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Jason Baehr

Loyola Marymount University, jbaehr@lmu.edu

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IS THERE A VALUE PROBLEM?

Jason Baehr

Loyola Marymount University

According to the standard conception of the “value problem” in epistemology, the problem originates with a compelling pretheoretical intuition to the effect that knowledge is more valuable than true belief.¹ Call this the “guiding intuition.” The guiding intuition is thought to motivate a *constraint* on an analysis of knowledge such that any plausible analysis must entail that knowledge is more valuable than true belief. A *problem* emerges in light of two additional considerations. The first is that knowledge is roughly justified or warranted true belief.² The second is that given certain popular accounts of knowledge, the value of justification or warrant is apparently derivative from and reducible to the value of true belief.³ But if knowledge is justified true belief, then these accounts apparently fail to entail that knowledge has value over and above the value of true belief and so fail to satisfy the relevant constraint. Defenders of these theories of knowledge have generally responded by attempting to show that the value of justification as they conceive of it is *not* entirely derivative from the value of true belief and hence that their theories do satisfy the relevant constraint and so are able to overcome the value problem.⁴

I argue here that the value problem conceived in the foregoing way is unmotivated and thus that a good deal of the literature on this problem is fundamentally off-track. Specifically, I argue that when we get clear on the content of the guiding intuition, it becomes evident that this intuition cannot motivate a constraint on an analysis of knowledge. If this is correct, then there is no problem with an analysis that fails to entail that knowledge is more valuable than true belief. I go on to argue, however, that the guiding intuition does motivate a “value problem” of sorts. This is the problem or project of identifying the full range of epistemic values, that is, the full range of ways (beyond true belief) in which a belief or other epistemic state might be valuable. But this account of the problem differs dramatically from the standard one.

I. The Value Problem and the Analysis of Knowledge

I begin by further clarifying the nature of the constraint that is said to be motivated by the guiding intuition. We noted that according to this constraint, any plausible analysis must entail that knowledge is more valuable than true belief. But what does “entail” amount to here? In short, an analysis of knowledge “entails” (in the relevant sense) that knowledge is more valuable than true belief just in case one or more of the conditions specified by this analysis has what might be called “truth-independent” value, or value that is not reducible to the value of true belief.⁵ Take reliabilism as an example. According to this view, knowledge is essentially true belief plus justification and a belief is justified just in case it is the product of a reliable or truth-conducive process or faculty.⁶ The problem is that the value of reliability is apparently entirely derivative from and thus reducible to the value of true belief. That is, forming beliefs in a reliable way is valuable simply because doing so increases one’s chances of hitting upon the truth. Thus it appears that none of the conditions specified by a reliabilist account of knowledge have any truth-independent value and that reliabilism therefore fails to entail that knowledge is more valuable than true belief.⁷

It is also critical to note that the constraint in question is purely *formal*, in the sense that it does not require anything of an analysis of knowledge *beyond* that one or more of the conditions specified by this analysis have truth-independent value. It does not require that the condition or conditions in question have any additional characteristics, for example, that they be internal versus external, a function of a belief-state rather than how the belief was formed, etc. Again, all that matters is that an analysis identifies knowledge with one or more features that *in fact* have truth-independent value.

This aspect of the relevant constraint is evident in the standard methodology for responding to the value problem. Replies to the value problem typically amount to little more than an attempt to show that knowledge as the author in question conceives of it has truth-independent value.⁸ The underlying assumption is that once this has been accomplished, the value problem has been “solved” or overcome. Again, it does not matter which quality an author identifies as “the added value of knowledge” as long as it actually has truth-independent value. But this is the right way of approaching the value problem only if the constraint in question is formal in the sense just noted. This is an important point – one that we will have occasion to return to below.

Now let us examine more closely the supposed *motivation* for this constraint. We have seen that the constraint is thought to be motivated by the guiding intuition. The idea, again, is that from a pretheoretical standpoint, knowledge seems clearly to be more valuable than true belief; and this, it seems, is something that an adequate analysis of knowledge ought to “reflect” or “explain” in the sense described above. Two important observations regarding this claim are in order. The first is that if the value problem is generated by a constraint on an analysis of knowledge and this constraint is motivated by the guiding intuition, then clearly there had better *be* a guiding intuition. That is, there had better be a reasonably compelling and widespread intuition to the effect that knowledge has value over and above the value of true belief. Otherwise, there will be no value problem at all (at least as this problem is standardly understood). Moreover, it is important that the intuition in question be a product of *pretheoretical* or *commonsense* thinking about knowledge: that is, that it not be a mere theoretical *result*. For if we found the claim that knowledge is more valuable than true belief plausible only after accepting a particular theoretical account of knowledge, reliabilists and others whose theories of knowledge are threatened by the value problem could simply reject this claim as a product of a mistaken theory.⁹ If the guiding intuition were not theoretically neutral, these authors would be under no obligation to try to accommodate it.¹⁰ Therefore, if the value problem (as ordinarily conceived) is genuine, there must be a *widespread, reasonably compelling, pretheoretical intuition to the effect that knowledge is more valuable than true belief*. While I do not wish to deny the existence of such an intuition, it is important to be clear about the critical role it occupies in connection with the value problem.

