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Why knowledge is special

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Abstract
I argue against Greco's account of the value of knowledge, according to which knowledge is distinctively valuable *vis-à-vis* that which falls short of knowledge in virtue of its status as an achievement and achievements being finally valuable. Instead, I make the case that virtuous belief is also an achievement. I argue that the nature of knowledge is such that knowledge is finally valuable in a way that virtuous belief is not, precisely because knowledge is not simply a success from ability. The value of knowledge lies in the positive responsiveness of the world to an agent's epistemic virtuousness.

1. The Value Problem of Knowledge

Knowledge is so important to philosophy that there's a whole field that is largely concerned with its study. Not every philosopher, however, thinks that knowledge is so important. Kvanvig has challenged the centrality of place which the study of knowledge traditionally enjoys in philosophy.[1] The apparent failure of epistemologists to provide a satisfying account of the unique value of knowledge has strengthened the challenge. Yet the intuition that knowledge is indeed valuable offers hope for those wishing to defend the view that knowledge really is special.

This paper addresses an old philosophical question. Why is knowledge valuable? There is, however, also an old philosophical problem lurking behind this question. Other epistemic standings, such as true belief and justified true belief, seem just as useful for our purposes, yet an intuition remains that knowledge is more valuable. Not only that, there's also an intuition that there's something different about knowledge that makes it valuable.

[1] Jonathan Kvanvig, 'Why Should Inquiring Minds Want to Know?', *The Monist* **81** (3) (1998), 426–451. In this paper, Kvanvig couches the challenge as a challenge to epistemology, but it seems from this and subsequent papers, for example Jonathan Kvanvig, 'Truth is not the Primary Epistemic Goal', *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*, (eds) E. Sosa and M. Steup, 285–96, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), that the challenge is motivated by worries about the importance of the study of knowledge rather than epistemology as a whole. It should, however, be noted though that in his earlier paper, Kvanvig explicitly takes the 'pre-eminence of knowledge' in philosophical inquiry to be the same thing as the 'pre-eminence of epistemology'.

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So actually the value of knowledge question pertains to more than one philosophical problem. Three value of knowledge problems, articulated by Duncan Pritchard inform the subsequent discussion in this paper.[2]

> The primary problem: why is knowledge more valuable than mere true belief?;
> The secondary problem: why is knowledge more valuable than that which falls just short of knowledge?;
> The tertiary problem: why is there a difference in kind rather than a mere difference of degrees between the value of knowledge and whatever falls short of knowledge?[3]

The problems are presented as problems because knowledge is claimed to have intuitively greater value in the different ways described, yet the task remains to explain why knowledge has value differences in each of these ways. Notice that each of the problems is related. Solving the secondary problem promises to solve the primary problem and solving the tertiary problem promises to solve the secondary problem as well as the primary problem.

2. Meno

Whether knowledge is more valuable than true belief, the primary problem, is discussed in Plato's *Meno*.[4] The discussion is preceded

[2] Duncan Pritchard, 'Knowledge and Understanding', in Haddock, Millar and Pritchard, *The Nature and Value of Knowledge: Three Investigations*, 3–88, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), at 10–14. For the sake of space and the for the focus of the paper, I won't provide a detailed defence of Pritchard's articulation of the value problems. For a brief discussion regarding the appropriateness of the tertiary problem, however, see the next footnote.

[3] Miranda Fricker, considering the claim that knowledge has a value that is different in kind from the value of whatever falls short of knowledge, writes that the claim corresponds 'to no natural philosophical intuition or question'. Miranda Fricker, 'The Value of Knowledge and The Test of Time', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* **84** (64) (2009), 121–138, at 127–128. A thought that might motivate the claim is that knowledge is a different and superior sort of epistemic standing than justified true belief and other epistemic standings that fall short of knowledge, and that it would seem odd if this was not somehow reflected in the account of it's value.

[4] Note that 'true opinion' here is often read as true belief. For example, see Duncan Pritchard, 'The Value of Knowledge', *The Stanford*

by an exchange between Socrates and Meno in which Socrates claims that the good man must be useful and one way of him being so is by correctly guiding others in their affairs.[5] The question of knowledge's greater value over true belief arises as Socrates seeks to explain his claim that it appears to be wrong to assume that the good man needs knowledge to do good.[6,7]

The discussion begins with an example.[8] Socrates asks Meno what difference there would be in the correctness of guidance given by

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Encyclopedia of Philosophy, edited by Edward N. Zalta, *(Fall 2008 Edition)*. When this is so the question of comparative value that is being raised relates to the primary problem. It would be a mistake to simply assume that Socrates' use of what is translated as 'knowledge' and 'true opinion' or 'true belief' fits neatly with how we understand those terms today. For example, Scott interprets Socrates' use of, what is often translated as, 'knowledge' as playing the role of understanding why something is the way it is. Dominic Scott, *Plato's Meno* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), at 179. Nevertheless, the Socratic discussion still serves as a rich starting point for the discussion of the value of knowledge.

[5] Plato, *Meno in Plato: The Collected Dialogues*, translated by W. K. C. Guthrie, 353–384 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

[6] Benjamin Jowett translates Socrates as saying it is wrong. Plato, *Meno*, translated by Benjamin Jowett, (Online: Forgotten Books, 2008). In contrast, W. K. C. Guthrie translates Socrates as saying that it appears to be wrong. Op. cit. note 5, at 380.

