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### Author

Pritchard, Duncan

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For *Alvin Goldman and His Critics*,  
 (eds.) H. Kornblith & B. McLaughlin, (Oxford: Blackwell).

## VERITISM AND EPISTEMIC VALUE

DUNCAN PRITCHARD

*University of Edinburgh*

ABSTRACT. It is widely held that reliabilism—a proposal which is closely associated with the work of Alvin Goldman—faces a problem accounting for the greater value of knowledge relative to true belief. In this paper I set out what this problem—which is known as the *swamping problem*—involves and critically consider the two responses that Goldman has offered for dealing with this problem. I argue that the real target of the swamping problem is not reliabilism specifically, but rather a view about epistemic value—known as *veritism*—which Goldman also endorses. Moreover, while I argue that Goldman’s own responses to the swamping problem are unsatisfactory, I claim that he is in a position to offer a compelling response to this problem once that problem is properly understood.

### 0. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

One of Alvin Goldman’s most distinctive contributions to epistemology—and there are many—concerns his development of a thorough-going reliabilism in the theory of knowledge. A common complaint against reliabilist views of the sort that Goldman defends, however, is that they are unable to account for the greater value of knowledge relative to mere true belief.<sup>1</sup> This problem is known as the *swamping problem*, for reasons that will become apparent below. For some authors, being able to account for the greater value of knowledge is a key desideratum of any theory of knowledge.<sup>2</sup> Goldman agrees. He writes:

The extra-value-of-knowledge [...] problem can be used to test the adequacy of accounts of knowledge. Suppose an analysis of knowledge is incompatible with knowledge having an added value [*relative to mere true belief*]. That would be a pretty strong argument against the adequacy of that analysis. (Goldman & Olsson 2009, 22)

If there is a problem in this regard, it thus follows that it is important even by Goldman’s lights

that he has an adequate response to it. He thinks he does, but I am not so sure, and I here explore my reasons for being sceptical about Goldman's treatment of the swamping problem. I also argue, however, that when the swamping problem is properly understood, then there is a very straightforward response available to Goldman.

In §1, I set out the swamping problem and argue that it does not pose a challenge which is specific to reliabilism, but rather presents a challenge to a certain conception of epistemic value (known as *veritism*) which Goldman also endorses. In §2, I critically evaluate—and find wanting—the first of Goldman's two responses to this problem, whereby he appeals to the greater future value of reliably formed true belief over mere true belief. In §3, I critique Goldman's second response to the swamping problem, which makes use of a process that he calls *value autonomization*. Finally, in §4, I put forward what I think Goldman should say in response to the swamping problem. In particular, I argue that once the conclusion of the swamping argument is properly understood, he can reasonably treat it as harmless.

## 1. THE SWAMPING PROBLEM

Here is the swamping problem in outline. Reliability in our beliefs is something which is only of value because it is a means to true belief. But if that's right, then having a belief which is both reliably formed and true can be no better than a belief that is merely true. After all, we only care about our beliefs being reliably formed because we know that reliability is a means to true belief, but once we have the true belief the reliability of the belief-forming process can contribute no additional value.

An analogy will be helpful here.<sup>3</sup> Suppose one is a lover of coffee. As a lover of coffee, one will value reliable coffee-making machines—i.e., coffee-making machines which regularly produce delicious coffee. Accordingly, one will seek-out coffee that is produced by such a machine. Still, one only cares about the fact that a cup of coffee is produced by a reliable coffee-making machine because one cares about drinking good coffee.

Imagine that one is presented with two identical cups of coffee. Both are clearly delicious and equally optimal in every respect—i.e., in terms of smell, texture, colour, and so on. But only one of them was produced by a reliable coffee-making machine, with the other one produced by an unreliable coffee-making machine, one that just happened to produce delicious coffee on this occasion. Should one now prefer the cup of coffee produced by the reliable coffee-making machine to the cup of coffee produced by the unreliable coffee-making machine? On the face of it, there seems no reason why one should. (If you are unconvinced, ask yourself the question of

whether you would be willing to pay more for the one cup of coffee over the other, given that they are, *ex hypothesi*, identical). Indeed, insofar as one is satisfied that the two cups of coffee are identical, and equally delicious, then it seems that one should be *indifferent* to whether they were produced by a reliable or unreliable coffee-making machine.

Here is a way of thinking about what is going on here. One cares about reliable coffee-making machines because one cares about the *output* of those machines, but once one has the output it no longer matters how that output was produced, since that's only significant as a means to that output. So while it is not in dispute that reliable coffee-making machines are valuable, they do not—*cannot*—contribute any additional value to the item that they are valuable as a means to—*viz.*, delicious coffee. In short, since the value of being produced by a reliable coffee-making machine is down to the value of good coffee, when one has good coffee in hand, then this value *swamps* any value that might be contributed by this good coffee being produced by a reliable coffee-making machine.

