WHAT IS THE SWAMPING PROBLEM?

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ABSTRACT. The swamping problem is often presented as being a difficulty which only besets certain specific epistemological proposals. It is argued here, however, that the swamping problem in fact poses a far more general challenge to epistemology than many have realised. In particular, it is claimed that this problem is best understood in terms of an inconsistent triad of claims, each of which is highly plausible when taken individually: (i) a general thesis about value, (ii) a more specific thesis about epistemic value, and (iii) a statement of a popular view in epistemology which I call *epistemic value T-monism*. With this inconsistent triad clearly set-out, it becomes transparent what the dialectical options are for those who wish to respond to the swamping problem. In particular, one is able to map out the various responses to this problem in the literature in terms of which of the members of this inconsistent triad they deny.

1. Most will agree that there is a constitutive relationship between belief and truth. Often, this relationship is expressed in terms of the slogan that belief in some sense 'aims' at the truth; that the *telos* of belief is truth. I think this slogan is essentially correct, though we need to be careful how we are understanding it. After all, since most beliefs are involuntarily formed, we do not want to be reading this slogan in such a way that it commits us to supposing that the agent forming the belief has some sort of occurent intention to form true beliefs whenever a belief is formed. Instead, I take it that what is meant by this claim is rather that what makes a belief the kind of propositional attitude that it is is that it is sensitive to considerations which indicate that the belief is either true or false. This is why one cannot self-consciously regard oneself as having overwhelming reason to think that a proposition is false and yet believe it nonetheless, for this would not then be a case of belief, but rather wishful thinking or something like that.[1]

Given that belief has this aim, then a primary way of evaluating beliefs is in terms of whether they achieve this aim: whether they are true. Of course, there are other ways of

assessing beliefs where truth does not enter the picture but, since they do not concern the aim of belief, they will not be *primary* ways, in the sense that I am using the term here.

One might, for example, evaluate beliefs in terms of how useful they are. Believing that one is very good-looking may be very useful, for instance, in that it gives you lots of confidence in social encounters, even if it isn't true. But that there are these other types of belief appraisal does not undermine the fact that a primary form of belief appraisal is in terms of its relationship to the truth. This kind of belief appraisal is paradigmatically *epistemic*.

Given the foregoing, it becomes very tempting to suppose that this form of epistemic evaluation is not just *a* primary form of belief appraisal, but is rather *the* primary form of belief appraisal. That is, one might be tempted to endorse a view that I am going to call *epistemic value T-monism*, a position which I think is widely accepted within epistemology:[2]

Epistemic Value T-Monism
True belief is the sole ultimate fundamental epistemic good.[3]

What do I mean here by 'fundamental'? Well, a good is fundamental, according to how I am using the term, if its value is not instrumental value relative to further goods of the same type. In terms of the value of true belief, the claim is thus that the value of true belief is not instrumental value relative to further *epistemic* goods. Notice that this way of describing the matter leaves it open as to whether true belief is non-instrumentally (i.e., finally) valuable. Perhaps it is, or perhaps it isn't and ultimately the value of true belief is just instrumental value relative to further non-epistemic goods, such as the achievement of our practical goals. Either way, true belief counts as a fundamental epistemic good on this view.

The reason why granting that the primary way of evaluating beliefs is in terms of their truth seems to lead to this position is that it strongly suggests both that there could be no further form of *epistemic* appraisal of a belief (hence, true belief is a *fundamental* epistemic good), and also that all other epistemic goods ultimately derive their epistemic value from the epistemic value of true belief (hence, true belief is the sole *ultimate* epistemic good).

This second claim might not seem so obvious. Aren't there lots of other epistemic goods beside true belief, such as knowledge, justification, rationality etc.,? Well, yes, but the thought is that what makes these goods epistemic goods, on this view, is that they are a means to true belief. Thus, the epistemic value of, say, justification, is due to the fact that justified beliefs tend to be true beliefs. Hence, the epistemic value of this good is parasitic on

the epistemic value of true belief in the sense that the epistemic value of this good is instrumental epistemic value relative to the fundamental epistemic good of true belief.