[7] Ethics, knowledge, and inquiry are each discussed in the *Meno*, but a recurring topic is virtue.

[8] The discussion of the distinction is brief and what is meant can be interpreted in different ways. Interpreting the *Meno* is generally a knotty task as the dialogue quickly traverses a range of topics, makes numerous references – the significance of many of which are oblique, and many of the comments made in the dialogue seem best understood as displays of Platonic irony. For example, near the beginning of the dialogue Socrates tells Meno that he, Socrates, is a forgetful person and towards the end of the dialogue Socrates asks Meno to convince Anytus about what Meno believes to be true following their discussion of virtue. Op. cit. note 5, at 354 and 384). These comments are ironic because during the dialogue the case is made that knowledge comes about through a process of recollection and that virtue can't be taught. Op. cit. note 5, at 371 and 380). Furthermore, as Dominic Scott notes, Anytus 'was one of two people most active in bringing about Socrates' trial and execution'. Op. cit. note 4, at 163. A joint reading of the *Meno* and Robin Waterfield's work creates an impression that the *Meno* is closely connected to representing Socrates' role and responsibility in Athenian society. Robin Waterfield, *Why Socrates Died: Dispelling the Myths* (New York: Norton, 2010).

someone who knows the way to Larissa and someone who has a true belief about which is the road there but who has never travelled that road before. Meno accepts that the guide who has a true belief, so long as it remains, would be just as good a guide as the man who knows.[9]

Socrates, considering why one should be preferred to the other, claims that the superiority of knowledge lies in its keeping a true belief in place; knowledge does so by tying a true belief down with explanatory reasoning.[10] One way of thinking about this is that when we gain knowledge we gain a kind of epistemic foothold in reality or the world that won't give way as a mere true belief will. As Plato writes; '[t]rue opinions are a fine thing and do all sorts of good so long as they stay in their place, but they will not stay long. They run away from a man's mind; so they are not worth much until you tether them by working out the reason'.[11] Returning to the original example, if you know the way to Larissa, then your guidance of others to their destination will be sure. If, however, you merely have a true belief, then that true belief may easily be lost, perhaps by evidence that suggests your belief is mistaken.

On the one hand, however, stably held true beliefs are not exclusively true beliefs that are known. A dogmatic true belief may be stably held without us taking that true belief to be knowledge. In this case we get the counterintuitive result that such dogmatic beliefs have the same value as knowledge. On the other hand, knowledge may be lost in the face of an apparent though not actual defeater, and possibly, in some cases at least, more easily so than a true belief. Kvanvig describes a case in which my mathematical knowledge that p would be lost if a renowned mathematician sincerely testified that not p.[12] Not knowing that there had been any such testimony and that testimony in fact being false, I could retain my true belief that p but lose my knowledge that p. It seems plausible that we do have certain beliefs and knowledge that are of a kind such that my knowledge is more unstable in the Socratic sense than my true belief. Scientific and technical knowledge that I amassed in the past through expert testimony, perhaps indirectly in school, but which I encounter little evidence for or against now seem to be especially

[9] Op. cit. note 5.

[10] More specifically, Socrates claims that the explanatory reasoning or the working out of the reason for something is accomplished by the process of recollection. Op. cit. note 5, at 381.

[11] Op. cit. note 5, 381.

[12] Jonathan Kvanvig, *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 15–16.

like this. If this is right then some knowledge would be less valuable than some mere true beliefs.[13]

One way of interpreting the claim of knowledge's stability, is as being the claim that stability will generally be present in cases of knowledge, whereas this is not so in the case of true beliefs. This could yield the conclusion that knowledge is generally more valuable than true belief. But granting that true beliefs that have greater stability than knowledge are more valuable than knowledge seems counterintuitive. Not only that, such a response wouldn't leave us well-placed to address the secondary and tertiary value problems; it looks like we would need a different explanation as to why knowledge is more valuable than justified true belief. There is therefore motivation to look beyond the *Meno* for an account that better makes sense of our intuitions.

3. Greco's Account

Greco's theory of knowledge seems to hold out the best prospects for solving each of the value problems.[14] According to Greco, S knows

[13] Fricker discusses, in the context of discussing the value of knowledge, both dogmatic true beliefs and knowledge that is more easily lost than true beliefs. Op. cit. note 3. The latter would be particularly troubling if it could be shown that knowledge more often has this feature in comparison to true belief, as then the Socratic account of the value of knowledge would be untenable; knowledge just wouldn't be more stable than true belief. In the broader discussion of the value of knowledge, Fricker herself defends a *Meno*-type response according to which knowledge is generally more valuable than true belief, as knowledge generally yields resilient true belief.