A second observation is that while the existence of such an intuition is necessary for motivating the relevant constraint on an analysis of knowledge, it is not sufficient. For the specific *content* of the guiding intuition must satisfy certain standards as well. First, this content must be entirely *general*, in the sense that it must (at least implicitly) cover or be applicable to *all* instances of knowledge.¹¹ It must (at least implicitly) be an intuition to the effect that knowledge is *always* or *categorically* more valuable than true belief. This is because an analysis of knowledge is aimed at specifying only the *necessary* or *defining* features of knowledge. It is not aimed at specifying any of its merely contingent or accidental features. Therefore, if the guiding intuition motivates a constraint on an analysis of knowledge, it must be built into the content of this intuition that knowledge is categorically or necessarily more valuable than true belief. This

point bears emphasis. Again, if the guiding intuition were just an intuition to the effect that knowledge is *sometimes* more valuable than true belief, or that certain *kinds* or *instances* of knowledge are more valuable than true belief, or that knowledge is more valuable than true belief on account of certain features that some kinds or items of knowledge might *lack*, then it would fail to indicate that knowledge is *always* or *categorically* more valuable than true belief, and thus would fail to motivate a constraint on an *analysis* of knowledge, which again is an attempt to specify the *necessary* (and sufficient) features of knowledge.

Second, the content of the guiding intuition must be entirely *formal*, in the sense that it cannot provide any indication of *why* or *that in virtue of which* knowledge is more valuable than true belief. This requirement is a result of the fact that the constraint that the guiding intuition is thought to motivate is itself entirely formal. As noted above, the value problem is thought to arise from a purely formal constraint on analysis of knowledge: one that makes no demands on an analysis of knowledge beyond that one or more components of this analysis have truth-independent value. But if the guiding intuition were *substantive*, then presumably the constraint motivated by this intuition would be substantive as well. Suppose, for instance, that the guiding intuition were an intuition (at least implicitly) to the effect that knowledge is more valuable than true belief on account of some reasonably specific feature F. If this were the case, then presumably it would be incumbent upon an analysis of knowledge, not merely to incorporate *a* component that has truth-independent value, but rather to incorporate F *in particular*. It would make little sense to hold that knowledge intuitively is more valuable than true belief on account of F, that an analysis of knowledge must therefore entail that knowledge is more valuable than true belief, but that in doing so it need not make any reference to F. This would be to ignore the very basis of the intuition in question. Therefore if the constraint at the heart of the value problem is entirely formal, the content of the intuition that motivates this constraint must be entirely formal as well.

We have seen, then, that the value problem (at least as it is ordinarily conceived) is a genuine problem only if (a) there is in fact a widespread commonsense intuition to the effect that knowledge is more valuable than true belief and (b) the content of this intuition is general and formal in the senses just noted.¹²

II. The Content of the Guiding Intuition

I have already indicated that I shall not call into question whether there is a guiding intuition, or an intuition that satisfies the condition just noted in (a).¹³ Rather my concern in the present section lies with (b). I argue that the guiding intuition does not have the qualities noted in (b), that is, that its content is neither relevantly general nor relevantly formal, and thus that the value problem as it is ordinarily understood is unmotivated.

Before proceeding, an important methodological concern must be addressed. It might reasonably be wondered whether one can do much in the way of *arguing* for a certain account of the specific content of the guiding intuition (or *any* intuition for that matter). It might be thought that one can do little more than to *describe* this content as it appears to one, with the hope that one's description will resonate with one's interlocutors. While I agree that the resources for defending a certain view of the precise content or character of any intuition are at least somewhat limited, they need not be *objectionably* limited. Indeed, in what follows, I employ two additional kinds of strategies in defense of my account of the content of the guiding intuition. First, I consider several *implications* of conceiving of this content in one way rather than another – implications that are plausible or implausible in their own right. Second, in section III, I sketch an alternative account of the intuitive origin of the value problem that coheres well with and helps explain several of the points arrived at in the present section regarding the content of the guiding intuition. Taken together with something like the descriptive strategy noted above, these considerations comprise a cogent case for thinking that the content of the guiding intuition is neither general nor formal.