I think that many are attracted to epistemic value T-monism, and attracted to it, at least in substantial part, because of the intuition that we started with: that belief in the relevant sense aims at truth (and all that this implies). As we will see, however, there is a fundamental difficulty facing this position, although few have recognised this fact.

2. This difficulty is the so-called 'swamping problem', as defended most prominently by Jonathan Kvanvig (e.g., 2003), but also put forward in various forms by Ward Jones (1997), Richard Swinburne (1999; 2000), Wayne Riggs (2002*b*), Linda Zagzebski (2003) and John Greco (*forthcominga*). The standard way of expressing this problem is as posing a difficulty not for a general epistemological thesis like epistemic value T-monism but rather for particular epistemological proposals, such as reliabilism.[4] With the argument so directed, here is how it goes.[5]

Imagine two great cups of coffee identical in every relevant respect—they look the same, taste the same, smell the same, are of the same quantity, and so on. Clearly, we value great cups of coffee. Moreover, given that we value great cups of coffee, it follows that we also value reliable coffee-making machines—i.e., machines which regularly produce good coffee. Notice, however, that once we've got the great coffee, we don't then care whether it was produced by a reliable coffee-making machine. That is, that the great coffee was produced by a reliable coffee-making machine doesn't contribute any additional value to it. In order to see this, note that if one were told that only one of the great identical cups of coffee before one had been produced by a reliable coffee-making machine, this would have no bearing on which cup one preferred; one would still be indifferent on this score. In short, whatever value is conferred on a cup of coffee through being produced by a reliable coffee-making machine, this value is 'swamped' by the value conferred on that coffee in virtue of it being a great cup of coffee.

The supposed import of this example to reliabilist theories of knowledge—theories which hold that knowledge is reliably formed true belief—is that it follows, by analogy, that if we are faced with two identical true beliefs, one of them reliably formed and one not, it shouldn't make any difference to us which one we have. After all, we only value reliable

belief-forming processes as a means to true belief, just as we only value reliable coffee-making machines as a means to great coffee, and so once we have the good in question—true belief or great coffee—then it shouldn't matter to us whether that good was in addition acquired in a reliable fashion. Intuitively, though, it *is* better to have reliable true belief rather than just mere true belief. Moreover, if, as the reliabilist maintains, reliable true belief is knowledge, then this intuition is stronger still. For surely many of us have the intuition that it would be better to have knowledge rather than mere true belief.

More generally, the claim implicit in the coffee cup case is 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. This is, of course, a general thesis about value. Moreover, as the coffee cup example illustrates, there seems every reason to think that it is true.

3. Interestingly, once we recognise that what is driving the swamping argument is this general thesis about value, then it ceases to become plausible that it should only affect reliabilist views. After all, the general value thesis just described will have an impact on *any* epistemological proposal which has the same relevant features as reliabilism—*viz*., which treats the epistemic standing in question as instrumentally valuable only relative to the good of true belief.

For example, suppose that we only value justification because it is a means to true belief—i.e., we only value it instrumentally relative to the good of true belief. If that's right, then we could just as well run the swamping argument for justification as we can for reliability, since if the swamping argument works at all then any value that is conferred on a belief in virtue of its being justified will be swamped by the value conferred by the belief's being true. The problem, then, is not specific to reliabilism.[6]

Indeed, once we recognise the role that this entirely general thesis about value plays in the swamping argument, then I think it starts to become clear that the real challenge posed by the swamping problem is not to any specific epistemological proposal but rather to epistemic value T-monism. The reason for this is that epistemic value T-monism entails that

any epistemic value that is contributed to a belief in virtue of it enjoying an epistemic standing like being justified or reliably formed is necessarily instrumental epistemic value relative to the fundamental epistemic good of true belief. But if that's right, then the swamping argument, if effective, demonstrates that there cannot be anything more epistemically valuable than mere true belief. *A fortiori*, it demonstrates that knowledge cannot be more epistemically valuable than mere true belief.