[14] Greco develops his position across a number of works: John Greco, 'The Value Problem', *The Routledge Companion to Epistemology*, edited by Sven Bernecker and Duncan Pritchard, 219–231 (New York: Routledge, 2011); John Greco, *Achieving Knowledge*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); John Greco 'The Value Problem', *Epistemic Value*, edited by Adrian Haddock, Alan Millar, and Duncan Pritchard, 313–321 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). More recently Greco has offered a somewhat different account of knowledge, though this account doesn't seem better equipped to solve each of the value problems identified by Pritchard. The account requires that the knowing agent's exercise of an intellectual ability is such that it 'regularly serve relevant informational needs, both local (actual) and global (typical and/or likely)' and that the belief being produced by an intellectual ability of this sort contributes 'in a way that would regularly serve relevant informational needs, both local and

that p, if and only if S believes truly *because* of S's cognitive ability. For Greco, a cognitive ability is by its nature reliable and is a process grounded in the cognitive character of an agent.[15] How does his account of the nature of knowledge help us to understand the value of knowledge? Greco argues that knowledge is valuable in a way that mere true belief is not because it is a cognitive success that is creditable to the agent while mere true belief is not. Knowledge is creditable in that it is a cognitive success that is because of the exercise of one's cognitive abilities.[16] Greco characterises success from ability as being an achievement, and knowledge as being a cognitive success from a cognitive ability as being a cognitive achievement. He contrasts someone gaining true beliefs because of their cognitive abilities with getting things right by 'blind chance, dumb luck, or something else'.[17] If I get a true belief in some such a way, then we would neither suppose my belief to be a case of knowledge nor a cognitive achievement creditable to my cognitive abilities.

Particularly pertinent to one of my arguments later is Greco's stance on justified though false belief. Greco writes that while knowledge is a success from cognitive ability and therefore a cognitive achievement, justified though false belief, along with any other subset of the constituents of knowledge, including justified true belief, is not a success from cognitive ability and can't have the value that a cognitive success from cognitive ability has.[18] Greco,

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global'. John Greco, 'A (Different) Virtue Epistemology', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* **85** (1) (2012), 1–26, at 27.

[15] A cognitive ability fits into the broader category of epistemic virtue. Sosa offers a similar virtue, albeit one that appeals to competence rather than ability. Ernest Sosa, *A Virtue Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[16] The idea is that as such, the success is credit worthy, the success wasn't just, say, down to luck. See the following for further discussion of the credit thesis: Linda Zagzebski, 'The Search for the Source of Epistemic Good', *Metaphilosophy* **34** (2003), 12–28; John Greco, 'Knowledge as Credit for True Belief', I*ntellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology*, edited by Michael DePaul and Linda Zagzebski, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Wayne Riggs, 'Two Problems of Easy Credit', *Synthese* **169** (2009), 201–216.

[17] John Greco 'The Value Problem', *Epistemic Value*, op. cit. note 14, at 318.

[18] He claims that 'virtuous belief that is not true' is not 'intrinsically valuable, or constitutive of what has intrinsic or final value, in just the way that knowledge is'. John Greco, *Achieving Knowledge*, op. cit. note

citing Aristotle, takes achievements to be constitutive of human flourishing and so finally valuable.[19] Knowledge, being an achievement, is then also finally valuable, while justified beliefs and justified true beliefs don't constitute achievements according to Greco.[20]

Pritchard lays out Greco's argument as follows:

(P1) Achievements are successes that are because of ability (Achievement thesis);
(P2) Knowledge is a cognitive success that is because of cognitive ability (Robust Virtue Epistemology);
(C1) So, knowledge is a cognitive achievement (Knowledge as Achievement thesis);
(P3) Achievements are finally valuable (Value of Achievements thesis);
(C2) So, knowledge has final value.[21]

4. Challenging Greco's Solution

As can be seen above, Greco's account of the value of knowledge neatly falls out of his account of the nature of knowledge. What's more, his overall account of knowledge appears to offer us ready

14, at 99. In the context of his overall account, what he writes here is vague. He seems to be leaving open the possibility that virtuous belief that is not true might also have the same kind of value as knowledge albeit in some other way. However, later Greco clearly endorses the knowledge as achievement argument as providing a solution to the tertiary value problem, i.e. showing that knowledge is distinctively valuable *vis-à-vis* that which falls short of knowledge. John Greco, 'The Value Problem', *The Routledge Companion to Epistemology*, op. cit. note 14.

[19] John Greco, *Achieving Knowledge*, op. cit. note 14, at 97–98. Rather than being about value in virtue of an internal property, a good that is finally valuable is valuable for its own sake either in virtue of relational properties or intrinsic properties. Pritchard identifies the first book off the first printing press as an example of something that is finally valuable. This first book's relational property with the first printing press is what makes the book valuable. Op. cit. note 2, at 30.

[20] Greco previously characterised knowledge as having intrinsic value, and later as having both intrinsic and final value. John Greco 'The Value Problem', *Epistemic Value*, op. cit. note 14; John Greco, *Achieving Knowledge*, op. cit. note 14.

[21] Op. cit. note 2, at 31.

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solutions to the various value problems set out earlier in the paper. If, however, we accept the criticism of Greco's handling of the Barn Façade County case from Pritchard, then we have to accept that Greco doesn't show that knowledge is more valuable than that which falls short of knowledge.[22] After all, Pritchard's criticism is that the Barn Façade County case is not a case of knowledge and yet it is a case in which an agent has a true belief (a cognitive success) because of ability. As a success from ability, it is a case of an achievement, and as an achievement, it is valuable in the same way knowledge is.[23] This contributes to Pritchard's conclusion that the three value problems can't be solved in a non-revisionist way. In other words, our value of knowledge intuitions can only be explained away rather than explained.