A. The Generality of the Guiding Intuition

We may begin by considering how plausible it is to think of the content of the guiding intuition as *general* in the relevant sense. That is, how plausible is it to suppose that when we think about knowledge as more valuable than true belief in the relevant intuitive or commonsense way,¹⁴ we think of it as *necessarily* or *categorically* more valuable? There may be some initial support for thinking of the guiding intuition in this way, for we do not tend to qualify our acceptance of the claim that knowledge is more valuable than true belief by saying or

explicitly thinking that it holds only sometimes or only in relation to certain kinds or instances of knowledge. But this is not sufficient for showing that the content of the guiding intuition is general in the relevant sense. At a minimum, it leaves open the possibility that this content has certain *implicit* limits. For instance, it leaves open the possibility that we regard knowledge (at least implicitly) as more valuable than true belief on the basis of certain features that we do not (intuitively or otherwise) think of as *necessary* features of knowledge. I might, for example, regard knowledge as more valuable than true belief at the relevant intuitive level on account of its being accompanied by good evidence or a kind of “reflective epistemic perspective,” while denying that such a perspective is, strictly speaking, a *necessary* condition for knowledge. In this case, my intuition to the effect that “knowledge is more valuable than true belief” would at bottom be an intuition to the effect that a certain *kind* of knowledge or knowledge that involves certain *properties* (properties which I do not necessarily regard as essential to knowledge) is more valuable than true belief. Nothing about the apparent character of the guiding intuition seems to rule out such a possibility.

Moreover, there is something *prima facie implausible* about the suggestion that when we think of knowledge as more valuable than true belief in the relevant intuitive way, we think of it as necessarily or categorically more valuable. We do not, in other words, appear to treat the relevant claim as an *exceptionless* or *necessary* truth: as applying to any *possible* instance of knowledge. Instead, the intuitive judgment in question appears to have something like the status of a broad *generalization*, the content of which may very well be *indeterminate* with respect to whether *in every case* knowledge is more valuable than true belief. The former characterization is apparently too strong: it attributes more than is warranted to the content of the guiding intuition. Thus while the guiding intuition may be somewhat general, it is apparently not completely or relevantly general.

This judgment is reinforced by the fact that there is nothing independently or inherently counterintuitive in the suggestion that there might exist, say, at least *one* item of knowledge the value of which does not exceed that of the corresponding item of true belief. I take it that nothing in our commonsense or pretheoretical way of thinking about knowledge rules out such a possibility. But again, if the guiding intuition were a product of commonsense, and if its content were completely general, this suggestion presumably would generate a clash of intuitions; it would strike us as questionable or implausible that *any* item of knowledge might fail to be more

valuable than the corresponding item of true belief. Such a suggestion presumably would be on par with the suggestion that there might exist a married bachelor or that two plus three might fail to equal five. But clearly it is not.

There are, then, some initially strong reasons for thinking that the content of the guiding intuition is not relevantly *general*. Thus this intuition apparently fails to yield a reason for thinking that knowledge is *always* more valuable than true belief, which in turn implies that it cannot motivate a constraint on an *analysis* of knowledge (which again is an attempt to specify the *necessary* features of knowledge).

It also worth noting in connection with this point that even if the content of the guiding intuition *were* relevantly general, it would not automatically or unproblematically generate a constraint on an analysis of knowledge. This is true in part because its content must also be *formal* – a point which we shall return to shortly. It is also true, however, because *as a matter of fact* knowledge is *not* always more valuable than true belief. This is evident, first, in certain isolated cases in which a demand for knowledge rather than mere true belief would require the forfeiture of certain other important goods. For instance, if trying to flee a certain foreign location in the face of some impending catastrophe, I might do better simply to trust my hunch (which happens to be accurate) about the appropriate way out than to stick around and do what it takes to acquire knowledge about this matter (e.g. find a map, get directions from a reliable source, etc.). In response it might be said that while from a *practical* or even an *all-things-considered* perspective, knowledge in cases like this is not more valuable than mere true belief, it is more valuable from an *epistemic* perspective. But there are at least two problems with this reply. First, it is unclear why from *any* perspective knowledge in such cases should be considered superior to mere true belief. Even if we limit our attention to a purely “epistemic” standpoint (whatever exactly this might involve), in what sense am I better off *knowing*, say, that to escape the catastrophe I need to turn right at this corner then left at the next than I am simply having a true belief about this matter?¹⁵ It is difficult to imagine what a plausible account of such value might look like. Second, the details of the case could easily be changed such that the good at stake is clearly epistemic rather than pragmatic. For instance, we can imagine cases in which, for the sake of some greater *epistemic* good, one would do better to opt for mere true belief than for knowledge (e.g. because acquiring knowledge at present would preclude acquiring some

more important item of knowledge at a later time). In such cases, knowledge fails to have value over and above the value of true belief – even from a purely “epistemic” standpoint.¹⁶