More formally, we can express the swamping argument in terms of an inconsistent triad of claims. The first claim is just the thesis of epistemic value T-monism, which we will express as (1):

(1) The epistemic value conferred on a belief by that belief having an epistemic property is instrumental epistemic value relative to the further epistemic good of true belief.

The second claim is the general thesis about value that we noted above:

(2) 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 it can confer no additional value.

As we have just seen, however, (1) and (2) entail that there cannot be an epistemic standing which is epistemically more valuable than mere true belief. After all, whatever epistemic value an epistemic standing contributes could only, given (1), be instrumental epistemic value relative to the epistemic good of true belief. But (2) makes clear that this value gets swamped by the value of true belief. Thus, there can never be a true belief which, in virtue of possessing an epistemic property, is epistemically more valuable than a corresponding mere true belief.

In order to get our inconsistent triad, then, all we require is a thesis to the effect that there is an epistemic standing that is at least sometimes epistemically more valuable than mere true belief. For the sake of simplicity, we will here focus on the epistemic standing of knowledge, since I take it that many have the strong intuition that knowledge is better, from an epistemic point of view, than mere true belief. We thus get (3):

(3) Knowledge that *p* is sometimes more epistemically valuable than mere true belief that *p*.

I will comment further on how we should understand (3), and why we should find it so compelling, in a moment.

In short, then, (1), (2) and (3) are jointly inconsistent because if straightforwardly follows from (1) and (2) that (3) is false. Thus, if we accept (1) and (2), we are thereby committed to the denial of (3). Given that this is an inconsistent triad, it follows that one must reject one of the claims that make up this triad. One option, of course, is just to reject the general claim about value expressed as (2). Unfortunately, I can see no way of objecting to this claim, nor am I aware of any good objections to this thesis in the literature (typically, responses to the swamping argument focus on other elements of the argument than this claim). Accordingly, in what follows I am going to take this thesis for granted and focus instead on the status of the other two members of this triad, since this is where I think the real promise of responding to this problem lies.

4. Let me start with the option of denying (3). In particular, it is important to emphasize that (i) it is specifically *epistemic* value that is at issue here, and (ii) that the thesis is only that knowledge is *sometimes* epistemically more valuable than mere true belief. This is important because if (3) were the claim that knowledge is *always* and *all things considered* more valuable than mere true belief then it would be obviously false. After all, there may be certain propositions which, if you knew them, would cause you great pain, pain that is not caused by you merely truly believing them. In such a case, it would clearly be better, all things considered, to have true belief rather than knowledge. Clearly, however, the example just given is not a counterexample to (3). After all, the greater value of true belief over knowledge in this case is an all things considered value, rather than a specifically epistemic value. Moreover, (3) doesn't say that knowledge must always be more valuable than mere true belief anyway, even when the value is restricted to specifically epistemic value.

Still, once it is clarified that it is specifically epistemic value that is at issue in (3), I think that many might well be tempted to argue that the right way to respond to this inconsistent triad is to concede that, from an epistemic point of view, there is nothing better about knowledge (or, indeed, any other epistemic standing) compared with mere true belief.[7] On this proposal, what makes it the case that knowledge is sometimes a better thing than mere true belief (assuming that it is sometimes better, all things considered) is purely a function of its additional *practical* (i.e., non-epistemic) value. That is, the greater value of knowledge compared with mere true belief is indeed an additional instrumental value, but

this value is not swamped by the value of true belief because it is not epistemic value that is at issue but practical value. Moreover, a further advantage of this proposal is that it can explain away our intuition that knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief in terms of a failure to distinguish between all things considered value and specifically epistemic value.

