

How do beliefs about the world, and beliefs about what is valuable, influence the...

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The pursuit of scientific knowledge has often been believed to be an exploration in which information is gathered solely from experimentation, but people are slow to realize that experimentation is only one way, among a variety of ways, in which scientists gather information. In their pursuit of new scientific knowledge, scientists may conduct surveys, or build on pre-existing information using assumptions and theories, along with experimentation, in order to obtain knowledge in any particular scientific field. That which the scientists determine as knowledge, however, does not always mirror that which the public receives as new scientific knowledge. Along the path of distribution of this knowledge, the influences of economics, morality and political beliefs can taint pure scientific knowledge discovered by the scientist. In almost all fields of new research, scientists seeking to gain new knowledge encounter inadequate funding. Whether the money is needed for new lab equipment or field research or other such projects, sufficient funding is almost always unattainable. Because so little is known about this new field of study, the public is scared and few are willing to support it. Once more information is discovered and scientists acknowledge the importance of that field, more funding is gradually provided, and more scientists, furthering the pursuit of knowledge, conduct more research in this field. The required funding is only provided after the scientists present data persuasive enough to promote further studies in that. Also, because of the lucrative business opportunities of such a discovery, a scientist may be unwilling to share his knowledge unless he has been rewarded. Next to interfere with the pursuit of scientific knowledge is morality. Just as information that is not "politically correct" cannot be released because it may be discredited, scientists cannot

release immoral or scandalous information because it may shock the public and scare them away from this field of research. Because defining morality may be difficult, most scientists will choose to stay on the more conservative end of the scale, for they believe it would be better to withhold certain information from a select few rather than offend the masses and give a chance that the information can be discredited. Scientists are "roped in" by the morals of their societies. For this reason, it is possible for information to be discovered in one nation and not in another. Morality sets the limitations within which scientists can accumulate and distribute knowledge. Should a scientist overstep such boundaries, he would put his own credibility on the line and could possibly jeopardize the distribution of new vital information. Finally, political beliefs warp that which we perceive as knowledge. In a society especially like the one in which we live today where everyone is striving to be "politically correct", it is in the scientists best interest to abide by such standards. Scientists would not want to release any unnecessarily controversial information for the simple reason that such information would not reach an entire spectrum of people. Certain groups of people would be avoided so that the members of these groups would not be offended or shocked by any of the information found by a scientist. For this reason, most of what we know as scientific knowledge has been "watered down" so that it would be tolerated and understood by the general public. It appears as though the three factors of economics, morality, and political beliefs are intertwined and can affect one another just as easily as they affect the information being obtained. Insofar as much of the funding for any scientific research comes from the government, any scientist wishing to gain financial

support of his project would want to remain politically neutral. Should he express extreme feelings he may lose the greatly needed support of a political party or establishment. Quite often, it is such political establishments that determine the morality of certain issues. Political leaders may find themselves captured between that which is moral and that which is financially convenient. A most recent example of how the pursuit of scientific knowledge can be affected is in the field of research for a cure of Parkinson's disease. Michael J. Fox, a television personality, has recently announced that he was diagnosed with such a disease. After keeping his disease- that struck him at an unusually young age- confidential for a few years, he has become increasingly open about it, and has made the transition, as he put it, from "patient" to advocate. Right now, he said he wants to focus more on advocacy than acting. Fox already has testified before Congress, seeking more research money for the baffling neurological disorder. Congress has sharply increased funding for research into Parkinson's disease, and Pennsylvania Republican Arlen Specter, chairman of the Senate Labor, Health and Human Services appropriations subcommittee, said he hopes to boost annual spending even further. A big controversy surrounding Parkinson's research is stem cell research, which the Senate may debate next month. Some scientists believe that stem cells, elusive master cells with the potential to become any kind of human cell, may hold huge promise for treating diseases such as diabetes and Parkinson's. However, stem cells may be derived from embryos left over from fertility treatment, which puts the research smack in the middle of the abortion debate. Fox urged people not to have a knee-jerk response to

the stem cell debate and said the research had the potential to æliterally change the world.? This controversy over developing a cure for Parkinsonæ disease is being affected by all three of the issues stated above (economics, morals, and politics). Because of Foxæ advocating of a cure, more funding has been given to the field of research. But also this field of research for a sure of Parkinsonæ disease has a highly debatable moral issues behind it, in which the public may not be willing to face, which will hinder the progress of such a research. This field has also stepped into the political arena in which now the United States Congress must take a stand on a moral issue, thus putting many political leaders into the spotlight that they are unwilling to take. The influences of economics, political beliefs and morality are not always negative. Had Fox not advocate for more research of a cure, the public would be unawareæ of the lives that the disease takes. Perhaps, in a few years, with further research done, a cure for this disease will be found without having to use stem cells, and perhaps a cure will not, but because of Foxæ intervention, it is ensured that further research will be done, and a cure may yet be found. Any of these factors, politics, morals, and economics, could keep a scientist from jumping to conclusions about his research. Perhaps it is true that no one can ever gain " pure" knowledge. Through the distribution process facts, figures, and theories can be altered to better suit the society or to accommodate the individuals presenting the new information. Complex ideas may be trivialized so that those among the masses understand their general concept. Regardless of how the adulteration occurs, it appears at adulteration of knowledge to some extent is always common.