Even granting the assumptions and conclusions of Greco's argument, we have reason to reject Greco's solution to the value problems. This is because we have reason to challenge his denial of justified belief being a kind of cognitive achievement.[24] We can do so based on the plausibility of the argument below:

(P1) Achievements are successes that are because of ability (Achievement thesis);
(P2*) Justified belief is a cognitive success that is because of cognitive ability;
(C1*) So, justified belief is a cognitive achievement;
(P3) Achievements are finally valuable (Value of Achievements thesis);

[22] Op. cit. note 2. Pritchard also charges that Greco's account of the nature of knowledge fails to predict knowledge in intuitive cases of testimonial knowledge. Given that Greco's account of the value of knowledge falls out of his account of the nature of knowledge, if Pritchard is right, then there is a corresponding gap in his account of the value of knowledge. In other words, if Pritchard is right, then then Greco needs to explain why testimonial knowledge enjoys the same value as other cases of knowledge. In fact, Greco denies that Pritchard is right. John Greco 'The Value Problem', *Epistemic Value*, op. cit. note 14. Pritchard is drawing on Jennifer Lackey's research for both the objections to Greco's account of the nature of knowledge discussed in this section. Jennifer Lackey, 'Why we don't deserve credit for everything we know' *Synthese* **158** (2007), 345–361.

[23] Roughly, Greco's own response is that the case is underdescribed and that abilities are enviroment-relative. As we'll see, however, there are other reasons to reject Greco's account of the value of knowledge. John Greco 'The Value Problem', *Epistemic Value*, op. cit. note 14.

[24] It's important to note that I'm using 'justified belief' interchangeably with 'epistemically virtuous belief'.

(C2*) So, justified belief has final value;
(P4*) Knowledge has final value;
(C3*) Knowledge and justified belief have the same kind of value.

Greco's solution to the tertiary value problem depends on knowledge being an achievement and nothing which falls short of knowledge being an achievement. It seems right, however, that if an agent has a virtuous belief, then the success of having that belief is down to the exercising of virtue on the part of the agent. The agent could not have a virtuous belief without the agent making a virtuous contribution. Sherlock Holmes arriving at a virtuous belief through a complex reasoning ability is surely a cognitive success of sorts, even if the belief falls short of knowledge. On this basis it looks like a virtuous belief should be regarded as an achievement and one that is down to the virtue of the relevant agent.[25] Let's consider this argument in more detail.

5. Cognitive Achievement without Knowledge

Greco needs there to be no cognitive achievement creditable to the cognitive agent that is not knowledge but which falls short of knowledge; otherwise his claim that knowledge is distinctively valuable is undermined. My objection is that accounting for the value of knowledge as an achievement does not provide the result that knowledge is distinctively valuable. If other epistemic standings that fall short of knowledge are also achievements, then the achievement account can't show knowledge to have distinctive value. As has been noted, Greco's account can say why knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief; mere true belief can't plausibly be thought of as any kind of achievement creditable to the cognitive abilities of the believer. But what about justified beliefs? Both justified true belief and justified belief are plausibly achievements. My argument

[25] Of course this is an example of an epistemic virtue being conceived of as an ability. Within virtue reliabilism it's typical for the virtues relevant for the attainment of knowledge to be conceived of as abilities or competences. Even if, however, one conceives of an epistemic virtue as an intellectual character trait, one can still get the result that the virtuous belief is an achievement. This is regardless of whether the belief is knowledge. Imagine a judge who arrives at a fair-minded belief about a defendant, when so many others would have arrived at a prejudiced belief. Plausibly the judge has a cognitive success because of intellectual virtue.

is intended to show both that it does not follow from Greco's argument that knowledge is distinctively valuable and that the account of the value of knowledge makes an implicit functionalist or teleological assumption. Understanding the assumption can in turn help us to understand why justified belief is not regarded as an achievement; mere justified belief cannot be a cognitive success because a justified belief that isn't true isn't successful.

Before making the case that justified beliefs are achievements, it's helpful to note some features of Greco's account. Greco's account of the value of knowledge is general in the sense that, as we are told, knowledge is finally valuable because it falls into a category, the category of achievement, and that which is an achievement is finally valuable. The account is not of knowledge's value *per se*. A dialectical worry with such an approach, though the approach may be appropriate, is that it leaves open the possibility that there are cognitive achievements other than knowledge.

If it can be demonstrated that Greco's account doesn't show that knowledge enjoys distinctive value in relation to justified belief, then the same will hold for justified true belief. Intuitively, it even seems plausible that getting justified beliefs regardless of their truth is an achievement. If justified beliefs are achievements, then they are also finally valuable – the kind of value that knowledge has on Greco's account.

My opponent might simply deny such an intuition and say that a belief that is not true but is held because of the cognitive ability of the believer, and so is justified, is not a cognitive success and therefore cannot be an achievement. The thought could be that having a justified belief shouldn't be thought of as a cognitive success but rather, in so far as it can be a cognitive success, it is only a part of the cognitive success that knowledge constitutes; a footballer who takes a good shot but who doesn't score doesn't have success.

But notice to keep the example analogous to what's going on when there is a justified belief, and not merely a belief, I have to talk about a 'good shot'. In what sense is taking a good shot not a success and not an achievement? It's good, and it's good rather than bad or turning out to be lucky, because of the footballing ability of the player. Similarly, it's strongly intuitive that a police investigator who sifts through a large quantity of a variety of evidence and forms a belief that is in accordance with the evidence has both a justified belief and a belief that is a cognitive achievement.

