RESISTING THE FACTS

Åsa Wikforss
Department of Philosophy
Stockholm University
The value of knowledge

Knowledge has a great instrumental value – it is needed if we are to reach our goals.

Why then do people resist available knowledge?

Complex interaction between societal and individual factors.
The post-truth era

• High-choice information environment (selective exposure)
• Large spread of unreliable information
• Declining and polarized trust in sources
Knowledge

I know that the Earth is round:

• I believe that the Earth is round
• It is true that the Earth is round
• I have reasons to believe that the Earth is round
Knowledge resistance

The tendency to resist available evidence – not drawing the proper conclusion.

Basic forms of evidence:

- Experiential (direct perception)
- Testimonial (from other people, through language)
The social nature of knowledge

Knowledge requires trust – and trust can be manipulated...
Knowledge resistance typically involves resisting testimonial evidence.

Conspiracy theories central!
Motivated reasoning

Reasoning driven not by accuracy goals but by other goals – skewed reasoning used to protect a cherished belief.

Politically motivated reasoning: The goal is identity-protection. Factual beliefs become a mark of political/cultural identity.
Counteracting?

Societal factors:
• Unreliable information (including disinformation)
• Partisanship and polarization

Individual factors:
• Background knowledge
• Critical reasoning skills
• Accuracy attitudes
The rational animal

- **Argument quality** matters! Explanatory power makes a difference.
- **Correction** works! Not enough to reject the false statement – must also provide the correct answer and a supporting explanation.
- **Respect** and self-affirmation essential! Need to create trust.
Knowledge Resistance: Causes, Consequences and Cures

Kathrin Glüer • Henrik Ekengren Oscarsson • Torun Lindholm Öjmyr • Jesper Strömbäck