The idea is that what goes for good coffee and reliable coffee-making machines also goes for true belief and reliable belief-forming processes. When faced with two identical true beliefs, one formed via a reliable belief-forming process and one not, there is nothing from a purely reliabilist point of view to set them apart, since they are both equally valuable. But if knowledge is understood as just reliable true belief (which is the view here being attributed to the reliabilist), then it follows that by reliabilist lights knowledge can be of no more value than mere true belief.

Let's try to spell-out this argument in a little more detail. First, we have a general claim about instrumental value, such that if a property (like being reliably formed, when it comes to beliefs, or being reliably produced, when it comes to coffee) is only instrumentally valuable relative to some further good (e.g., true belief or great coffee), then in cases in which the further good in question is already present, no further value is conferred by the presence of the instrumentally valuable property. Next we have a claim which is specific to reliabilism, to the effect that the value of the reliability of a belief-forming process is instrumental value relative to the good of true belief. Putting these two claims together, we get the claim that reliably formed true belief is no more valuable than mere true belief. This intermediate conclusion, in conjunction with the further thesis that knowledge for the reliabilist is nothing more than reliable true belief, gives us our ultimate conclusion that knowledge can be no more valuable than mere true belief.

Here, then, is the swamping problem for reliabilism:

*The Swamping Problem for Reliabilism*

(P1) If the value of a property possessed by an item is only instrumental value relative to a further good and that good is already present in that item, then this property can confer no additional value to that item.

- (P2) The value of the property of being a reliably formed belief is instrumental value relative to the good of true belief.  
 (C1) Reliably formed true belief is no more valuable than mere true belief. [From (P1), (P2)]  
 (P3) Knowledge is reliably formed true belief.  
 (C2) Knowledge is no more valuable than mere true belief. [From (C1), (P3)]

A few comments about this argument as it is presented here are in order.

First, Goldman is unusual in that he holds that knowledge—at least, as he puts it, in a ‘weak’ sense—can be nothing more than true belief.<sup>4</sup> Now if knowledge were always nothing more than true belief, then clearly Goldman would be unable to account for the greater value of knowledge over true belief even if we set aside the swamping problem. For if knowledge is just true belief, then it immediately follows that there can be nothing more valuable about the former relative to the latter, since the former just is the latter. Fortunately, Goldman doesn’t hold that knowledge is always just true belief, and so this particular variant of the value problem for knowledge doesn’t arise for his view. In what follows, we will focus on his position with regard to knowledge insofar as it demands more than merely true belief.

Second, Goldman doesn’t hold that knowledge is nothing more than reliably formed true belief. For example, he holds that there might well need to be an anti-luck condition added to one’s theory of knowledge in order to deal with Gettier-style cases.<sup>5</sup> Strictly speaking, then, (P3) is false by his lights, and hence the ultimate conclusion, (C2), doesn’t go through. Even so, I think Goldman would be wise to grant this premise for the sake of argument (which he seems willing to do).

There are three reasons for this. The first is that since reliability is the main epistemic condition on knowledge laid down by reliabilism, then the intermediate conclusion of this argument, (C1), seems in itself bad enough from the reliabilist point of view. Why, one might ask, is reliability such an important epistemic property if it doesn’t add any value to a true belief? The second reason is that it doesn’t appear that what needs to be added to reliably formed true belief to get knowledge will itself confer any additional value on a mere true belief by reliabilist lights. For example, if the property of being reliably formed doesn’t confer value on a true belief, then why should the property of not being subject to Gettier-style epistemic luck?<sup>6</sup> Finally, the third and most important reason is that once we examine the more general form of the swamping argument, then it becomes apparent that even if Goldman were to reject (P3) he would still be faced with a version of the swamping argument in virtue of his commitment to a certain view about epistemic value.

In order to see this last point, we first need to note that the underlying thinking behind the swamping problem does not seem to be specific to reliabilism. All that matters to the swamping problem is that the epistemic property in question should be merely instrumentally valuable

relative to the good of true belief, since once this much is granted, then one can generate a swamping problem. Reliability fits this template, but so do, arguably, lots of other epistemic properties too. One could imagine an epistemologist arguing, for example, that the property of being justified is only instrumentally valuable relative to the good of true belief. If so, then one could run a parallel swamping argument which is targeted at justification which has as much force as the argument just presented.<sup>7</sup>

With this point in mind, then one could conceive of the swamping argument more generally as a *reductio* of a certain view of epistemic value, such that what really matters from an epistemic point of view is just true belief, with all other epistemic properties being merely instrumentally valuable relative to the good of true belief. Goldman himself explicitly adheres to such a conception of epistemic value—which he calls *veritism*—but there will be other epistemologists who fall into this camp, and who will likewise need to respond to this problem.<sup>8</sup>

Here then is the swamping problem in its general form, such that it is focussed on a problem posed for epistemological theories which endorse veritism rather than specifically targeted at reliabilism:

*The Swamping Problem for Veritism*

- (P1\*) If the value of a property possessed by an item is only instrumental value relative to a further good and that good is already present in that item, then this property can confer no additional value to that item.
- (P2\*) Epistemic properties are only instrumentally valuable relative to the good of true belief. [Veritism]
- (C\*) Knowledge is no more valuable than mere true belief. [From (P1\*), (P2\*)]

(P1\*) is meant to be a conceptual axiological truth. (P2\*) just expresses veritism.<sup>9</sup> And (C\*) is held to follow logically from (P1\*) and (P2\*).