My opponent might seek to hold fast to the view that having a justified belief should not be considered a discrete success, but she can't just assume that true belief is the goal and that anything that falls

short of that necessarily can't constitute a cognitive success. After all, I've provide a ground to think that this is mistaken. Greco's account doesn't provide a satisfactory explanation as to why cognitive success because of ability excludes standings that fall short of knowledge.

The denial of justified belief as a cognitive success seems best explained on Greco's view as being the result of an implicit functionalist or teleological assumption.[26] According to this line of thought the purpose of justification/cognitive ability is just to get something else and, as such, justified beliefs or beliefs formed because of cognitive ability should never be thought of as cognitive successes in their own right. The something else can't be just anything else. Greco holds that if a belief is true because of ability, then there is an achievement. For Greco, in the restricted set of knowledge and that which falls short of knowledge, justification/cognitive ability is just for getting true belief; if it doesn't get that, then there is no chance for an achievement. Put another way, in the restricted set that we're confining ourselves to, the only kind of cognitive success is one which at least contains true belief. If justification/cognitive abilities can't hit that target, then there can be no cognitive success and therefore no achievement.

A problem with running the value of knowledge argument by way of the Value of Achievement thesis, or any alternative to cognitive achievement, in order dialectically to get the claim that knowledge is distinctively valuable, is that, as things stand, what should be counted as success remains unclear or at least contentious. Without a premise as to what counts as a success, whether it be an implicit teleological assumption or otherwise, what falls into the category of achievement, if we keep the basic form of Greco's argument, will also remain unclear or contentious. Without such a premise, and one that is well motivated, there is a good case that a justified belief, just like a good shot, is an achievement. Furthermore, on an intuitive understanding of success, if S is just aiming at having a justified belief, then if S succeeds in his aim because of his ability, the result is that it is appropriate to say that S is exhibiting a kind of achievement.

[26] Ernest Sosa is explicit in his assumption of a 'teleological conception of intellectual virtue, the relevant end being a proper relation to truth'. Ernest Sosa, 'Knowledge and intellectual virtue', *The Monist* **68**(2) (1985), 226–245, at 227.

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6. The Value of True Belief

What has been said so far about the value of virtuous belief is relevant to knowledge in so far as knowledge entails virtuous belief. Here we want to account for the value of knowledge and not just the value of virtuous belief. Knowledge does seem to be more valuable than virtuous belief. Knowledge entails not only a justified belief but also a true belief. If we think of a true belief as enjoying *prima facie* or *pro tanto* value, then we get an immediate ground for saying that knowledge is more valuable than virtuous belief.[27] One argument made in the literature for true belief enjoying such value is that true beliefs are instrumentally valuable for achieving practical ends.[28]

Aside from this value, there is reason to believe that true belief may be valuable on another ground, a ground with implications for moves that are made in the dialectic. It's implicit in both Greco's and Pritchard's discussion of the former's position, that mere true belief doesn't enjoy final value as an achievement or enjoy final value on some other basis.[29] If this were otherwise, then Greco's account of the value of knowledge would not appear to be a candidate for solving the tertiary value problem identified by Pritchard – explaining why knowledge is distinctively valuable *vis-à-vis* that which falls short of knowledge. Neither Greco nor Pritchard, however, offers detail on what value they regard true belief as having.[30] The question as to the value of true belief remains.[31]

[27] *Prima facie* and *pro tanto* may be explained in terms of defeasibility. A good that is *prima facie* valuable may in a particular instance have that value undercut such that the particular instance has no value; similarly, a good that is *prima facie* valuable may in a particular instance have that value overridden such that, although the good remains valuable to some extent, it is not all things considered valuable. In contrast, a good that is *pro tanto* valuable does not have its value undercut.

[28] Duncan Pritchard and John Turri, 'The Value of Knowledge', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), (Winter 2012 Edition).

[29] John Greco, *Achieving Knowledge*, op. cit. note 14; op. cit. note 2.

[30] Ibid.

[31] More recently, Pritchard (2014, 113–114) claims truth to be finally epistemically valuable, though he plausible argues that this does not commit one to claiming truth to be *pro tanto* finally valuable *simpliciter*. One possibility he mentions is that from the non-epistemic point of view, the only value of truth is practical value and that value he suggests is a form of instrumental value. Duncan Pritchard, 'Truth as the Fundamental Epistemic Good', *The Ethics of Belief: Individual and*

Intuitively true belief is valuable, although cashing out that intuition presents a challenge. True belief is, perhaps, also finally valuable and valuable in virtue of true belief, *prima facie* or *pro tanto*, being constitutive of the good life. Consider the following case from Shelly Kagan, based on a case first developed by Thomas Nagel:

> Imagine a man who dies contented, thinking he has achieved everything he wanted in life: his wife and family love him, he is a respected member of the community, and he has founded a successful business. Or so he thinks. In reality, however, he has been completely deceived: his wife cheated on him, his daughter and son were only nice to him so that they would be able to borrow the car, the other members of the community only pretended to respect him for the sake of the charitable contributions he sometimes made, and his business partner has been embezzling funds from the company which will soon go bankrupt.[32]

Fred Feldman juxtaposes this case with that of a cousin businessman, who thinks all the above about himself with the difference that in the cousin's case his beliefs are true.[33] If we were to compare the two lives, based on what we know of them, then it's intuitive to think that the cousin's life has gone better.