Other kinds of cases also support the idea that knowledge is not always more valuable than mere true belief. Consider much of what falls under the rubric of “trivial knowledge”: for instance, knowledge about the number of blades of grass on one’s front lawn or the number of names listed under “C” in the local phonebook. It is at least *prima facie* implausible to suppose that knowledge about such matters is always superior to mere true belief. Indeed, on the plausible assumption that knowledge makes a greater demand on one’s cognitive resources than true belief, it might reasonably be thought that if one must have any beliefs about such matters at all, one is better off, even “epistemically speaking,” opting for mere true belief than for knowledge. To go for knowledge rather than mere true belief in such cases, it might be said, would amount to a misuse of one’s cognitive resources.¹⁷ A related point holds for so-called “immoral” or “forbidden” knowledge, that is, knowledge the acquisition of which is problematic or off limits from a moral standpoint (e.g. knowledge of the horrific details of an act of genocide, torture, or rape). It seems obvious that in such cases knowledge is not always more valuable than mere true belief (if indeed it ever is). And presumably the reason is not a strictly moral one. Even from a purely “epistemic” standpoint, it clearly seems mistaken to think that knowledge about such matters is always (if ever) preferable to true belief.¹⁸

These considerations indicate that knowledge is not always or categorically more valuable than true belief. It follows that even if the content of the guiding intuition *were* general in the relevant sense (and again we have examined good reasons for thinking it is not), it could not be taken at face value; it could not immediately or unproblematically motivate a constraint on an analysis of knowledge.¹⁹

B. The Formality of the Guiding Intuition

Let us now turn to consider whether the content of the guiding intuition is relevantly *formal*. How plausible is it to suppose that when we think of knowledge as more valuable than true belief at the relevant intuitive level, we are thinking of it *purely* in the abstract, without any (even implicit) reference to any of the features in virtue of which it apparently *is* more valuable? In fact this seems quite implausible. That is, it is implausible to think that the relevant intuitive

preference for knowledge over true belief has *nothing* whatsoever to do with any reasonably specific *features* that we take knowledge to have. This is not to deny that our grasp or awareness of these features may be somewhat implicit or fuzzy; nor that the content of the guiding intuition may be to some extent indeterminate on this point. But this is entirely consistent with the possibility that when we value knowledge at the relevant intuitive level, we do so (at least implicitly) on the *basis* of its seeming to us to be a certain way or to have certain reasonably specific features. Thus while the content of the guiding intuition may be somewhat formal, it is apparently not *entirely* or *relevantly* formal. If so, it cannot motivate a purely formal constraint on an analysis of knowledge.

This point can be drawn out in several ways. First, we can ask whether it might ever be reasonable to object to a proposed reply or solution to the value problem for any reason other than that the reply identifies the added value of knowledge with a feature that lacks truth-independent value. For instance, consider Linda Zagzebski's reply to the value problem.²⁰ She defines knowledge (roughly) as true belief that results from virtuous intellectual motives and actions; and she maintains that the motives in question have intrinsic value. Accordingly, she claims that knowledge is more valuable than true belief on account of these motives. Suppose we grant that the motives in question are intrinsically valuable. Are there no possible grounds for objecting to Zagzebski's proposed solution to the value problem? Or rather, couldn't someone object by claiming, say, that the relevant motives – valuable as they may be – cannot really explain or make sense of the intuitive added value of knowledge, in the sense that they cannot really be what we have in mind when we regard knowledge as more valuable than true belief in the relevant intuitive way? I see no principled problem with this sort of objection (indeed it strikes me as quite plausible). However, if the guiding intuition were entirely formal, this objection would make little sense. For it assumes that we regard knowledge as more valuable than true belief (at least implicitly) on account of certain specific features but not others.

A second way of drawing out the relevant point is to ask whether it makes sense to think that we might make progress in our understanding of *why* knowledge is more valuable than true belief by further reflecting on or scrutinizing the content of the guiding intuition. Here the question is whether the content of the guiding intuition *itself* might provide at least some indication of the relevant added value of knowledge. Again I see no reason to rule out such a possibility. In fact it seems like an entirely plausible way to proceed. If we intuitively regard

knowledge as more valuable than true belief and want to understand why it is more valuable, it seems entirely sensible to focus on the intuitive basis of this judgment: for example, to ask what is about knowledge as we conceive of it that apparently leads us to think of knowledge as more valuable than true belief. But again, if the content of the guiding intuition were purely formal, this would be a hopeless and misdirected endeavor, for ex hypothesi it would fail to provide us with any of the sought after information.