With the swamping argument so formulated, such that the only epistemological premise concerns veritism, it is clear that the real focus here is a specifically *epistemic* value. That is, when we talk about ‘epistemic value’ we can have one of two things in mind. On the one hand, we might have in mind a particular type of value which is epistemic. On the other hand, we might just be talking about the value of something epistemic, where that value may or may not be specifically epistemic. It is important to keep these two notions apart, since otherwise this can lead to confusion, as what is of specifically epistemic value might not be of value more generally (and, of course, what is of value more generally might not be of specifically epistemic value).<sup>10</sup> Henceforth, when we talk of ‘epistemic value’ we will have in mind a kind of value which is specifically epistemic.

Consider veritism in this regard. This is explicitly a claim about epistemic value. That is, in terms of the epistemic domain, true belief plays a foundational axiological role, in that according to veritism we are to regard all epistemic standings as being merely instrumentally valuable relative

to the non-instrumentally valuable epistemic good of true belief. Note, however, that it does not follow from the fact that an epistemic standing is of instrumental epistemic value that it is thereby of instrumental value more generally, and neither does it follow from the fact that true belief is of non-instrumental—or, as it is sometimes called, *final*—epistemic value that it is thereby of non-instrumental value more generally. Take the latter point first.

There are three main options in this respect. The first is that true belief, while of non-instrumental epistemic value, is of no value at all generally speaking. The second is that true belief is not only of non-instrumental epistemic value, but is also of instrumental value more generally speaking. And the third option is that true belief is not only of non-instrumental epistemic value, but is also of non-instrumental value generally speaking. While one can see a case being made for options one and three, option two looks the most plausible. For true belief is surely something that has all kinds of practical benefits, especially when it comes to fulfilling our goals, which is to say that it is of general instrumental value. But whichever option we choose in this regard, the point remains that one needs additional argumentation to make the further claim—none of these options is entailed by the fact that within the specific epistemic domain true belief has non-instrumental value.

What goes for the non-instrumental epistemic value of true belief applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the instrumental epistemic value of epistemic standings. Take the epistemic standing of having a belief that is reliably formed as an example. That one's belief has this epistemic standing entails, according to veritism, that it is of instrumental epistemic value. But we cannot conclude from this that such a standing is in general of value, instrumental or otherwise. Perhaps, for example, having reliably formed true beliefs actually runs counter to your practical interests. If so, then on this score at least this epistemic standing will not be generally of instrumental value. And the idea that this epistemic standing is in general of non-instrumental value will be even harder to defend. For why should this be so? That is, why would we (rightly) value reliably formed belief as an end in itself, as opposed merely as a means to some further end?

Properly formulated, then, the swamping problem is thus a challenge to a particular conception of epistemic value that Goldman endorses. Now that we have a clear handle on the challenge posed by the swamping problem, we are in a position to consider how Goldman responds to this problem.<sup>11</sup>

## 2. GOLDMAN ON THE SWAMPING PROBLEM I: CONDITIONAL PROBABILITY

In a recent paper jointly authored with Erik Olsson (Goldman & Olsson 2009), Goldman offers two responses to the swamping problem. The first—which is described as the *conditional probability solution*—involves appeal to the future value of having a true belief which is reliably formed as opposed to one that is merely true. The second appeals to a process—which is described as *value autonomization*—whereby something can ‘inherit’ value from something else. Interestingly, while both authors endorse both responses to the swamping problem, they nonetheless note that Olsson’s preference is for the first response and Goldman’s preference is for the second response.<sup>12</sup> With this in mind, although I will comment on both of these proposals for dealing with the swamping problem, my focus will mostly be on the second proposal which Goldman favours.<sup>13</sup>

According to the conditional probability response to the swamping problem, the additional value that a reliable true belief has over a mere true belief is that the probability of having more true belief (of a similar kind) in the future is greater conditional on the subject having a reliable true belief that  $p$  than when conditional on the subject merely having a true belief that  $p$ . Goldman illustrates this point by appeal to what he takes to be the analogous case of gaining good coffee from a reliable coffee-making machine:

If a good cup of espresso is produced by a reliable espresso machine, and this machine remains at one’s disposal, then the probability that the next cup of espresso will be good is greater than the probability that that next cup of espresso will be good given that the first good cup was just luckily produced by an unreliable machine. [...] This probability enhancement is a valuable property to have. (Goldman & Olsson 2009, 28)

And what goes for good coffee is held to also hold for true belief. Where true belief is reliably formed the conditional probability that one will form further true beliefs is higher than it would be if that true belief were the lucky consequence of an unreliable belief-forming process.

