

ETHICS AND KNOWLEDGE

Desire enters into what we believe more than we usually desire to believe. Logic (and mathematics) is one of the few areas of knowledge, ⁱⁿ upon which belief is seldom affected by desire. But even here desire is sometimes a strong factor in belief. The main reason the primitive propositions of logic are believed is that more familiar propositions of logic follow from them. In areas, such as politics, where strong emotions may be aroused, desire usually has a strong effect upon belief.

Is there any reason to prefer one set of beliefs to another? The natural answer is that true beliefs are to be preferred to false ones. However, this answer even when accepted does not solve the problem. What beliefs are true and what beliefs are false. Even the most basic premisses of empirical science are not logically deducible and hence not necessarily true. Take for example the law of induction. It states that if B has always followed A in the past then it will also follow A in the future. To say that this is true because it has always held true in the past, is to assume the principle itself and hence is circular. There is no logical reason to believe in the law of induction.

Let us suppose that some beliefs are better than others. In fact we may assume that true beliefs are to be preferred to false ones. What follows from this assumption? The answer to this will depend in part upon the theory of value adopted. A preliminary discussion of values is therefore in order.

predjudices. I believe that no philosopher will doubt that he has whatever sensations he does have. I also believe that no philosopher will doubt that true belief is preferable to false belief. If these prejudices are admitted as knowledge, then, as shown above science is itself knowledge.