A third point is closely related to the foregoing two. If the value problem is rooted in a purely formal intuition to the effect that knowledge is more valuable than true belief, it follows (implausibly) that the two possibilities just considered are misguided in an even more fundamental way than has been suggested thus far. To see why, note that the possible reply to Zagzebski and the possible method of ascertaining the added value of knowledge just considered both presuppose that there is *an* added value of knowledge, that is, that there is some reasonably determinate property or fairly limited set of properties in virtue of which we intuitively regard knowledge as more valuable than true belief. But if the value problem is rooted in a purely *formal* intuition to the effect that knowledge is more valuable than true belief, then there are in principle *any number* of possible “solutions” to the value problem or “right answers” to the question of what makes knowledge more valuable than true belief. In other words, there is no very determinate or univocal “added value of knowledge.” Thus not only does the question of whether it might make sense to reply to Zagzebski in the manner noted above warrant a negative answer, the very question itself is confused. The same goes for the question of whether we might make some progress in our understanding of why knowledge is more valuable than true belief by reflecting further on the content of the guiding intuition. For again, both of these proposals presuppose that there is a reasonably determinate and univocal “added value of knowledge.” The problem, of course, is that neither of these proposals seems fundamentally confused or misguided at all. This, then, is a further indication that the content of the guiding intuition is not purely formal.

A fourth and final point in favor of this conclusion emerges in connection with cases like the following. Imagine a world in which, owing to the work of a less than benevolent Cartesian demon, human beings are capable of nothing more than so-called “animal knowledge,” or knowledge of the sort possessed by higher animals and small children. Such knowledge represents the upper boundary of human cognitive achievement. Does the guiding intuition hold

relative to worlds like this? If human cognition were limited in this way, would it still be clear from a commonsense standpoint that knowledge is more valuable than true belief?²¹ I take it that at a minimum the intuition would be considerably less firm than it is in relation to the actual world. That is, it would at least be questionable from a commonsense standpoint whether knowledge is in fact more valuable than true belief. If so, this shows that our actual, rather firm intuitive preference for knowledge over true belief is (at least implicitly) a response to certain epistemic features absent from animal knowledge but instantiated by a higher grade, “human” or “reflective” kind of knowledge. And again, if this is right, then the content of the guiding intuition is not be purely formal.

We have examined several good reasons for denying that the content of the guiding intuition is formal or general in the relevant senses. Thus it apparently cannot motivate a constraint on an analysis of knowledge. This in turn shows that the value problem as it is standardly conceived is unmotivated and thus that a good deal of the literature on the value problem is fundamentally off track. Before moving on, it is worth noting that this conclusion follows even if the content of the guiding intuition were to lack just *one* of the two features just noted. In other words, the viability of the value problem requires that the content of the guiding intuition be *both* relevantly general *and* relevantly formal. Therefore, even if one remained convinced that, say, the content of the guiding is in fact entirely general, one would not thereby be warranted in rejecting the conclusion just reached. Such a rejection would be warranted only if it were plausible to suppose that the content of the guiding intuition is completely formal as well.

C. A Diagnosis

If the characterization of the guiding intuition that has emerged in this section is correct, what explains the nearly universal tendency to think of the value problem as involving a constraint on an analysis of knowledge? I think an answer is suggested by the fact that those who have addressed the problem appear not to have thought very carefully about the specific character and content of the guiding intuition and in fact have tended to treat it – or rather its object²² – as a kind of necessary, self-evident truth. This is suggested by the standard methodology for addressing the value problem. As alluded to earlier, the standard approach

begins with a quick and uncritical acknowledgement of the fact that “knowledge is more valuable than true belief” and then immediately shifts to the project of showing that knowledge as one conceives of it has value over and above the value of true belief. If the guiding intuition were something like a necessary, self-evident epistemological principle, this approach would make good sense. It would also warrant thinking of the value problem as involving a constraint on an analysis of knowledge, for if the guiding intuition had this status, then presumably it would be general and formal in the relevant senses. So again, the problem is apparently that epistemologists have failed to pay sufficient attention to the specific character of the guiding intuition and the implications of this character for a proper conception of the value problem.

III. An Alternative Version of the Value Problem

Before dismissing the value problem as nothing more than a pseudo-problem, it is worth considering what a more plausible conception of the guiding intuition might look like and whether this conception might motivate an alternative version of the value problem.

A. An Alternative Conception of the Guiding Intuition

In some recent work on the value problem, John Greco (following Socrates in the *Meno*) argues that the value problem begins, *not* with the question of why knowledge is more valuable than true belief, but rather with a more basic question: namely, “Why is knowledge valuable? Or perhaps better, What is it that makes knowledge valuable?”²³ One obvious reply is that true belief (or, as Greco describes it, “true information”) is an essential ingredient of knowledge, and true belief is valuable. But as Greco (again following Socrates) quickly points out, this is not a fully adequate answer, for “we think that knowledge is more valuable than *mere* true information, or true information that is not knowledge.”²⁴ Thus for Greco the value problem begins with a question about the value of knowledge per se; it then shifts to a question about the added value of knowledge relative to true belief.