Interestingly, it seems that Plato might well have been inclined to respond to our inconsistent triad in this way. Recall that in the *Meno* Plato raises the question of what makes knowledge more valuable than mere true belief, and conjures up the famous story of the road to Larissa to make this worry vivid. Adapted slightly, the worry he poses is this: given that a true belief about the correct way to Larissa and knowledge of the correct way to Larissa generate no practical differences (either way one gets what one wants, to get to Larissa), why should we suppose that knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief?

It is important to note that the problem that Plato is expressing here is very different to the problem posed by the swamping problem. In particular, what Plato wants is an explanation of why knowledge is of greater *practical* value than mere true belief, with the Larissa story meant to be a reason for thinking that this might not be so. Indeed, notice that the solution that Plato sketches to this problem in the *Meno*—which appeals to the stability of knowledge as opposed to mere true belief—is explicitly meant to be a story which accounts for the practical value of knowledge. On this view, the reason why knowledge is better than mere true belief if this 'stability' story is correct has nothing to do with our epistemic goals—it is not guaranteed that stable true belief is better from an epistemic point of view than mere true belief—but everything to do with our practical goals. The thought is explicitly that we can do a lot more, from a practical point of view, with stable true belief than we can with mere true belief.

Plato's problem, then, is not our problem. Nevertheless, the fact that Plato is only concerned with the greater practical value of knowledge might make us wonder whether it is important to us to defend the specific claim that knowledge is better than mere true belief from a purely epistemic point of view. After all, one might argue, in a broadly Platonic fashion, that knowledge is generally of greater all things considered value than mere true belief whilst simultaneously granting that from a purely epistemic point of view there is no additional value to be had. Moreover, notice that one key advantage of this response to the problem is that one is able to retain epistemic value T-monism (and hence (1)), and hence respect the intuitions about belief and truth which, as we saw above, motivate that thesis.

If (3) were the strong claim that knowledge is *always* epistemically more valuable than mere true belief, then I think this sort of line would have a lot of plausibility. Given that we have seen that (3) is in fact rather the very weak claim that only *sometimes* knowledge is epistemically more valuable than mere true belief, however, it starts to look implausible. After all, consider the following scenario. Suppose that someone comes to you and says that in a moment one of two scenarios will obtain: either one will have a true belief that *p* or one will have knowledge that *p* (where one does not know which proposition is at issue). Furthermore, it is stipulated that all the practical consequences are kept fixed in both scenarios, so there will be no practical benefit to choosing the one option over the other. Nevertheless, shouldn't one choose knowledge rather than mere true belief? If knowledge is even sometimes better than mere true belief from an epistemic point of view, then this would account for this intuition. In contrast, those who defend the claim that (3) is simply false seem unable to account for this intuition at all.[8]

5. Assuming that one accepts (2), however, which we are taking for granted here—and one thinks that the argument is valid—then the only other premise that can be denied is (1). Interestingly, there are two very different ways of denying this premise. In particular, while any response to the swamping problem which denied (1) would be committed to denying epistemic value T-monism, it does not follow that in denying this thesis one is thereby endorsing epistemic pluralism.

The quick way to see this is to note that there are different ways of being an epistemic value monist than being a T-monist. Consider, for example, someone like Timothy Williamson (e.g., 2000), who has explicitly argued for what he calls a 'knowledge-first' epistemology. Although (as far as I am aware), he has not endorsed such a view in print, presumably he would be very attracted, given his wider epistemological views, to an epistemic value monism of the following form:

Epistemic Value K-Monism:
Knowledge is the sole ultimate fundamental epistemic good.

According to this view, only knowledge is the ultimate fundamental epistemic good, which means that the value of all other epistemic goods is to be understood along instrumental lines relative to this fundamental good.