Now one natural response to this sort of line of argument might be to contend that whether a particular reliable true belief has the extra value in play here is an entirely contingent matter. For example, if one knows that one will die in a few moments time, then it is hard to see why this line of argument would confer any additional value on a true belief that is reliably formed over a mere true belief, since one will be acutely aware of the fact that one won’t be having any future true beliefs.<sup>14</sup>

Goldman is sensitive to this issue, however, and he is careful to make clear that what is being claimed is not that this response to the swamping problem ensures that *all* reliably formed



true belief is *always* of greater value than mere true belief, but only that it is *generally* of greater value in the conditions that we find ourselves in. I think that this is entirely the right line to take. For one thing, the idea that knowledge is always and everywhere of more value than mere true belief is far from intuitive.<sup>15</sup> But perhaps more importantly, the swamping problem does not need such a robust conception of the value of knowledge in order for the argument to run anyway. If the swamping argument is correct, then knowledge is *never* of greater value relative to mere true belief. Hence, if Goldman is able to defend the claim that knowledge is in general, in the conditions we find ourselves in, of greater value than mere true belief, then he has answered this problem.

Even so, I do not find the conditional probability response to the swamping problem at all plausible. In order to see why, consider again the remarks just quoted regarding the analogy with the coffee case. There seems to be a simple error in play here. It is undeniably true that being in possession of a reliable coffee-making machine is valuable in virtue of the fact that it can produce additional good coffee in the future. But the key point is that this is a value that attaches to the machine and not to the cup of coffee that is produced by the machine. That is, it is not in dispute that reliable coffee-making machines are more valuable than unreliable coffee-making machines because only the former regularly produce good coffee. The issue, though, is whether a cup of coffee produced by a reliable coffee-making machine is more valuable than one not produced in this way. And the whole point of the swamping problem (as applied to coffee) is that the undeniable value of reliable coffee-making machines (including the fact that they can produce for you good coffee in the future) does not add value to *any particular cup of coffee*.

What goes for good coffee goes for true belief. It is not in dispute that reliable belief-forming processes are more valuable than unreliable belief-forming processes, and more valuable in virtue of the fact that they lead to further true beliefs. This much is just a consequence of veritism. What is in dispute is rather whether a *particular* true belief is of any greater value relative to a corresponding true belief in virtue of being reliably formed. The conditional probability response to the swamping problem does not seem to speak to this issue at all.<sup>16</sup>

### 3. GOLDMAN ON THE SWAMPING PROBLEM II: VALUE AUTONOMIZATION

This brings us to the second response to the swamping problem, which is the one that Goldman offers. This response appeals to a process that Goldman calls value autonomization, which is meant to be a particular way in which one kind of thing can derive value from its relationship to another kind of thing.

Key to Goldman's defence of this claim is to make a type-token distinction. He writes:

The swamping argument assumes that, according to reliabilism, the value of a token reliable process derives from the value of the token belief it produces. (Goldman & Olsson, 31)

Goldman wishes to resist this assumption:

When tokens of type  $T_1$  regularly cause tokens of type  $T_2$ , which has independent value, then type  $T_1$  tends to inherit (ascribed) value from type  $T_2$ . Furthermore, the inherited value accruing to type  $T_1$  is also assigned or imputed to each token of  $T_1$ , whether or not such a token causes a token of  $T_2$ . (Goldman & Olsson, 32)

The example that Goldman gives to illustrate this claim is that of money:

Money (especially paper money) is not the sort of thing that has fundamental value. But since possessing money (in non-trivial amounts) frequently produces events or states of affairs that do have fundamental value (pleasure, satisfaction, etc.), possessing money comes to be viewed as an instrumentally valuable type of state. Furthermore, each *token* of this type inherits instrumental value from the type, even if some tokens don't actually cause events or states of affairs with fundamental value. (Goldman & Olsson, 32)

It's not clear what Goldman means by 'fundamental' value here, but it must at least be a kind of non-instrumental value (even if it is restricted to a certain domain). So construed, the argument in play seems to be something like as follows. Money isn't in itself of any value, but as a general type its purchasing power creates a causal connection between possessing money and gaining certain goods which are valuable.<sup>17</sup> As a type, then, money over time acquires instrumental value, where this value is also ultimately conferred on the tokens of this type also, even though it remains the case that not every token of this type stands in the relevant causal relationship to valuable goods (e.g., where the money is unspent). Goldman is thus claiming that in certain conditions something which lacks value can acquire instrumental value in virtue of the causal relationship that the type stands in with regard to certain goods, even though not all tokens of that type stand in that causal relationship.

The immediate concern with this claim is that it is hard to see how it relates to the swamping problem. After all, the value that is being attributed to the relevant tokens—presumably, though it's not altogether clear from the passage itself, Goldman has in mind token events of possessing money—is just instrumental value. But if that's right, then if we apply this line of reasoning to reliabilism, then it won't offer us a way out of that problem.