There is, however, difficulty in cashing out the intuition in play. The intuition that the second life has gone better may be a response to the fact of the cousin businessman's wife being faithful, and everything else described, rather than the cousin businessman's belief being true. If, however, we compare the first businessman case with a second in which the cousin businessman believes truly that his wife has cheated on him, and everything else described, then the intuition nonetheless arises, though perhaps without being very strong, that it is better to be the cousin businessman; this supports the thought that having a true belief is somehow valuable. To have

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Social, edited by J. Matheson & R. Vitz, (Oxford: Oxford: University Press, 2014).

[32] Shelly Kagan, 'Me and My Life', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* **94** (1994), 309–324, at 311; Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge University Press, 1979).

[33] Fred Feldman, 'The Good Life: A Defence of Attitudinal Hedonism', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* **65**(3) (2002), 604–628, at 614–615. It is perhaps natural to think that in the second case the cousin would have knowledge rather than mere true belief, but, regardless of that, the value that the case highlights is plausibly one owing to true belief rather than knowledge.

this intuition may require bearing in mind that we can stay neutral on how true belief weighs up in an all things considered judgement against the likely accompanying pain of such true beliefs.

As to how to cash out the value of true belief, Pritchard's claim that the value of truth lies in the value of authenticity looks plausible.[34] To support this claim Pritchard appeals to our intuitions as to whether it matters whether one is a brain in a vat or not. He writes that even adding greater pleasure to the envatted, deceived self would not make us think that that life is better. Such considerations lend themselves to the thought that like achievement, true belief is also constitutive of the good life. The considerations outlined are admittedly, however, a somewhat sketchy attempt to cash out the intuition that true belief is valuable. What is important for my purposes here is just that there are grounds to think that true belief is valuable and to flag a worry, in addition to the problem raised by virtuous belief, with the way in which knowledge is defended as being distinctively valuable.[35]

Returning to our original concern, if we take both virtuous belief and knowledge to be achievements, and take true belief also to be valuable, then knowledge, entailing true belief as it does, is more valuable than virtuous belief. But this leaves unanswered the challenge of explaining the difference in value between knowledge and justified true belief; both whether knowledge is more valuable than that which falls short of it, and whether knowledge is distinctively valuable *vis-à-vis* that which falls short of knowledge. Indeed, if we accept the foregoing – in particular, that virtuous belief is also an achievement – then a swamping problem is in the offing for Greco's virtue theoretic account of the value of knowledge.[36]

This is also the case for other accounts of the value of knowledge that build on the claim that knowledge entails creditworthy true belief. While what I write here doesn't challenge this claim itself, it

[34] Duncan Pritchard, *What is this thing called knowledge?* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), at 154–155.

[35] A response to what I've outlined here might be to say that this doesn't show that true belief has *prima facie* or *pro tanto* value; rather what it shows is that some true beliefs, presumably those pertaining to important aspects of one's life, are intuitively valuable and are perhaps finally valuable. An intuition remains, however, that an agent with a true belief about the world is, *prima facie*, doing better than an agent with a false belief or who doesn't have any relevant belief about the world.

[36] For a discussion of the swamping problem, see Duncan Pritchard and John Turri, op. cit. note 28.

does challenge the claim that nothing short of knowledge, including virtuous belief, is similarly creditworthy. If both knowledge and virtuous belief are suitably creditworthy, then claiming that knowledge is creditworthy isn't going to be the key move in a satisfying account of the value of knowledge.

7. Beyond Credit

Drawing on the thought that the value of knowledge should drop out of the nature of knowledge, the obvious place to look for an answer as to the difference in the value of knowledge *vis-à-vis* the value of justified true belief, is to a difference in the nature of knowledge *vis-à-vis* the nature of justified true belief. In both cases there are true beliefs, so the difference between the two doesn't lie there. A general way of describing the difference, that allows for neutrality as to whether a belief must be virtuous or whether it must be virtuous and safe, is to say that a belief must be appropriately formed.[37] A knowledge conducive virtuous belief is objectively appropriate given the relevant agent's environment, while this is untrue of the agent who has a justified true belief but not knowledge. The agent who has a justified true belief but not knowledge has been Gettiered. Some factor of her environment is such that, though she has a justified belief, she misses out on knowledge.

It is from this difference in the nature of knowledge *vis-à-vis* justified true belief that a difference in the value of these goods emerges. Knowledge is the happy state of affairs of the cognitive agent forming her belief in such a way as to put her in a position to gain knowledge and her in fact gaining knowledge. The value of knowledge lies in the value of a good that requires the right kind of contribution from an agent but which cannot be secured by that contribution alone. In this knowledge is in a way similar in structure to *eudaimonia* or happiness and is analogous to some of the goods that are constitutive of the good life.[38]

[37] Pritchard holds that a correct account of the nature of knowledge must include a safety requirement. For Greco, there is no such requirement in addition to a virtuous belief.

[38] *Eudaimonia* is sometimes translated as happiness but Aristotle doesn't conceive of *eudaimonia* as some kind of merely psychological state. *Eudaimonia* is that which the good life consists in and is alternatively translated as flourishing.