What does Greco’s characterization suggest about the content or character of the guiding intuition? The first thing to note is that on Greco’s view, the fundamental basis of the guiding intuition is apparently not a judgment about the *comparative* value of knowledge and true belief.

Rather it is a judgment about the value of knowledge *per se*. In particular, it is apparently something like the rather ordinary and familiar pretheoretical judgment or general conviction that *knowledge is valuable* – that it is an estimable or worthy human good. Presumably it is this sort of judgment – not any purely abstract or formal judgment regarding the value of knowledge as such – that motivates Greco’s initial question concerning the value of knowledge.²⁵ This general conviction about the value of knowledge leads to a judgment about the comparative value of knowledge and true belief once we attempt to answer this initial question, that is, once we attempt to explain *why* or *that in virtue of which* knowledge is valuable. For on reflection, while the fact that knowledge involves true belief may *partly* explain our high intuitive regard for knowledge, it is not a *complete* explanation. In other words, at the relevant pretheoretical or commonsense level, we think of knowledge as valuable in ways that apparently go beyond the value of true belief.

Notice how different this characterization of the guiding intuition is from the one considered above. Here the guiding intuition clearly does not amount to an apprehension of a necessary, self-evident principle to the effect that “knowledge is more valuable than true belief.” It is at once a more “folksy” and more complex psychological state. It is a kind of intuitive *inference* based upon a very ordinary pretheoretical judgment about the value of knowledge together with an additional judgment to the effect that this value is not exhausted by the value of true belief. The inference exhibits the following structure: (1) Knowledge is highly valuable; (2) This value apparently is not reducible to the value of true belief; (3) Therefore knowledge must value over and above the value of true belief.

This way of thinking about the guiding intuition fits well with certain of the conclusions reached earlier concerning the precise content of this intuition. First, it is highly doubtful that when conceived in this way, the content of the guiding intuition is entirely *general*. For there is little reason to think that the relevant, rather ordinary and folksy judgment about the value of knowledge (corresponding to (1) above) is entirely general or categorical in nature. That is, there is little reason to think that when we judge knowledge to be valuable in the relevant intuitive way, we take this judgment (even implicitly) to apply to any and every *possible* item of knowledge. Rather this judgment is more plausibly understood as a rough *generalization* or judgment to the effect that *in general* knowledge is highly valuable. If this is right, then the scope of the resulting comparative judgment (captured by (3)) is limited as well; this judgment is

not completely general. Second, it is also highly doubtful that the content of the guiding intuition thus conceived is entirely *formal*. For it seems entirely plausible to suppose that when we regard knowledge as valuable in the relevant intuitive way, we do so on account of one or more reasonably specific *features* that we take knowledge to have. We do not, at the relevant ordinary and intuitive level, value knowledge simply in the abstract. Rather we value it, presumably, on account of what (in particular) it *is* and on account of how it is *related* to other things we value. But again, if this is right, then the resulting judgment to the effect that knowledge has value over and above the value of true belief is at least somewhat substantive; it is not purely or relevantly formal.

B. The “Value Pluralism” Conception of the Value Problem

Suppose, then, that we think of the guiding intuition along the lines just sketched. Is there a “value problem”? It depends on how broadly we are willing to use this term. Let us refer to the standard conception of value problem (criticized above) as the “formal constraint” conception, since its thrust is a formal constraint on an analysis of knowledge. Clearly the guiding intuition conceived in the present way does *not* motivate this conception of the value problem, for again, the content of the guiding intuition thus conceived lacks the required generality and formality. The intuition does, however, motivate an alternative problem. For it provides at least an initial indication that truth is not the sole epistemic value. Thus it motivates the question: *What is the full range of epistemic values? That is, what are the various ways (beyond truth) in which an item of knowledge might be valuable?* This is an interesting and substantive question; and one that seems clearly to indicate a “value problem” of sorts. Let us then refer to this as the “value pluralism” conception of the value problem.

