

## A VIRTUE-THEORETIC ACCOUNT OF THE VALUE OF KNOWLEDGE

### *UMA CONTA VIRTUAL-TEÓRICA DO VALOR DO CONHECIMENTO*

### *UNA CUENTA VIRTUO-TEÓRICA DEL VALOR DEL CONOCIMIENTO*

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**ABSTRACT:** The article examines the knowledge value in connection with virtue epistemology. Several kinds of value are examined to set up theoretical framework for discussion about value of knowledge. The traditional pragmatic theory of value of knowledge is considered with objections to it. It is shown that at the center of value problem is the concept of T-value monism (value of truth above everything else). Different strategies of overcoming T-value monism are exposed. The reliabilist virtue-theoretic account of value of knowledge is defended. Different strategies of reliabilist answer to the value problem are analyzed, proposed by A. Goldman, J. Greco, D. Pritchard. Some objections against the reliabilist account are considered: the “coffee machine” objection by Zagzebski and the objection from the existence of trivial knowledge. Another virtue-theoretic alternative to value problem by Zagzebski is analyzed. Against Zagzebski’s account it is maintained that knowledge has fundamental value, even if it does not have final value.

**KEYWORDS:** Value of knowledge. Epistemology. Virtue epistemology. Epistemic value. Value. Knowledge. Pritchard. Kvanvig. Zagzebski.

**RESUMO:** *O artigo examina o problema do valor do conhecimento em conexão com a epistemologia da virtude. Vários tipos de valor são examinados para estabelecer uma estrutura teórica para a discussão sobre o valor do conhecimento. A teoria pragmática tradicional do valor do conhecimento é considerada com objeções. É mostrado que no centro do problema de valor está o conceito de monismo de valor T (valor da verdade acima de tudo). Diferentes estratégias para superar o monismo do valor T são expostas. A explicação confiável da teoria da virtude do valor do conhecimento é defendida. São analisadas diferentes estratégias de resposta confiabilista ao problema do valor, propostas por A. Goldman, J. Greco, D. Pritchard. Algumas objeções contra a versão confiabilista são consideradas: a objeção da “máquina de café” de Zagzebski e a objeção da existência de conhecimento trivial. Outra alternativa teórica da virtude para o problema de valor de Zagzebski é analisada. Contra o relato de Zagzebski, afirma-se que o conhecimento tem valor fundamental, mesmo que não tenha valor final.*

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**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Valor do conhecimento. Epistemologia. Epistemologia da virtude. Valor epistêmico. Valor. Conhecimento. Pritchard. Kvanvig. Zagzebski.

**RESUMEN:** El artículo examina el problema del valor del conocimiento en relación con la epistemología de la virtud. Se examinan varios tipos de valor para establecer un marco teórico para la discusión sobre el valor del conocimiento. La teoría pragmática tradicional del valor del conocimiento se considera con objeciones. Se muestra que en el centro del problema del valor está el concepto de monismo de valor-T (valor de la verdad por encima de todo lo demás). Se exponen diferentes estrategias para superar el monismo del valor T. Se defiende la explicación teórica de las virtudes fiabilista del valor del conocimiento. Se analizan diferentes estrategias de respuesta fiabilista al problema del valor, propuestas por A. Goldman, J. Greco, D. Pritchard. Se consideran algunas objeciones contra el relato fiabilista: la objeción de la “máquina de café” de Zagzebski y la objeción de la existencia de conocimientos triviales. Se analiza otra alternativa teórica de virtudes al problema de valores de Zagzebski. Contra el relato de Zagzebski, se sostiene que el conocimiento tiene un valor fundamental, incluso si no tiene un valor final.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Valor del conocimiento. Epistemología. Epistemología de la virtud. Valor epistêmico. Valor. Conocimiento. Pritchard. Kvanvig. Zagzebski.

## Introduction

In this paper we will examine the problem of value of knowledge from the perspective of virtue epistemology. Why do we value knowledge? This problem is even more prominent in the age of Infosphere when everybody is connected to the Internet. Since any information is available in several clicks, the question arises – why does one need to know anything at all? The value of knowledge seems to be deflated. Even expert knowledge is questioned. Why do we need experts in political science, medicine or history if we have Wikipedia and Google search? All these questions are based on some understanding of knowledge which is usually implicit but never verbalized. But if we ask those who deny any value of knowledge to produce an adequate account of nature of knowledge, we will see that they would be unable to do so. In recent epistemology the question of value of knowledge is related to the discussions around virtue epistemology (PRITCHARD ET AL., 2018).