For consider an exactly analogous line of reasoning with regard to reliabilism. Having a belief which is formed by a reliable belief-forming process is not the sort of thing that is in itself of value. But having reliable beliefs frequently produces events or states of affairs that do have non-instrumental (epistemic) value—*viz.*, true beliefs—and so having beliefs which are formed by

reliable belief-forming process comes to be viewed as instrumentally (epistemically) valuable. Furthermore, each token in this regard—presumably, the state of having a particular reliably formed belief—inherits this instrumental (epistemic) value, even though not every token is correlated with true belief.

As should be clear, this line of reasoning at most establishes the instrumental epistemic value of not just the relevant type (i.e., having beliefs which are formed by reliable belief-forming processes) but also the relevant tokens (i.e., having a particular belief which is formed by a particular reliable belief-forming process). But how does that claim gain us any purchase on the swamping problem as set out above? In particular, this claim seems to be entirely compatible with the premises of the swamping problem. The general axiological premise is clearly still in place. But also too is veritism, since it still remains true that all epistemic standings, whether construed *qua* type or *qua* token, are only of instrumental epistemic value relative to the non-instrumental epistemic good of true belief.

It becomes clear from Goldman's subsequent discussion, however, that he has something very specific in mind when it comes to value autonomization. In the 'money' example just given, the additional value that is being generated is of a specifically instrumental form, and that is why it is not helping him to resolve the swamping problem. But Goldman's hope, it turns out, is that in the epistemic case this process of value autonomization might actually generate non-instrumental (or, as he calls it, 'fundamental') value.

It is worth quoting Goldman's remarks here at some length:

Consider the relationship between (morally) good actions and good motives. The primary locus of moral value [...] is actions [...]. Actions, however, are not the only things regarded as morally good or valuable. We also value good motives [...]. Why do we value such motives? A straightforward explanation is that such motives regularly bring about corresponding actions, actions which themselves are valuable. It is therefore plausible that there is a pattern of inheritance by which value passes from types of actions to corresponding motive types, which regularly produce those actions. Notice that a token motive of an appropriate type is regarded as good or valuable even if it fails to produce a good action. [...] Despite failing to produce good consequences of a standard sort, the token motive is still good or valuable, presumably because such value is inherited from the type of which it is a token. And this value it retains autonomously, even without triggering an independently good action.

Good motives [...] are naturally thought of as good *in themselves*. (Goldman & Olsson, 33)

For the sake of argument we will grant the moral claims in play here, and in particular the general philosophical picture being put forward of the relationship between morally good actions and good motives.<sup>18</sup> What is salient for our purposes is that Goldman is using this case to argue that the process of value autonomization can generate non-instrumental value. That is, the idea is that the relationship between morally good actions (which have non-instrumental value) and good motives is such that via a pattern of inheritance this value over time transfers to tokens of the

latter, even in cases where the motives do not lead to good actions.

To begin with, let us suppose that Goldman could use a parallel argument to show that having a belief which is formed by a reliable belief-forming process is non-instrumentally epistemically valuable. That is, the primary locus of epistemic value is true belief, but we also epistemically value beliefs formed by reliable belief-forming processes because of the relationship they stand in to true belief. Thus, over time, beliefs which are formed by reliable belief-forming processes come to be regarded as non-instrumentally epistemically valuable too, even particular token beliefs of this type which are not in fact true.

This claim certainly would deal with the swamping argument, since it would now no longer be true that the epistemic value of an epistemic standing like being the result of a reliable belief-forming process is necessarily instrumental epistemic value relative to the epistemic good of true belief. But if that's right, then there is an epistemic value that attaches to this epistemic standing which is not swamped by the epistemic value that attaches to true belief.

Now one might think that to make this move is to give up on veritism, and thus that Goldman is here arguing himself into a contradiction, given his endorsement of this account of epistemic value. I think that would be too quick, however. What is certainly true is that the formulation of veritism offered above as (P2\*) is inconsistent with this dialectical move, but I think a more sympathetic reading of what Goldman is up to here is that he is trying to highlight an ambiguity in our thinking about veritism. For Goldman, veritism is the view that ultimately all that matters from the epistemic perspective is true belief (see, e.g., Goldman & Olsson 2009, 24). Although that claim does seem to be naturally formulated as something like (P2\*), the point about value autonomization appears to show that this is not the best rendering of this thesis.

For notice that the account being offered of the non-instrumental epistemic value of having beliefs that are formed by reliable belief-forming processes still grants that this epistemic value is in an important sense *derivative* on the epistemic value of true beliefs. Recall that in the moral sphere the claim is that the non-instrumental value of good motives is *inherited* from the non-instrumental value of good actions, such that the latter has an axiological primacy over the former. The value autonomization that occurs in this realm, and which leads to good motives being of non-instrumental moral value, is thus compatible with a moral analogue of veritism which says that ultimately all that matters from a moral point of view is morally good action. Equally, in the epistemic sphere Goldman can claim that because the non-instrumental epistemic value of having a belief formed by a reliable belief-forming process is inherited from the non-instrumental epistemic value of true belief, so this need not be in conflict with the claim that all that matters from an epistemic point of view is true belief. When properly formulated, then, veritism is compatible with the non-instrumental value of having a belief which is formed via a reliable belief-

forming process.