On this view, there is no reason to assent to (1), and thus the argument cannot even get started. Moreover, notice that one cannot straightforwardly run a swamping argument against this view. For what motivated the swamping argument described above was that we were comparing mere true belief with a more elevated epistemic standing, and asking the question of why the latter epistemic standing, from an epistemic point of view, should be more valuable. With epistemic value K-monism in play, however, the question of why knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief has a straightforward answer: because knowledge, unlike true belief, is a fundamental epistemic value.

Of course, in order to motivate such a position one would need to give it the further theoretical support that it requires. More specifically, one would also need to revisit the intuition about the relationship between belief and truth that we began with. On this alternative view, presumably, the aim, in the relevant sense, of belief is not truth at all but knowledge. But, of course, Williamson, for one, would be quite happy with *that* claim.

6. But suppose that one does not wish to go in this direction. Indeed, suppose one is tempted to conclude, on the basis of this argument, that there is more than one fundamental epistemic value and hence deny (1) by endorsing epistemic value pluralism. What, now, are one's options?

To begin with, notice that simply opting for a form of epistemic value pluralism might not be enough by itself to rescue our intuition that knowledge is at least sometimes epistemically more valuable than mere true belief. Consider, for example, a form of epistemic value pluralism which said that both true belief and a further epistemic property—let's call it 'X'—were fundamental epistemic goods. Simply arguing for such a position would not, however, be enough to ensure the truth of (3). After all, suppose that it were the case that, necessarily, when one knows a proposition, one's belief cannot exhibit the target epistemic property, X. Although this may be unlikely, this doesn't seem to be a possibility that we can rule out *a priori*, since it depends upon one's wider epistemological commitments (in particular, what theory of knowledge one endorses). If this were the case, however, then

clearly that X is an epistemic property which, in addition to true belief, is fundamentally epistemically valuable would not suffice to ensure that knowledge is sometimes epistemically more valuable than mere true belief, and hence (3) would still be in question. The whole point of denying (1) in the face of this inconsistent triad, however, is surely so that one is able to consistently endorse (2) and (3).

Accordingly, what is required of this strategy is some way of denying (1) so that (3) gets the support that it requires. In particular, what is needed is a form of epistemic value pluralism which can account for the fact that knowledge is sometimes of greater epistemic value than mere true belief.

7. Consider, for example, the kind of epistemic value pluralism endorsed by Kvanvig (e.g., 2003). Kvanvig argues that there are several fundamental epistemic goods other than true belief, the chief example that he offers in this respect being understanding. Interestingly, however, Kvanvig does not offer his epistemic value pluralism as a means of rescuing the intuition that knowledge is epistemically more valuable than mere true belief, since he instead uses the swamping argument to demonstrate that we are mistaken in thinking that knowledge is a particularly valuable epistemic standing, as opposed to understanding. Accordingly, it seems that Kvanvig would respond to our inconsistent triad by rejecting *both* (1) and (3).[9]

I don't think that this can be the full story, however, for while Kvanvig argues that understanding is not a species of knowledge, he does not argue for the stronger claim that it is never the case that when one knows a proposition one's true belief also has the relevant epistemic property of understanding. Indeed, although the details of his view are too involved to be usefully expounded here, his conception of understanding and its relationship to knowledge in fact strongly suggests that it is quite often the case that when one has what he calls 'propositional' understanding, one will also have knowledge of the corresponding proposition.[10] If this is right, though, then Kvanvig ought to be willing to accept (3) after all, and thereby accept that knowledge is at least sometimes epistemically more valuable than mere true belief, since in those cases where knowledge and understanding coincide, the known true belief in question will have an epistemic value which is greater than the epistemic value of the corresponding mere true belief. The ultimate problem posed by the swamping

argument on Kvanvig's view, then, is thus not for (3) at all, but rather for epistemic value T-monism (i.e., (1)).