What is the value problem related to the traditional definition of knowledge as justified true belief? As D. Pritchard showed there is actually not one, but three different layers of the problem (PRITCHARD, 2010). There is the initial problem, or as Pritchard calls it “primary value problem”, which is why knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief? This must be answered in the first place. This is the traditional formulation of the value problem first introduced in Plato’s dialogue “Meno”. Secondary value problem, as formulated by D.

Pritchard, is why knowledge is more valuable than any of its proper subsets? If knowledge is justified true belief, then its subsets are at least: true belief, justified belief, justified truth. That's why it makes sense to ask why knowledge is more valuable than any of its proper subsets, not just true belief. But suppose, knowledge is something like justified true belief plus some anti-Gettier condition. Then it makes sense to ask a third question: why knowledge is more valuable than justified true belief? This is what Pritchard calls "tertiary value problem": why knowledge is not just more valuable than anything which comes short of it, but also distinctly valuable?

Another problem which need to be clarified before we get directly to the problem of value of knowledge is what kinds of value there are in general. All values – moral, epistemic, aesthetic, material, etc. – can be regarded as instrumental and non-instrumental. A good example of instrumental value is money. Money is only inasmuch valuable as it's exchange rate (for goods, services or other currencies). Justified belief has instrumental value if it is only good for something else (say, true belief). Another distinction that can be drawn is the difference between fundamental and non-fundamental epistemic value. As Pritchard puts it, knowledge is fundamentally epistemically valuable if it is at least sometimes not instrumentally valuable relative to further *epistemic* good. Though it could be instrumental to achieving some non-epistemic goods (utility, happiness, etc.). So, for example, if understanding is fundamentally valuable, then it has non-instrumental value in relation to other epistemic goods, such as true belief, but it may be instrumentally valuable for other non-epistemic goods. And lastly, Pritchard draws distinction between final value and non-final value. Something has final value if it is good for itself, not for something else. For example, someone could say pleasure is good for itself and other things are good only inasmuch as they bring us pleasure and remove pain. Knowledge is finally valuable then, when having it is valuable irrespective of other considerations, i.e. it is valuable for itself.

But those distinctions are not enough. A good may have *prima facie* (at first glance) value  $x$ . By saying that knowledge has *prima facie* value  $x$ , we are saying that on the face of things knowledge has this value and therefore it is appropriate to treat an individual instance of knowledge as having this value unless there is reason to think it doesn't. Also, a good may have *pro tanto* value  $x$  (i.e., to such an extent, to that extent). If knowledge is *pro tanto* valuable, it means that we should prefer knowledge to some extent over something that is short of knowledge, or there is some reason why we should prefer knowledge over something that is short of knowledge. And finally, a good may have *ceteris paribus* value  $x$ , or all things considered value  $x$  (or all other things being equal).

## Methods

In this work the authors intend to use methods traditional for analytical philosophy. First, it is a method of conceptual analysis. That method comprises identifying the conceptual core of a term through comparing various contexts of its use. Second, this is an extrapolation method. This method involves the extension of the methods of analysis of some types of discourse to other types of discourse. In this case we use the concepts from ethics (such as value, virtue) to analyze the concepts of epistemology.

## Results and Discussion

Armed with all these theoretical preconceptions about value, we are ready to discuss the question of this paper, namely, the value of knowledge. The most common answer to the problem of value of knowledge is pragmatic – having knowledge is good for practical purposes. Indeed, if we do not only have a mere true belief about something, but also know that, it seems that we are in a better position practically. Socrates poses objection to pragmatic theory. In “Meno” Socrates asks why knowing a way to Larissa is practically more valuable than merely having a true belief about the way to Larissa. Both of them will successfully get you there. A possible answer to this objection: – “So what?” Knowledge has no more value than true belief. If we accept this answer, we adopt the view which has been labelled “epistemic T-value monism” (“T” for “truth”). According to this view, true belief is the sole fundamental epistemic good. All other epistemic goods are only valuable relative to this epistemic good. Kvanvig maintains that this entails that the value of true belief “swamps” all other epistemic value (so he calls this “Swamping Problem”) (KVANVIG, 2003). “Swamping Problem” is connected to the primary value problem for knowledge as mentioned earlier.

Swamping problem can be expressed with three inconsistent claims:

1. True belief is the sole fundamental epistemic good. So, any epistemic value is relative to achieving true belief.
2. If any epistemic good is only relative to achieving another epistemic good then it has no additional value.
3. Knowledge sometimes is more epistemically valuable than mere true belief.