So if Goldman can use this line of argument to show that having a belief which is formed by a reliable belief-forming process is of non-instrumental epistemic value, then he does seem to have a way of dealing with the swamping problem while retaining his veritism. Everything thus hangs on whether he can argue for the non-instrumental value of this epistemic standing in this way.

Unfortunately, the process of value autonomization, even if plausible in the moral case, doesn't seem to be at all plausible in the epistemic case. In fact, when applied to the epistemic case this process seems to represent a kind of *fetishism* about reliable belief-forming processes. Given veritism, reliable belief-forming processes are initially only instrumentally epistemically valuable since they enable one to gain the non-instrumental epistemic good of true belief. Over time, though, the correlation between these belief-forming processes and true belief is meant to ensure that we start to treat reliability in our belief-forming processes as itself of non-instrumental epistemic value. As a claim about human psychology this may well be right, but the key point would remain that to treat reliable belief-forming processes as being of non-instrumental epistemic value in this way would be to confer a value on them which by veritistic lights is simply not warranted.

The case of money is a good analogy in this regard. It is undoubtedly true, for example, that the correlations between having money and gaining goods which the subject believes are non-instrumentally valuable can over time lead a subject to regard money as being itself non-instrumentally valuable. But to ascribe such a value to money is mistaken, as it is simply not the kind of thing that has non-instrumental value (think, for example, of the miser in this regard). The same goes by veritistic lights for reliable true belief. Another way of putting this point is that while it is undoubtedly true that agents can over time come to treat things which are of instrumental value (such as money or reliable true belief) as being of non-instrumental value, it doesn't follow from the fact that something is valued non-instrumentally that it is of non-instrumental value (as the case of the miser illustrates).<sup>19</sup>

I would imagine that Goldman would respond to this objection by insisting that when it comes to its axiology the epistemic domain is more akin to the moral domain than the financial domain. Thus, he will contend that it is more appropriate to compare the relationship between reliably formed true belief and mere true belief to morally good motives and morally good actions rather than to money and the goods and services which money can acquire. The problem, though, is that moral value seems to be very different from epistemic value.

I noted earlier that we cannot obviously conclude from the fact that something (e.g., a belief) has epistemic value that it is therefore of value in general. True belief may be of non-instrumental epistemic value, but it would be a big jump to infer that true belief is therefore non-

instrumentally valuable *simpliciter*. Moral value is very different in this respect, however, in that typically to say that something is morally valuable *is* to say that it is valuable *simpliciter*.

Think, for example, about the claim that morally good actions are non-instrumentally valuable. Clearly, this claim at least entails that they are non-instrumentally valuable from a moral point of view. But intuitively, it entails a stronger claim also—*viz.*, that these actions are non-instrumentally valuable from *any* point of view. This is not to deny that there may be other axes of evaluation relative to which there might be some sort of trade-off when it comes to assessing the overall goodness of an action. Perhaps, say, practical or aesthetic or epistemic (etc.,) considerations also have a role to play here. But at most these considerations surely only *blunt* the extent of the non-instrumental value in play, and cannot completely undermine it. For imagine what it would mean for, say, a practical consideration to completely undermine the non-instrumental moral value of an action. Can the practical disbenefits of doing something morally right *ever* ensure that, all things considered, doing the morally right action lacks any non-instrumental goodness?

From an axiological point of view, then, the moral domain is very different from other domains, and certainly a domain like the epistemic, where there seems no direct route from something being of epistemic non-instrumental value to it being of non-instrumental value *simpliciter*. But with this disanalogy in play, it is far from clear that there can plausibly be a process of value autonomization in the epistemic case which generates non-instrumental value.

That is, I think that the story Goldman offers of how value autonomization works in the moral case is only plausible because of the special nature of moral goodness. If the morally good is non-instrumentally good *simpliciter*, then it is reasonable to contend that that which is a reliable means to the morally good is non-instrumentally good *simpliciter* too. For example, if morally good actions are a central part of a good life—i.e., a life of flourishing—and morally good motives are the best route to morally good actions, then it is plausible to suppose that morally good motives are a central part of a good life too. Thus even if the moral value of the latter is ultimately derivative on the moral value of the former, nonetheless they are both of general non-instrumental value.

In order to run the same argument for epistemic value, however, we would need some basis for holding that what is non-instrumentally epistemically good (i.e., true belief according to veritism) is non-instrumentally good *simpliciter*. Not only has Goldman not offered us a basis for this claim, but such a thesis seems in any case to be suspect. True belief may be non-instrumentally valuable from an epistemic perspective, but it is hard to see why it would be thought to be non-instrumentally valuable *simpliciter*.

