

Exploring The Question of Why Knowledge Is Often Supposed to Have More Value Than Justified True Belief

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Abstract. Knowledge has always been supposed to have more value than true beliefs. This is because the process of attaining knowledge has often been intended to involve more trials than obtaining a true belief, which gives knowledge more value. However, the definition of such trials is vague. In addition, sometimes essential pieces of knowledge are obtained by luck, which means an absence of such trials and the knowledge's possession of high value. Even though we can define such trials, it is hard to relate the value of obtaining knowledge with knowledge itself. This article seeks to find 1). How is knowledge more valuable than true belief or 2). If knowledge is not prior to true belief because of value, what does knowledge have in addition to true belief? The article starts by analyzing the value problem. The value problem suggests that knowledge does not have an additional value comparing to true beliefs of the same content, since knowledge is true beliefs formed reliably. Then, the article seeks to find a solution to the value problem. Arguments from Zagzebski about virtue epistemology are analyzed and criticized. Then, the concept of epistemic virtue is used to solve the problem. This research can provide readers with a viewpoint that allows them to consider the value problem of knowledge from another perspective.

Keywords: Meaning; Virtue reliabilism; Knowledge and true belief.

1. Introduction

Philosophers have traditionally regarded knowledge as a highly valuable epistemic state, perhaps even one of the great goods of life [1]. The question of what knowledge possesses that justified true beliefs don't is of great importance since if one knows what knowledge has those true beliefs don't, one knows why knowledge is distinct, which, in other words, is how knowledge is valuable. If it is suggested that knowledge is equally valued as justified true belief, why should we pursue knowledge rather than be satisfied with it? However, the argument that knowledge possesses more value than justified true belief has not yet been substantially justified.

2. The Value Problem

Reliabilism claims that knowledge is true belief that is formed reliably. This method is explanatory regarding many pieces of knowledge. Also, one's perception of the concept of knowledge coincides with such theory: it is apparent that knowledge is obtained by methods including but not limited to testifying with experiments and doing calculations. However, this definition also has a problem: if a method of forming the knowledge is reliable and the outcome, which is the knowledge obtained, is not reliable, then we do not say that the method is reliable, at least we do not conclude from this result that the method is reliable. In other words, the reliability of the method cannot determine the reliability of the knowledge, but it is true the other way around.

Zagzebski proposed the coffee machine problem [1]. In the example, there are two coffee machines, and one is more reliable than the other. The two machines produced two cups of coffee that were almost identical. Thus, we judge that the two cups of coffee are identical. However, the condition that one of the coffee machines is more reliable than the other does not add any value to the cup of coffee that the reliable machine produces. This is because the two cups of coffee have virtually no differences themselves. This example suggests that in the case of knowledge and true belief, knowledge and true belief have no difference regarding the outcome despite the reliability of the

method that forms them [2-3]. Thus, with this example, Zagzebski proposes that the current method fails to point out the extra value that knowledge possesses comparing to true belief [1].

To illustrate in more detail, some pieces of knowledge are, in fact, the result of accidental discoveries, but they still possess great influence regarding the world. Though the process of discovery of knowledge is not very reliable or even not reliable at all, the knowledge should still be called knowledge. For example, the fact that some fungi can kill bacterial infections caused the invention of Penicillin, which saved countless lives. However, the cause of the discovery of this knowledge is an accidental contamination of one of the petri dishes. Even though the process of discovery is highly unreliable, which is a laboratory accident, we still say that the discovery of this piece of knowledge is highly valuable. According to reliabilists' definition of knowledge, this piece of information cannot be defined as knowledge, yet its value suggests that this knowledge should, in fact, be defined as knowledge. Some might argue that that it is still possible that knowledge can be defined as true belief, but it is counterintuitive.

The significant failure of such a method is that there are by now no methods to connect the value of the method of obtaining knowledge with the additional value that is produced in the process. With the steps identical, knowledge is believed to have no difference in value compared to true belief. But that is also to say that if the process of producing knowledge has certain connections with the knowledge, which provides knowledge with something that discriminates it from true belief, then the problem of how knowledge is prior to true belief will be solved.

3. An Attempted Solution of Virtue Reliabilism and its Problem

3.1. The Solution

Zagzebski proposed that the discussion of knowledge can be viewed internally [1]. The method is to focus on the subject's epistemic virtues rather than the knowledge's values. Epistemic virtues include virtues such as epistemic wisdom, epistemic humility etc. These virtues are shown by the subject through their pursuit of knowledge: the subject's acts or responds to trials they face when pursuing knowledge would be a manifestation of epistemic virtues. This focus on internal values converts the subject of discussion, which is knowledge itself, into the discussion of the subject's epistemic virtues and how they are shown in the pursuit of knowledge. This method regards the pursuit of knowledge as a part of knowledge. Thus, it is reasonable to suggest that the knowledge is at a higher epistemic state. When people utilize their epistemic virtues when obtaining knowledge, they add value to the process of obtaining knowledge, since these traits should be admired and desired. As a result, the total value of the knowledge is also increased since the process of obtaining knowledge is also counted as part of the knowledge. If the case of coffee machine is being considered, then it can be concluded that the value of the coffee shouldn't be considered, but rather the whole process of the production: the coffee machine, the production of coffee, and the coffee.

