

Understanding without Achievement

On September 17th I presented a paper titled “Understanding without Achievement” at a Virtue Epistemology Conference at the University of Leuven in Belgium. The conference was a 3 day professional conference. My project on the nature and value of understanding was chosen through a blind review process. I presented this paper under my professional name.

In this presentation I argued that the unique value that understanding has over knowledge is not due to the kind of epistemic achievement it is. There are even cases of easy understanding where the agent does not complete a genuine achievement by coming to understand at all. I then went on to suggest that the greater value that understanding has comes from its unique social function. Knowledge often is said to play a social function of distinguishing between reliable and unreliable informants. On my view, the concept of understanding does not pick out who is merely a good informant, but who is an expert. Expertise has a particular kind of social value. However, being an expert is just a function of how much one knows. This means the difference in cognitive abilities between a knower and understander is not a difference in kind, but a difference in social value. The thesis of the presentation went over well and I received several positive and helpful comments for refinement.

The conference greatly contributed to my professional development. It gave me an opportunity to gain experience giving a talk in a professional setting. There were only a couple of graduate students presenting at the conference so I stood out in this regard. Furthermore, there were several well known and top epistemologists present at the

conference, including John Greco and Ernie Sosa. This provided me with the opportunity to network and gain valuable feedback on my work as I prepare it for publication. One such opportunity came when Dr. Sosa invited me to sit in on his current Epistemology seminar at Rutgers University. I have now been attending this seminar for several weeks. This has enabled me to build a stronger relationship with Dr. Sosa where we continue to provide each other feedback on new work. As this relationship matures I will be in a position to receive a reference letter from him to add to my dossier.

Presenting at this level of professional conference this early in my career is a great sign for success with future work and professional development. I was honored to be representing Fordham University in this professional setting.