moreover, we are often compelled to make decisions quickly

So no one can be blamed for reaching a decision on a matter before failing to review all the evidence.

They can only be blamed if they make less of a review than they could reasonably be expected to.

Some consequences

A person is entitled to a belief as long as they made as much of an examination as they had leisure and resources for at the time prior to first forming it

After that they cannot be expected to justify their persistence in their beliefs

- given the number of beliefs we have, that places an unreasonable burden on memory

Neither can they be obliged to change their minds as new evidence comes in

- because a degree of constancy in one's opinions is a virtue
- because people are not obliged to remember all the reasons for their beliefs
- because new evidence is always coming in and these matters are never decided

Locke's parity argument

Since I don't always pause to fully consider each new bit of evidence that someone brings to my attention that challenges my beliefs,

and since I resent it when people take it upon themselves to instruct me in what matters I should study more fully,

I can't expect either of those things from those who disagree with me about any matter of probability.

Locke's argument for toleration

Since people can't be expected to answer every new argument and constantly change their minds as new evidence comes in,

we ought to all tolerate one another's contrary beliefs in matters of probability.