We can reject premise one here and try to go for the alternative. Then we need a real objection to Socrates argument as stated above. Luckily, Socrates himself proceeds with counter claim. The answer of Socrates: knowledge is more stable than mere true belief. He gives an example of the legendary statues of Daedalus – they were so life-like that they would

run unless tethered to the ground. This “tether” in the case of knowledge, according to Socrates, is justification. Justification “tethers” true belief to reality, so that it is not easily lost. Somewhat similar account of value is proposed by Williamson: knowledge is less vulnerable than mere true belief to rational undermining by future evidence. If the cognitive faculties are in good order, the probability of your believing  $p$  tomorrow is greater conditional on your knowing  $p$  than on your merely believing that  $p$  (WILLIAMSON, 2000). This theory is sometimes called the permanence account of the value of knowledge. Both of these accounts try to show that knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief. In case of Williamson, it is even more evident, because he rejects the JTB account of knowledge and rather regards belief as a species of knowledge. It is worth mentioning, that usefulness and permanence are extrinsic accounts of value. According to extrinsic accounts of value of knowledge, it’s not internal features of knowledge that make it valuable.

A counter argument can be produced here to show that stability does not add value to knowledge. Kvanvig noticed that the problem is that stably held true beliefs are not exclusively true beliefs that are known. A true belief could, perhaps because of sheer dogmatism, be stably held without us taking that true belief to be knowledge. Suppose a religious cult brainwashed its members into having certain beliefs, for example that the end of the world is near. By chance it turns out that these beliefs are true, but for other reasons than believed by the cult (say, climate change). These beliefs are stably held by the members because of their brainwashing. Do we want to say that in this case the beliefs are just as valuable as knowledge? Seems not! Or a scientist can have a certain true belief out of sheer dogmatism and unwillingness to accept alternative views. But being dogmatic is not inherently good. On the contrary, we praise open-mindedness exactly because it allows a person to change his views.

In this paper we defend the virtue epistemology answer to the problem of value of knowledge. This account is reliabilistic. The reliabilist account was formulated by A. Goldman: The justification of the belief (in other words, positive epistemic status of the belief) is a function of the reliability of the process (or processes), where (in first approximation) the reliability of the processes consists in the tendency of the process to more likely produce true beliefs (GOLDMAN, 1979). This suggests the idea that the value of knowledge is in the factor where it comes from. If it comes from a reliable process, then it is valuable. The idea is that knowledge is more reliable than mere true belief, where reliability is a vague notion. We can give some examples of reliable processes: sense perception, deduction, induction and so forth. Even if these are sometimes mistaken, by and large, they are considered as reliable sources of

true beliefs that amount to knowledge. Knowledge is equal to reliably produced true belief (simple process reliabilism).

Linda Zagzebski objects to reliabilist account of the value of knowledge. According to Zagzebski, if a given belief is true, its value will not rise, if it is produced by a reliable process (Zagzebski, 1996). Therefore, knowledge is no more valuable than unreliably produced, but true belief. Example that she gives is a cup of good coffee produced by unreliable coffee-machine. If a given cup is a cup of good coffee, we don't really care if it was produced by an expensive and reliable coffee-machine or by an unreliable and otherwise likely to malfunction coffee-machine. Another example is given by Swinburne: a beautiful piece of furniture is produced by a factory that ordinarily produces defective pieces (Swinburne, 1999; Goldman & Olsson, 2009).

And secondly, reliability has autonomous value, i.e. it is valuable irrespective whether the given process leads to truth or not. To explain why this is so, he introduces token-type value distinction. Something could be valuable as a type, even though an individual token of it is not valuable. For example, money is valuable, even though any money-token could lose its value because it was spent on risky shares or because of inflation. But it doesn't make money-type not valuable in general.

The main object of criticism in virtue epistemology is the T-value monism. According to E. Sosa's virtue epistemology, the main idea is that it's not only the final result that matters, the outcome, rather it's how we get to that result. Sosa proposes the following structure of knowledge, which became known as AAA-structure of knowledge:

- accuracy, i.e. truth;
- adroitness, i.e. exercise of ability (or competence);
- aptness, i.e. truth because of ability (Sosa, 2007).

His favorite metaphor is the archer's shot. A good shot is accurate (hits on target), is adroit (due to archer's skill and not some lucky circumstance), and it is apt (accurate because adroit). Suppose that a gust of wind diverts the arrow, then another gust of wind sets it back to its course and it hits the bull's eye. In this case the shot is accurate, but is not apt, because it is not accurate due to the archer's abilities.

J. Greco's virtue-theoretic account of value is also based on the concept of knowledge as a result of exercise of ability (GRECO, 2010). According to Greco, *S* knows that *p* if and only if *S* believes truly because of *S*'s reliable cognitive abilities. Knowledge is priceless since it is a cognitive achievement that is decent to the agent, whereas mere right belief is a cognitive gain that is not decent to the agent. Knowledge is creditable because it is a success that is the result of

“one’s abilities”. So, on Greco’s account knowledge is valuable in a way that mere true belief is not.

