

8. McGrath 2008, Controversiality and Skepticism

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What is **knowledge**? To know something:

You must believe it.

It must be *true*.

Your belief must be justified/rational/supported by evidence.

Does a justified, true belief suffice for knowledge? Not always!

Belief must also be *safe*:

Your belief is **safe** if it couldn't easily have been false.

Knowing that *p* seems to require that your belief that *p* be justified, true, and safe.

McGrath's argument:

A belief is **CONTROVERSIAL** if it is denied by someone, and you have no more reason to think that they are in error than that you are.

P1 Our controversial moral beliefs are **CONTROVERSIAL**.

P2 **CONTROVERSIAL** beliefs are not knowledge.

C Our controversial beliefs are not knowledge.

Why think (P2) is true?

Alice and the train example.

If your belief is **CONTROVERSIAL**, it's not safe! *You* could've easily been the one with the false belief.

Why think (P1) is true?

Evolution and experts. *Moral* experts?

Analogy: example of unique green.

In this case, there may well be some "unique-green experts".

But (1) *they* don't have reason to think they're experts, so can't know. And (2) We have no good way of identifying them!

Moral beliefs are similar, McGrath says. People's judgment about which moral premises to accept is immediate and intuitive, like judgments about unique green.

Even if some of us are getting it right, given that we disagree, we have no way of knowing *which* of us are getting it right!

?? "I know it'll rain but I don't believe it will."

?? "It's not going to rain, but Bill knows that it will".

Bill the hermit believes, with no evidence, that my birthday is July 30.

Stopped Clock: You glance at a clock that reads "12:11 pm", and come to believe it's 12:11 pm. This belief is justified and true. Unbeknownst to you, the clock is stopped—your belief is true merely by luck; it could easily have been false.

controversial \neq **CONTROVERSIAL**.

It's like learning that one of your watches has stopped.

So, McGrath says, beliefs about unique green are **CONTROVERSIAL**.

So it's **CONTROVERSIAL**.