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On the Aristotelian conception of the good life, virtue is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for *eudaimonia*.[39] In other words, in order for an agent to enjoy *eudaimonia*, an appropriate contribution from the agent alone is not enough. The most valuable human good, in terms of content, *eudaimonia*, has the kind of structure that is most valuable. What can be achieved by virtue for Aristotle, and hence what is praiseworthy, isn't as valuable as that which requires virtue but for which virtue isn't sufficient. For Aristotle the latter is 'blessed'.[40]

> We praise the just and the brave person, for instance, and in general the good person and virtue, because of their actions and achievements… If praise is for these sorts of things, then clearly for the best things there is no praise, but something greater and better. And indeed this is how it appears. For the gods and the most godlike of men are [not praised, but] congratulated for their blessedness and happiness. The same is true of goods; for we never praise happiness, as we praise justice, but we count it blessed, as something better and more godlike [than anything that is praised].[41] (Bracketed content is from the quoted passage).

While *eudaimonia* like knowledge requires virtue, like knowledge, it also requires more than this. But so far so like justified true belief; justified true belief too is more than just virtue. It is in goods of structure analogous to knowledge, that also are constitutive of the good, that we can appreciate the 'blessedness' of knowledge and of happiness itself.

Consider the case of friendship. An agent, let's call her Naira, may possess virtues that make her a potentially good friend; say she is funny, generous and understanding of those close to her.[42] It may be the case that despite Naira's possession of virtues that make her a potentially good friend, she fails to enjoy the feeling of closeness that comes with being a good friend, supposing that she isn't

[39] Aristotle, 'The Nature of Virtue', extracts from *Nichomachean Ethics* (1999) translated by Terence Irwin, in *Ethical Theory: An Anthology* edited by Russ Shafer-Landau, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), at 672–673.

[40] I'm not attempting to provide a definitive interpretation of Aristotle. Rather, like Greco, I am drawing on an Aristotelian approach, which is independently plausible, in my account of the value of knowledge.

[41] Op. cit. note 39, at 673.

[42] Here I'm avoiding the diverting task of providing an account of friendship but if one holds that virtues like the ones described are necessary to be a potential friend rather than a potential good friend, then that can be granted without it detracting from my general point.

friends with anyone. It may be, for whatever reason, that the agents in her environment are unresponsive to those virtues. Just as there are hostile epistemic environments in which, despite an agent believing virtuously, that agent may still fail to gain knowledge, an analogously hostile environment for friendship is possible.

In the case of friendship, it may be that though other agents are unresponsive to the agent's possession of virtues that make her a potentially good friend, she happens to enjoy with someone the feeling of closeness that is always a feature of friendship but which may also exist independent of friendship. Perhaps the person with whom she enjoys this feeling of closeness is a man who simply latches on to others. Even if Naira possesses virtues that make her a potentially good friend and enjoys the feeling of closeness that is a feature of friendship, intuitively, as in the case of an agent who has a justified true belief but not knowledge, even if what she has is valuable to some extent, she is missing out on something more and differently valuable.

Let's consider another case to tease out what this is. Consider the case of Tim. Tim gets a particularly desirable job. Tim has ability in the job relevant domain, though he doesn't get the job based on his ability but rather because of a factor orthogonal to the requirements of the job; say the employer was always going to give him because he owed Tim's parents a favour. What is of note here is that Tim's getting the job doesn't seem as valuable in this case as it would have been if he had got the job because he was objectively the better person for the job. In both cases the agents are relevantly virtuous and have something good, but their possession of these goods doesn't require a contribution from them and in this way their possession of these goods is less valuable than would otherwise be the case.

The difference between knowledge and justified true belief is like this with a corresponding difference in value. Knowledge, like goods constitutive of the good life, doesn't just involve the coinciding of virtue with another good or other goods, it involves having the good in part because of virtue. The value of knowledge, like the value of the good life, lies in the world rewarding or being positively responsive to the agent for her virtuousness rather than her simply getting goods independent of her virtue in the relevant domain. With this in mind, note that getting a desirable job or developing a friendship aren't things that are just down to the contribution of an agent. An agent could of course have all the virtues of a potentially good friend without meeting someone who is sensitive to those virtues. The situation is analogous for virtuous belief. This explains

the sense in which, knowledge, when it is attained, is 'blessed'. By being virtuous in various respects, an agent puts herself in a position to gain certain corresponding goods.

The explanation offered here of the value of knowledge is original and intuitively plausible. It accounts for the final value of knowledge in a way that marks a difference from that which falls short of knowledge. It is also an explanation that allows us to solve the three value problems.

Knowledge is not distinctively valuable *vis-à-vis* that which falls short of knowledge in the sense that knowledge enjoys final value while that which falls short of knowledge merely enjoys, say, instrumental value. Knowledge is distinctively valuable *vis-à-vis* that which falls short of knowledge, however, on the basis of the way in which it is finally valuable. I don't dispute that achievements are also finally valuable and that they are finally valuable in virtue of being constitutive of the good life. The difference, however, lies in their respective bases for being constitutive of the good life. Knowledge is constitutive of the good life in that it is structured such that it is of a kind of good that is most valuable, whereas, say, a virtuous belief, although as an achievement is also constitutive of the good life, is not the kind of good that is most valuable.