Pritchard sets out Greco’s argument as follows:

(P1) Achievements are successes that are because of ability;

(P2) Knowledge is a cognitive success that is because of cognitive ability;

(C1) So, knowledge is a cognitive achievement;

(P3) Achievements are finally valuable;

(C2) So, knowledge has final value (Pritchard, 2010).

There is a problem with this account that not all knowledge which results from ability (and hence is a cognitive achievement) is valuable. Trivial knowledge such as the knowledge of how many articles “the” there are in this paper can be regarded as a kind of cognitive achievement but obviously is not valuable (except in a scenario where it is a part of some coded message).

To answer this objection, we should defer to the above-mentioned distinction between *prima facie* value, *pro tanto* value and *ceteris paribus* value. Greco needn’t claim that each instance of knowledge, all things considered, is finally valuable. Assume that a distinguished Harvard mathematician, wholly informed regarding all the choices open to her, produces a powerful urge to count the blades of grass on the well-trimmed lawns of Harvard. Would that knowledge be finally valuable? Greco maintains that it is at least *prima facie* or *pro tanto* valuable to have knowledge. Cases of trivial truths are simply cases where, all things considered, it is not good to have knowledge.

Virtue or not: why does it matter? There is to be a problem what additional value is added to true belief by the fact that it can be credited to the agent? For it seems that it is the effect that matters, not the cause: “winners are grinners”, “winner take all”, etc. According to Brogaard, this is only a problem if we adhere to the intrinsic concept of value (BROGAARD, 2007). According to intrinsic conception of value, if two things have the same intrinsic properties, then they are equally valuable. If there are two identical goods bought for different price from different sellers, it doesn’t matter. Their value stays the same. But only if we accept the intrinsic concept of value. Suppose, we have a dress which belonged to princess Diana and an identical dress produced by the same designer. We would agree that the dress which belonged to princess Diana will be more valuable, simply because the origin matters here. The example of princess Diana’s dress shows that there could be objects that are finally (i.e., non-instrumentally) valuable without thereby being intrinsically valuable.

## Summary

We showed that virtue theoretic account gives the solution to the primary value problem. It also gives the solution to the secondary value problem because it doesn't need an anti-Gettier condition, since VE requires a proper connection between the belief and the operation of virtues. It can also resolve a "fake barn façade" case by adding a condition that virtues must be exercised in proper environment (contextualist condition). Virtue epistemology also solves a tertiary value problem because it shows a distinct value of knowledge and not just value in degree. The distinct value of knowledge is that only knowledge as an exercise of ability can be credited to the knower, whereas justified true belief cannot. We considered some objections the virtue epistemology account of knowledge. In answer to the "coffee machine" objection by Zagzebski, the virtue reliabilist maintains that a having a reliable source of knowledge is autonomously valuable. In answer to the cases of trivial knowledge we invoked the distinction between prima facie value and ceteris paribus value to show that even if trivial knowledge is not valuable ceteris paribus, it may have some prima facie value.

## Conclusion

In conclusion let's examine the responsibilist alternative to the account of the value of knowledge. This version of virtue-theoretic account was developed by L. Zagzebski. According to Zagzebski, the idea that the knower gets a credit for her beliefs is right but the source of the credit lies outside of epistemic domain. Ultimately, the knower's intellectually virtuous motives lead a person to a more flourishing, happy life. An agent gets credit for knowledge if "she arrives at a desirable true belief because of acts motivated by love of true beliefs that are components of good life" (ZAGZEBSKI, 2003). Let us briefly state why we believe that this account is problematic. Suppose, the ultimate goal of human life is reaching the state of happiness, or eudaimonia (whatever that concept means). Why should that confer any kind of value on knowledge? A person motivated by reaching the state of eudaimonia could very well be deluded and have a very poor judgement. How does that make her erroneous beliefs more valuable? It seems that these things are not connected conceptually. The fact that love of truth may or may not eventually lead to eudaimonia is irrelevant to its epistemic value. It's not that fact that it leads to eudaimonia that would make it good. Rather, it is some fundamental value of knowledge that makes it different from ignorance, that makes knowledge good. There is some goodness of knowledge, in virtue of which it may lead to another kind of goodness, namely, eudaimonia. The fact that precisely knowledge leads to eudaimonia (and not its opposite) is the feature of the epistemic domain, not ethical domain. So, one could say, it is great that



knowledge allows us to reach eudaimonia (assuming eudaimonia is our final value). But why is that great? To answer that question, one cannot invoke the fact that it leads to eudaimonia because that would constitute a vicious circle. From this follows that we must assume that knowledge has some fundamental value (within the epistemic domain), even if it does not have final value.

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