8. Nevertheless, I think that Kvanvig is onto something here when he seems to in effect treat the swamping argument as ultimately undermining both (1) and (3). For suppose that one argued for the negation of (1) by appeal to a form of epistemic value pluralism which treats knowledge as sometimes epistemically more valuable than mere true belief because of the fundamental epistemic value of an epistemic property which is only sometimes present when one has knowledge (such as understanding). Indeed, just to make this point particularly vivid, suppose that one argued for the negation of (1) by appeal to a form of epistemic value pluralism which treats knowledge as *always* epistemically more valuable than mere true belief because of the fundamental epistemic value of an epistemic property which is *always* present when one has knowledge, even though it is not sufficient, with true belief, for knowledge (i.e., the epistemic property in question is merely necessary for knowledge). Would we regard such a stance as demonstrating that knowledge has the kind of epistemic value that we typically suppose it to have?

I think not. In order to see this, notice that part of what is at issue in the wider debate about epistemic value is the central role that knowledge plays in epistemological inquiry. If it were to turn out, however, that knowledge is only of greater epistemic value than mere true belief because of the greater epistemic value of a necessary component of knowledge (still less, a non-necessary component), then that would surely threaten the central role that knowledge plays in epistemological theorizing almost as much as the claim that knowledge is *never* of greater epistemic value than mere true belief. After all, why should we now care whether we have knowledge, specifically, rather than just true belief plus the extra fundamentally valuable epistemic property?[11]

Ideally, then, what we want is a defence of (3) which is able to support our wider intuition that knowledge is worthy of the central focus that it enjoys in epistemological theorising. The most straightforward way of doing this within the model of epistemic pluralism would simply be to argue that knowledge is itself a fundamental epistemic value. The trouble with this suggestion, however, that it is hard to see why knowledge should be a

fundamental epistemic value, rather than being an epistemic standing which is instrumentally epistemically valuable relative to the epistemic good of true belief.

9. Perhaps, though, there is another way to think about this problem. As I noted back in §1 above, an epistemic value can be 'fundamental', as I am using the term, and yet not be finally (i.e., non-instrumentally) valuable. All that is required for it to qualify as fundamental is that it not be instrumentally valuable relative to any further epistemic good. Similarly, one could offer a form of epistemic value pluralism which was not committed to any final epistemic values. For example, perhaps the reason why both true belief and understanding are fundamental epistemic values is because they are instrumentally valuable relative to some further non-epistemic good. Relatedly, one could defend the thesis that knowledge is fundamentally epistemically valuable without being thereby committed to thinking that knowledge is finally valuable.

Equally, however, one might opt for a form of epistemic value pluralism which *did* appeal to final value. Perhaps, for example, understanding is the sort of thing that is good for its own sake, regardless of any further instrumental value that it might generate?[12] Similarly, perhaps the reason why knowledge is a fundamental epistemic value is precisely *because* it is finally valuable? Indeed, those who wish to resist the swamping argument by appeal to epistemic value pluralism tend to precisely make a move of this sort. That is, while they grant that true belief is a (mere) fundamental epistemic good in the sense that I am using that term, they argue that knowledge is not just a fundamental epistemic good but also, more specifically, something which is finally valuable. Moreover, a further advantage of this strategy is that it can fully validate our intuition that knowledge should be at the centre of epistemological theorising: if knowledge is the kind of thing which, unlike other lesser epistemic goods, is finally valuable, then it is no surprise that we have tended to focus on this notion in our epistemological inquiries to the exclusion of other epistemic standings.[13]

It is certainly not implausible to argue that knowledge has certain properties which ensure that it is epistemically valuable for its own sake. Indeed, the thought experiment described above—where we asked whether, keeping all other factors fixed (and in a state of ignorance about the relevant '*p*' under discussion), we should prefer knowledge that *p* over mere true belief that *p*—suggests just that, since it implies that even if we kept all the

practical ramifications fixed, and even if we assume that the instrumental epistemic value is kept fixed, there is still something preferable about knowing a proposition rather than merely truly believing it. If knowledge were the kind of thing which, in certain cases at least, is finally valuable, then this would account for this intuition.