8. Virtue and Value

In this section I provide specification as to when particular instances of knowledge are finally valuable. This section contributes to the provision of a more comprehensive account of the value of knowledge, although the main argument in this paper does not depend on the argument in this section. The argument in this section, however, builds on the main argument in this paper.

There are cases of knowledge of pointless truths and it is intuitive that knowledge is not valuable, even on a *pro tanto* basis, in such cases. This point, if accepted, challenges the notion that an answer to the value of knowledge question will simply fall out of an answer to the nature of knowledge question, as some further explanation will be required as to when knowledge has value.

The Pierre case is a case of knowledge of a pointless truth and runs as follows:

> Pierre sits in a café by the window looking out onto a relatively busy Parisian side-street. He decides to gain knowledge by counting the number of people who pass by his table on the

> street outside between every two sups of his coffee. He comes to know that five people passed between his first sup and his second sup, seven people passed between his second sup and his third sup, etc. Let us further add that there is no opportunity cost worth considering, he couldn't have been doing anything else that is valuable.[43]

What seems mistaken about saying knowledge is valuable in the Pierre case is precisely the pointlessness of the knowledge. What seems to account for this lack of value is an appropriate relation between the knowledge gained and that which is virtuous *simpliciter*. So if we investigate that which it is all things considered vicious to investigate, then the resultant knowledge will not be valuable. An epistemic agent, like Pierre, is acting viciously, all things considered, when he is seeking knowledge of pointless truths.[44] If an agent exercises epistemic virtue and thereby has knowledge, but is not exercising all things considered virtue, as in the Pierre case, then it's not a case in which knowledge is finally valuable.

Both the account of the value of knowledge advanced in this paper and Greco's account explain the value of knowledge by way of the relation of knowledge to the good life. Judging by the Pierre case, a case of pointless knowledge, objecting to the claim that knowledge always has *pro tanto* value looks plausible.[45] This looks plausible as in both accounts knowledge is claimed to be finally valuable in virtue of being constitutive of the good life, and yet if individual instances of knowledge conflict with what is virtuous *simpliciter*, then they conflict with a requirement for the good life on an Aristotelian account. If an agent's individual instance of knowledge attainment is all things considered vicious, then, *ceteris paribus*, there is no reason to think that knowledge may in anyway be constitutive of the good life.

A good that is sometimes valuable in virtue of being constitutive of the good life and so finally valuable, in cases in which it's not

[43] Shane Ryan, 'The Value of Knowledge', *Dialogue and Universalism* **3** (2014), 84–88, at 86.

[44] The viciousness is in the manner in which he gains knowledge. If he were to gain knowledge of a pointless truth simply by having happened to look in a certain direction, then the viciousness in the manner of knowledge acquisition would be absent. In such a case, although the particular knowledge is pointless, value is still present owing to its form.

[45] Michael Ridge has argued that immoral achievements aren't valuable. Immoral knowledge might, like knowledge of pointless truths, also lack *pro tanto* final value. Michael Ridge, 'Getting Lost on the Road to Larissa', *Noûs* **47**(1) (2011), 181–201, at 21.

constitutive of the good life, may not be finally valuable. In cases in which that good is constitutive of the good life, then that good is always finally valuable. The account offered here then of the value of knowledge is one according to which it is in the nature of knowledge to be valuable. How should we understand 'being in the nature' here? An example can illustrate how this should be understood. We can maintain that it is in the nature of a tiger to be fierce, while accepting that non-fierce tigers are possible.[46]

But what then should we say about the intuition that knowledge is valuable? We have that intuition, perhaps, because knowledge is the kind of thing that the virtuous agent has. When knowledge and virtue *simpliciter* come apart, however, such as in the Pierre case, our intuition as to what is valuable doesn't track knowledge. This supports the thought that ultimately knowledge isn't valuable alone; it is knowledge that is virtuously held (*simpliciter*) that is finally valuable.[47]

9. Conclusion

This paper sets out the value problems and offers a solution to those problems. Knowledge is differently valuable from that which falls short of knowledge in virtue of being a 'blessed' good, whereas justified true belief and justified belief are not. It is 'blessed' in the sense that good friendship and the good life are blessed. While each depends on one making a virtuous contribution, such a virtuous contribution alone does not guarantee the attainment of the relevant good. These goods are blessed in that the relevant virtuous contribution receives its relevant reward. The person exercising virtues for good friendship, gains a good friend; the person exercising the virtues for knowledge, gains knowledge.

The account provided is a neat one. Understanding the nature of knowledge, how knowledge differs from justified true belief, helps

[46] Duncan Pritchard, 'Achievements, Luck and Value' *Think* **25** (2010), 1–12.

[47] An alternative way of motivating the move that is made on the basis of the Pierre case is appealing to a revised conception of the unity of the virtues, not to determine what counts as virtuous in a given domain but to determine what has final value in virtue of being constitutive of the good life – a valuation that is naturally understood as neither being restricted to a particular domain, nor, with the revised conception of the unity of virtues in play, necessarily *pro tanto* in nature.

us to understand the value of knowledge. The account is one that equips us well to respond to Kvanvig's challenge to the propriety of affording the study of knowledge a central place in philosophy.[48] Knowledge really is special.[49]

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[48] While the account of knowledge I have provided makes sense of the eminent place of the study of knowledge in philosophy, I don't take that account to make sense of the relative neglect in post-Gettier epistemology of understanding and wisdom.

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