The “value pluralism” conception of the value problem is considerably broader and more fluid than the formal constraint conception. First, its focus is not limited to the essential or defining features of knowledge. It is not concerned merely with the ways in which *any* item of knowledge is bound to be more valuable than the corresponding item of mere true belief. As the question above indicates, it is concerned instead with the range of values (beyond true belief) that an item of knowledge *might* instantiate. In fact, the central question could easily be restated without any reference to knowledge. It might be put thus: What is the full range of ways in

which a *belief* or any other epistemic state might be valuable? Alternatively: what is the full range of values that might accrue to a belief or other epistemic state? Second, though the value pluralism conception of the value problem is to some extent rooted in a certain commonsense judgment about the value of knowledge, the data relevant to addressing the problem are not limited to those available via commonsense. We might, while laboring under this conception, establish the existence of one or more epistemic values on the basis of purely theoretical or philosophical considerations. The values in question may not be part of what explains our high intuitive regard for knowledge.²⁶ Third, while the value problem thus conceived is concerned with the various ways in which a belief or other epistemic state might be valuable, there is little reason to think this value must be “epistemic” in nature. It might also be pragmatic, moral, aesthetic, or otherwise. Again, the concern here is with the *full* range of ways – whether epistemic or not – in which beliefs or other epistemic states might be valuable.²⁷

The central project at the heart of the “value pluralism” conception of the value problem is that of elucidating the full network of values that might be instantiated by a belief or other epistemic state – regardless of whether these values are instantiated by *every* instance of knowledge, whether they are evident in commonsense, or whether they are themselves “epistemic” in nature. The aim is to identify the full range of such values, to get a better sense of their precise nature, and to understand how they are related to each other. Understood in this way, the value problem is well-motivated and stands to inspire a good deal of interesting and original work in epistemology.²⁸

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¹ This is implied by most discussions of the value problem, which treat the claim that knowledge is more valuable than true belief as a kind of truism. See, e.g., Linda Zagzebski's various treatments of the value problem (1996; 2000; 2003). John Greco (forthcoming) makes this point explicit. Two of the earliest contemporary treatments of the value problem are Zagzebski 1996 and Jones 1997. But traces of the problem go as far back as Plato's *Meno*.

² Gettier concerns may be set aside in the present context. For it is implausible to suppose that the added value of knowledge relative to true belief consists in the kind of non-accidentality that anti-Gettier conditions are aimed at capturing. For a discussion of this point, see Zagzebski 2000, p. 117.

³ Reliabilism is the easiest target here. As I explain in more detail below, reliabilists define justification in terms of reliability or truth-conduciveness, the value of which is apparently reducible to the value of true belief. A similar point can be made in connection with several other accounts of justification, including *evidentialism* – at least insofar as the value of having good evidence for one’s beliefs is understood (as it often is – see, e.g., Bonjour 1985, pp. 7-8) in terms of the resulting likelihood that one’s beliefs will be true. For if justification amounts to the possession of good evidence and having good evidence is valuable because it increases the probability that one’s beliefs will be true, then the value of justification is apparently reducible to the value true belief.

⁴ See, e.g., Riggs 2002, Greco 2003, and Sosa 2003.

⁵ To say that something has “truth-independent” value is not to say that its value is independent of truth *in every possible way*. For instance, something might be valuable on account of an *intentional* relation to truth but still have what I am calling “truth-independent” value, since in this case the value might not be *reducible* to the value of true belief. A motivation for or “love” of truth might fit this description. See Zagzebski 1996 and Hurka 2001 for accounts of this sort.

⁶ See Goldman 1986 for a classic statement of this view.

⁷ It is not obvious that reliabilists cannot overcome this problem. For instance, Greco (2003) argues that additional value supervenes on the event of reaching the truth *through* or *as a result of* one’s cognitive faculties. Knowledge as he describes it is a sort of *achievement* that has value over and above the value of true belief.

⁸ See, e.g., Zagzebski 2000, Riggs 2002, and Greco 2003.

⁹ Of course reliabilists would need to adduce independent reasons for accepting their account of knowledge.

¹⁰ Interestingly, this is not how reliabilists or other epistemologists have tended to respond to the value problem. As indicated earlier, many prominent reliabilists have regarded the value problem as a serious challenge and have taken significant pains to show that their preferred versions of reliabilism can overcome it. This suggests that they at least *think* that there is a compelling commonsense intuition to the effect that knowledge is more valuable than true belief.

¹¹ The “implicitly” qualifier is meant to allow for the possibility that the guiding intuition might motivate the relevant constraint even if it does not *obviously* or *explicitly* have the features necessary for doing so.