10. The best way that I know of to motivate the thesis that knowledge is finally valuable is by appeal to the idea that achievements are, at least sometimes if not typically or universally, finally valuable, and that knowledge, properly understood, is a kind of achievement. This is the kind of line pursued, in various different ways, by some virtue epistemologists, since on their view knowledge seems to have a structure such that one could reasonably argue that it falls under the more general class of achievements—i.e., that it is a specifically *cognitive* achievement.[14] After all, one plausible account of achievements is that they are successes that are because of one's ability. On standard virtue-theoretical accounts of knowledge, however, knowledge tends to be analysed, roughly, as true belief (i.e., cognitive success) that is because of cognitive ability, and so knowledge turns out to be just a cognitive type of achievement. Moreover, achievements do seem to be the kind of thing which are sometimes, if not typically or universally, of final value. Just as, all other things being equal, we would prefer knowledge over mere true belief, wouldn't we similarly prefer a success which constituted an achievement over a success which didn't constitute an achievement (which was merely lucky, say)? A natural explanation of both claims is that achievements and knowledge are finally valuable. On the virtue-theoretic account of knowledge this is no surprise, since knowledge is simply a type of achievement.[15]

Anyway, if one could show that knowledge has final value in this way, then that would be another way of dealing with the swamping problem, since one would then have grounds to deny (1). My personal view is that this strategy is not going to work for the simple reason that knowledge is not a type of achievement. In particular, I've argued elsewhere that there are cases of 'easy' knowledge in which one knows but where does not exhibit a cognitive achievement in the relevant sense, and also cases in which one exhibits a cognitive achievement but does not know because cognitive achievements, unlike knowledge, are compatible with a certain kind of epistemic luck. Here is not the place to explore these objections further.[16] Note, however, that even if this form of epistemic value pluralism were

rejected, this would not mean that all ways of responding to the swamping problem by appeal to epistemic value pluralism should be rejected, and still less would it mean that all ways of responding to the swamping problem by appeal to a version of epistemic value pluralism which made appeal to final value should be rejected.

11. In any case, it is not my goal here to definitively argue for or against any particular line on the swamping problem but rather to provide a clear picture of what the problem is and thus what dialectical options are available to us. In particular, I have argued that the swamping problem is best read as an inconsistent triad involving epistemic value T-monism and two further claims, one a general claim about value and another a more specific claim about epistemic value. With the swamping problem so understood, there are several avenues of escape available to us. In particular, given that we grant the general thesis about value formulated in (2), then either we simply deny the intuition that knowledge is sometimes epistemically more valuable than mere true belief or else we opt for a form of epistemic value pluralism. As regards the latter option, we have also seen that there are a number of versions of this style of response, some of them more compelling than others.

For my own part, although I haven't argued for this here, my view is that while we can resist the swamping argument by opting for a form of epistemic value pluralism—like Kvanvig (2003), I hold, for example, that understanding is a fundamental epistemic value, albeit on different grounds—it is an inevitable consequence of this style of response that knowledge, while sometimes epistemically more valuable than mere true belief, is not more valuable in such a way as to justify the preoccupation with this notion in contemporary epistemological theorising. Thus, we evade the immediate problem posed by the swamping problem, and yet are still left with an epistemological revisionism of sorts, since it is now incumbent upon us to water down our love affair with knowledge and turn our attentions towards to other epistemic standings.[17]

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NOTES

[1] There may be some special cases in this regard. Perhaps, for example, some beliefs simply cannot be given up, even when the countervailing evidence is incredibly strong. Interestingly, though, once one discovered that this propositional attitude was involuntary in this strong fashion, and so not susceptible to evidential considerations, it ceases to be so clear that it should continue to be regarded as a belief. Thus, even the tricky special cases ultimately speak in favour of this claim. For further discussion of the idea that truth is the aim of belief, see Wedgwood (2002), Shah (2003) and Shah & Velleman (*forthcoming*).