3.2. The Problem of the Solution Above

However, the problem to this is that knowledge is usually considered as a piece of information rather than the process of attaining knowledge [4-6]. One would not care about how the coffee is produced since the value of the coffee, which the person would enjoy is exclusively the coffee itself. The value of the coffee machine would not be shown by the coffee. Just like that of coffee, people would not care how the knowledge is obtained, because the value of knowledge that people intuitively recognize is the content of the knowledge. Even though we abandon the machine-product model, it is still controversial to relate the process of obtaining knowledge and knowledge itself. For example, the knowledge of utilizing fungi to kill off bacterial infection is an important and invaluable one. However, people care less about how this knowledge is discovered, while they are interested in what innovations this knowledge can bring.

If knowledge is true belief arising out of the exercise of good traits and skills, it cannot be the reliability of the agent's traits and skills that adds the value. Those traits or skills must be good for

some reason that does not wholly derive from the good of the product they produce: true belief [1]. Thus, the definition of knowledge on the above is somehow counterintuitive, because we normally would not relate how a method can create more value in the future when we are applying the method to accomplish our own goals: there are no relations between the value that it is going to create and the value it has already created.

4. Another Method to Search for the Priority of Knowledge

4.1. What is known from the above

From the above, it is not hard to conclude that searching for the value of knowledge is especially difficult [7-8]. In addition, it is hard or even nearly impossible to connect the process of obtaining knowledge with knowledge itself regarding their value. However, these perspectives all have one similarity, that is, they all believe knowledge is prior to mere true beliefs. When we learn, we say that we obtain knowledge instead of form true beliefs. It is still hard to explain why knowledge are supreme regarding their value, since their value is mainly manifested by their usages, while their usages are essentially identical. This means that they have identical external value, since they have the same content, and their internal values are proven to be irrelevant to the problem since they do not matter so much. There might still be differences in different facets, so the first problem mentioned one the above would not be discussed in the paper from then on, and the rest of the paper would seek for a solution for the second problem. Though the virtue reliabilists' method mentioned on the above failed, it still has considerable merits: 1) The method points out that it is impossible to relate the value of the process of obtaining knowledge with knowledge itself, and 2) The method of virtue epistemology provides an innovative method of consideration, which is the introduction of epistemic virtue. This methodology encourages people to utilize epistemic virtues to seek for knowledge. According to the rebuttal above, however, knowledge produced by a reliable method still doesn't mean that knowledge possess additional value.

4.2. An Alternative Method

Nevertheless, knowledge might not be prior to justified true belief because of the value, but because its meaning and significance. The value of knowledge might not have anything to do with the method of acquiring knowledge. However, reliable methods can produce more reliable knowledge. For example, in the coffee machine problem, it is true that the two cups of coffee produced don't have detectable differences, but if the two machines produce 10 cups of coffee, the outcome would be different. If the less reliable machine produces 3 cups of coffee with low quality and the more reliable one produces only 1 or 0 cups of unqualified coffee, then we would certainly use the more reliable one. This works similarly with knowledge. If knowledge is acquired through luck, or it just emerged to be true, then we might say that such method of acquiring knowledge is less useful and is meaningless, because it is highly probable that the outcome of such approach would be worse than a reliable method of acquiring knowledge. Thus, it is possible to suggest that knowledge can have the same value of true beliefs. For example, the information that fungi can be used to produce antibiotics might be a true belief or a piece of knowledge when people are applying this information to produce more value with the value that the information possesses. That is to say, the value of the true belief and the piece of knowledge are the same, even though it might not align with the many theories present. However, the knowledge is important. The meaning and importance of discovering something comparing to being taught something is completely different. For example, it is clearly more meaningful that Einstein discovered that $E=mc^2$ comparing to one being told this theory. Clearly for the latter it could just be a true belief, and for the former it should be truly knowledge. Also, only considering this piece of knowledge and *ceteris paribus*, then the value of $E=mc^2$ has the same value when it works as a piece of knowledge and when it works as a true belief. However, it is impossible to suggest that its two forms have the same meaning. When it works simply as a true belief, it is

nothing but an equation. However, when it works as a piece of knowledge discovered by Einstein, its meaning is an equation obtained through years of hard work and countless times of calculations.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, the article started with the discussion of reliabilism's inability to solve the value problem by pointing out that true beliefs and knowledge form in almost identical processes, and the only difference is that knowledge should undergo reliable methods to form. However, if a piece of knowledge and a true belief have the same content, then the method of justification is of no meaning. Thus, Zagzebski's method of virtue epistemology is introduced. Virtue epistemology introduced a concept called epistemic virtues, which may add value to the process of forming a piece of knowledge. Thus, the consideration of the value of knowledge includes the epistemic virtues that the subject shows. However, the consideration of knowledge's value would be counterintuitive if the subject is also involved in the evaluation, and the evaluation of solely knowledge itself is demanded. Thus, a method is proposed. The additional value of knowledge is not considered anymore but the significance and the meaning. This method abandons the pursuit of seeking for value but the meaning. Obviously, the epistemic virtues work as a manifestation of the meaning or the significance of the knowledge. The meaning of the article is that it provides a possible method of avoiding the justification of the excess value of knowledge when discussing the difference between knowledge and true beliefs, converting the problem into why knowledge is prior to simply true beliefs, while it does not conflict with the intuition that knowledge is at a higher epistemic state.

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