Note that I am not claiming here that there aren't epistemic goods which are non-

instrumentally valuable *simpliciter*. Indeed, I think there are such goods, and that their goodness precisely consists in the role they play in a life of flourishing.<sup>20</sup> Crucially, though, the kind of epistemic goods that might plausibly play such a role—such as wisdom, understanding, and other kinds of sophisticated cognitive achievements—are very different from the kind of epistemic good that is the focus of veritism—*viz.*, simple, unadorned, true belief.

My ultimate worry about Goldman’s appeal to value autonomization is thus that it only looks plausible because the example given concerns a domain which, unlike the epistemic domain, clearly appeals to a general non-instrumental value.

#### 4. HOW A VERITIST SHOULD RESPOND TO THE SWAMPING PROBLEM

So what are Goldman’s options? There are some heroic routes that he might take, and an obvious one would be to maintain that the epistemic domain is on a par with the moral domain, such that non-instrumental epistemic value has the same kind of axiological status as non-instrumental moral value. Perhaps Goldman will be tempted by such a line. I think, however, that he would be better advised to abandon the two responses to the swamping problem that he has defended, and take a more direct approach to this problem.

In common with many commentators on this topic, Goldman tends to move seamlessly between general claims about value and claims which, on the surface of things anyway, seem to be about particular species of value, such as epistemic or moral value. In this paper, though, we have been keen to keep all the relevant distinctions in place. But with those distinctions in place, let’s look again at the swamping problem that we formulated above:

##### *The Swamping Problem for Veritism*

- (P1\*) If the value of a property possessed by an item is only instrumental value relative to a further good and that good is already present in that item, then this property can confer no additional value to that item.
- (P2\*) Epistemic properties are only instrumentally valuable relative to the good of true belief. [Veritism]
- (C\*) Knowledge is no more valuable than mere true belief. [From (P1\*), (P2\*)]

This problem looks worrying for someone like Goldman, precisely because he denies (C\*) and holds that knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief. But with the foregoing in mind it ought to be clear that the swamping argument doesn’t really support (C\*) after all. For notice that the kind of value in play in (P2\*) is specifically *epistemic* value, and hence it follows that the kind of value at issue in the conclusion should be epistemic value too. That is, what (P1\*) and (P2\*)

support is not (C\*), but rather the weaker (C\*\*):

(C\*\*) Knowledge is no more epistemically valuable than mere true belief. [From (P1\*), (P2\*)]

Here is the crux. The conclusion of this reformulated version of the swamping argument is entirely compatible with the thought that knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief, which is what Goldman wants to defend. For the claim being made in (C\*\*) is only that knowledge is not *epistemically* more valuable than mere true belief, and that is a much more specific claim. With that in mind, it is entirely open for someone like Goldman to maintain, in line with his veritism, that all that really counts from an epistemic point of view is true belief, while maintaining that there is nonetheless more to the value of knowledge than the epistemic value of true belief.

Indeed, I think Goldman is on strong ground in this regard, in that it seems that there are at least lots of *practical* benefits to having knowledge as opposed to having merely true belief, and that means that there is a greater instrumental non-epistemic value to knowing as opposed to merely truly believing. Indeed, there may even be wider benefits which are specific to knowledge that extend beyond the practical. Perhaps, for example, having knowledge plays some fundamental role in a life of flourishing, such that it inherits a general non-instrumental value from playing this role?<sup>21</sup>

In any case, it seems to me that the reason why Goldman gets vexed about this problem is because he grants—to be fair, in common with most parties to this debate—that the swamping problem is about the general question of the greater value of knowledge relative to true belief. But once it becomes clear that this problem is specifically concerned with the greater epistemic value of knowledge relative to true belief, then there is nothing here that the veritist should worry about. Veritism, after all, is a claim about epistemic value, and so construed it is simply a *consequence* of the view that knowledge is no more valuable, from a specifically epistemic point of view, than mere true belief. But, crucially, it does not follow from this that knowledge is not more valuable than mere true belief.

At the outset of our discussion we cited Goldman's own remarks on the value problem:

The extra-value-of-knowledge [...] problem can be used to test the adequacy of accounts of knowledge. Suppose an analysis of knowledge is incompatible with knowledge having an added value [*relative to mere true belief*]. That would be a pretty strong argument against the adequacy of that analysis. (Goldman & Olsson 2009, 22)

That is, the challenge Goldman sees as being laid-down by the value problem for knowledge is that one's epistemology had better not be incompatible with the claim that knowledge has more value than true belief. Given the foregoing, however, it should be clear that Goldman's epistemology—i.e., his reliabilism and, more generally, his veritism—passes the test that is being



laid down here. For while veritism entails that reliable true belief (and thus knowledge) is of no more epistemic value than mere true belief, veritism is entirely *compatible* with the claim that knowledge is generally more valuable than mere true belief. Appeals to conditional probability or a complex process of value autonomization are thus by-the-by. Properly formulated, the swamping problem poses no challenge for Goldman's view at all.<sup>22</sup>