[2] For recent discussion of this view, see David (2001) and the exchange between David (2005) and Kvanvig (2005).

[3] Note that sometimes this view is expressed in terms of the thesis that it is *truth* (rather than true belief) which is the only ultimate fundamental epistemic good (see, for example, Kvanvig 2003, ch. 2). The difference between these two views is complex and raises some subtle questions. However, since nothing is lost for our purposes by focussing on the version of epistemic value T-monism set out here, I will ignore this complication in what follows.

[4] Though see Riggs (2002).

[5] The following discussion closely follows that offered by Zagzebski (2003).

[6] Indeed, the problem isn't specific to externalist epistemological proposals more generally either. The argument that was just ran as regards justification would work with equal force whether the notion of justification in question were cashed-out in an externalist or internalist fashion.

[7] This view has been expressed to me in conversation by both Michael Lynch and Mike Ridge.

[8] Kvanvig (2003) could be read as responding to the swamping problem by denying (3). As I note below, however, I think that ultimately he is best read as rejecting (1).

[9] Of course, evaluations of this sort are inevitably moot given that Kvanvig wasn't responding to the swamping problem in the specific form that it is presented here. What follows should be read with this *caveat* in mind.

[10] For example, consider one's true belief that one's house burned down because of faulty wiring. It seems entirely plausible that it could be the case that this belief both has the epistemic property of knowledge and the epistemic property of understanding (i.e., that one both knows and understands that one's house burned down because of faulty wiring). For more on Kvanvig's conception of understanding, see Brogaard (2005), Grimm (2006), Elgin (*forthcoming*), Kvanvig (*forthcoming*) and Pritchard (*forthcomingb*). For more on the notion of understanding more generally, see Zagzebski (2001) and Riggs (2003).

[11] This problem is what I have referred to elsewhere as the 'secondary' value problem. While the primary value problem is the problem of showing that knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief, the secondary value problem is the problem of showing that knowledge is more valuable than any epistemic standing that falls short of knowledge. The reason why this is a genuine problem is essentially that just given in the main text. For if we simply claim that knowledge is epistemically more valuable than mere true belief because of its relationship to some further epistemic property, like understanding, then that leaves the question of why as epistemologists we ought to be focussing on knowledge completely unanswered. For more on the secondary value problem, see Pritchard 2007*a*; 2007*b*; 2008). As I note below—see footnote 13—there is also, plausibly, a *tertiary* value problem as well.

[12] As it happens, I defend this very thesis in Pritchard (*forthcomingb*).

[13] I noted above, in footnote 11, that one can distinguish between a 'primary' and a 'secondary' version of the problem of the value of knowledge. One can also delineate a 'tertiary' version of this problem: the problem of explaining why knowledge is more valuable than that which falls short of knowledge not just as a matter of degree but also as a matter of kind. It should be clear that the thesis just described regarding the final value of knowledge can potentially meet all three of these problems. For further discussion of the tertiary value problem, see Pritchard 2007*a*; 2007*b*; 2008).

[14] Sosa (1988) was, I believe, the first to offer a virtue-theoretic proposal along these lines. See also Sosa (1991; 2007). Versions of this sort of virtue-theoretic proposal can also be found in Zagzebski (e.g., 1996; 1999) and Greco (2002; 2007; *forthcominga*; *forthcomingb*)

[15] An embryonic version of the general idea that appeal to final value might be a way of responding to the swamping problem can be found in Percival (2003). For further discussion of this way of dealing with the swamping problem, see Brogaard (2006) and Pritchard (2007*a*; 2007*b*; 2008; *forthcominga*; *forthcomingb*).

[16] For the main places in which I pursue this line, see Pritchard (2007*a*; 2007*b*; 2008; *forthcominga*; *forthcomingb*).

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