¹² Some recent work by Jonathan Kvanvig (2003) might be thought to suggest an alternative motivation for the value problem understood as involving a constraint on an analysis of knowledge, a motivation that requires neither (a) nor (b). At times, Kvanvig seems to endorse the idea that the relevant constraint is motivated directly by what we are calling the guiding intuition (see, e.g., pp. x, 4). Elsewhere, however, his discussion suggests something like the following principle: an analysis of knowledge is worthwhile only if the value of knowledge exceeds the value of any subset of its parts (x, xiv, 11, 109, 185). If correct, this principle would require that a plausible or worthwhile analysis of knowledge entail that knowledge is more valuable than true belief. But why endorse the principle to begin with? It is by no means obviously true. Kvanvig himself says very little in support of this principle beyond an appeal to something like the guiding intuition (4). But even if there *were* an intuition that satisfied the condition noted in (b), Kvanvig’s principle would not be well supported. For the guiding intuition thus conceived requires merely that knowledge have value over and above the value of *true belief*, not over and above the value of “any subset of its parts.” (See Greco unpublished for a similar point.) Moreover, if the guiding intuition is what ultimately is supposed to underwrite Kvanvig’s principle, then in fact this principle does not yield an *alternative* motivation for the constraint in question at all.

¹³ I do have doubts about how univocal the intuition in question is, which could present a major obstacle to thinking of this intuition as motivating a constraint on an analysis of knowledge. But I will set this worry aside in the present context.

¹⁴ It is important to bear in mind that there must *be* a “relevant intuitive or commonsense way” of thinking about the comparative value of knowledge and true belief. Otherwise the value problem (at least as it is ordinarily conceived) fails even to get off the ground.

¹⁵ This of course is very similar to the question raised by Socrates in the *Meno*, 97a.

¹⁶ It might be said in response that while knowledge in such cases is not, *all things considered*, more valuable than true belief, it is more valuable *ceteris paribus*: that is, barring the sort of practical conflict in question, knowledge is always more valuable than true belief. But first, it is unclear why this point should be of any help in the present context. Why think that the value problem is limited to the relevant *ceteris paribus* rather than an all-things-considered perspective? Second, even if it were limited in this way, the point in question would be inapplicable to other sorts of cases, that is, to cases in which knowledge, *ceteris paribus*, is *not* more valuable than true belief. These include cases of immoral or forbidden knowledge, to be discussed momentarily.

¹⁷ The problem need not be merely that allocating one’s cognitive resources in this way would be a waste relative to other things they could be spent on (though this much is surely correct). For intuitively, there is a sense in which the

relevant subject matters are, as a matter of principle, unworthy of our cognitive resources; these subject matters being what they are, they fail to merit the allocation of our these resources.

¹⁸ Perhaps there are isolated cases in which such knowledge would be preferable to mere true belief: e.g. if one is in the position of prosecuting one of the relevant actions or (perhaps) if is doing a research for a novel or film that depicts one of these actions.

¹⁹ Whether a modified version of the constraint might still be motivated is, I take it, an open question. However I will not pursue this question here.

²⁰ Zagzebski 1996, pp. 300-4; 2000; 2003.

²¹ Perhaps it *would* be clear from a given theoretical standpoint: e.g. one's analysis of knowledge might entail (as perhaps Greco's in 2003 does) that even animal knowledge has value over and above the value of true belief. But our concern at present is with the content of the guiding intuition and so is limited to the value of knowledge examined from a pretheoretical or commonsense standpoint.

²² Strictly speaking, the concern here is with the *object* of the guiding intuition, that is, with the claim or proposition that the intuition is about. The intuition, as I am thinking of it here, is a psychological state that involves grasping or apprehending this proposition (it is not itself a proposition).

²³ Greco forthcoming, typescript p. 1.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Admittedly I am reading into Greco's discussion at least to some extent, since he does not discuss the underlying intuition as such. However, it is entirely plausible to think that what he does say presupposes the present account of this intuition. For a similar account of the underlying intuition, see Kvanvig 2003, p. 4, and Zagzebski 2000, p. 122.

²⁶ Suppose, for instance, that on the basis of substantial theoretical or philosophical argumentation, I articulate a certain account of the nature of knowledge and it follows from this account that knowledge has a certain value over and above the value of true belief. This value may be sufficiently technical or theoretical so as to be absent from any commonsense thought about the value of knowledge (and thus absent from the guiding intuition). However, this is no reason to think that the value is not genuine or that it is somehow irrelevant to the inquiry in question. Again, this inquiry need not be limited to the deliverances of commonsense.

²⁷ As this suggests, when I speak of the full range of "epistemic values," I am referring to values that might be instantiated by *epistemic* states; the values *themselves* need not be of an epistemic variety.

²⁸ This paper has been in the works for some time and has benefited from many conversations with colleagues, friends, and family. Of special note are extended and especially helpful conversations with Michael Pace, Dan Speak, and Dan Yim. Versions of this paper were read at the 2004 Southern California Philosophy Conference and at a conference on epistemic value at the University of Stirling, Scotland, in August 2006. Feedback received on these occasions was also very helpful. Finally, work on an earlier version of this paper was supported by a 2004 Continuing Faculty Summer Research Grant from Loyola Marymount University.