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See, for example, Jones (1997), Swinburne (1999), Riggs (2002*a*; 2002*b*), Kvanvig (2003) and Zagzebski (2003).
- <sup>2</sup> See, especially, Kvanvig (2003).
- <sup>3</sup> This example is due to Zagzebski (2003).
- <sup>4</sup> See Goldman (1999) for more on this distinction between weak and strong senses of ‘know’.
- <sup>5</sup> See, for example, Goldman & Olsson (2009, 22-23).
- <sup>6</sup> Goldman makes this point himself. See Goldman & Olsson (2009, 22-23).
- <sup>7</sup> I’m not the first to make this point. For example, Percival (2003, 32-33) makes essentially the same claim.
- <sup>8</sup> Goldman defends veritism in a number of places, but see especially Goldman (1999; 2002). Elsewhere—see, e.g., Pritchard, Millar & Haddock (2010, ch. 1) and Pritchard (2011*b*)—I’ve referred to veritism as *epistemic value T-monism*, to make clear that this is a conception of epistemic value where there is only one fundamental epistemic good, and where the fundamental epistemic good in question is true belief rather than some other epistemic standing. For more on veritism, see David (2001), and the exchange between David (2005) and Kvanvig (2005).
- <sup>9</sup> Note that my formulation of veritism implicitly takes it as given that being true is not an epistemic property of a belief. Nothing hangs on this (if one prefers, one could simply add a *caveat* to make clear that it is epistemic properties of belief *other than being true* that are at issue here). Note also that veritism as it stands is logically stronger than it needs to be for the purposes of this argument. What is important for this argument, after all, is just that the epistemic properties *which are relevant to knowledge* (and which are thus epistemic properties of beliefs) are only instrumentally valuable relative to the epistemic good of true belief. We will set this complication to one side in what follows.
- <sup>10</sup> This is an instance of the more general point that Geach (1956) makes about predicative and attributive adjectives. In particular, from ‘*x* is a big flea’ it does not follow that ‘*x* is a flea’ and ‘*x* is big’, since the claim being made is only the attributive claim that *x* is big *for a flea*. (Compare: ‘*x* is a red flea’).
- <sup>11</sup> For further discussion of the nature of the swamping problem—and in particular how this problem relates to the more general problem regarding the value (epistemic or otherwise) of knowledge—see Pritchard, Millar & Haddock (2010, ch. 1) and Pritchard (2011*b*). See also Pritchard & Turri (2011; cf. Pritchard 2007).
- <sup>12</sup> See Goldman & Olsson (2009, 27).
- <sup>13</sup> For ease of expression, in what follows I will also just refer to Goldman, and not also to Olsson.
- <sup>14</sup> This is essentially the critical line to this response to the swamping problem that is offered by Meylan (2007).
- <sup>15</sup> That said, and as Goldman & Olsson (2009, 30) note, some commentators, such as Riggs (2002*b*, 79) and Kvanvig (2003, 57), are inclined to defend the stronger claim.
- <sup>16</sup> Olsson (2007; 2009) offers a more developed version of the conditional probability response to the swamping problem. Although I do not think the more developed version of this response is plausible, it would take me too far afield to explore it here.
- <sup>17</sup> I here (and in what follows) set aside the complicating case where money happens to be valuable in other ways, such as by being beautiful, or by having further uses beyond serving as a means of exchange.
- <sup>18</sup> For what it’s worth, I find the idea that morally good actions and morally good motives can be disengaged from each other in the manner implied here extremely suspect.
- <sup>19</sup> Interestingly, Goldman does offer a brief discussion of this distinction between genuine and merely attributed value (see Goldman & Olsson 2009, 34-5), but he misidentifies the problem that this distinction raises for value autonomization. This is because he thinks that an objector might appeal to this distinction in order to undermine the very idea of value autonomization, when in practice the most obvious use of this distinction from a critical point of view will be with regard to the specific application of value autonomization to the epistemic case.
- <sup>20</sup> I discuss epistemic goodness in a number of places. See, especially, Pritchard (2009*a*; 2009*b*; 2011*b*) and Pritchard, Millar & Haddock (2010, chs. 1-4).
- <sup>21</sup> Elsewhere—see, e.g., Pritchard (2009*a*; 2009*b*) and Pritchard, Millar & Haddock (2010, ch. 2)—I have argued against the idea that knowledge has general non-instrumental value, but it would take me too far afield to explore this issue here.
- <sup>22</sup> This paper was written while I was in receipt of a Phillip Leverhulme Prize, and I am grateful to them for their support. Elements of this paper were presented at a conference at the University of Copenhagen in 2011, and I am grateful to the audience for their comments, particularly Alvin Goldman and Erik Olsson. Thanks also to Hilary Kornblith for comments on a previous draft.