

Which scientific knowledge is a common good?

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In this presentation, I address the question of whether science can and should be seen as a common good. For this purpose, the first section focuses on the notion of (scientific) knowledge and examines its main characteristics. I discuss and assess the core view of analytic epistemology, saying that knowledge is, basically, justified true belief. On the basis of this analysis, I then develop an alternative, multi-dimensional theory of the nature of (scientific) knowledge. Section 2 reviews and evaluates several answers to the question of what to understand by the notion of a common (or public) good. It discusses both economic and socio-political interpretations of this notion. In section 3, I develop an alternative account of the common good of scientific knowledge. This knowledge constitutes a common good if it is both non-exhaustible and in the public interest. The two notions are equally important, but in this presentation the focus is on the former. Some implications of this account for the politics of science are examined by analyzing the theory and practice of product patenting. The main conclusion is a fundamental critique of privatizing non-exhaustible scientific concepts through patenting the products of scientific research.