

ARTICLE

Draining the Swamp, Together

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ABSTRACT

Veritism, the thesis that true belief is the sole epistemic value, has been challenged in the context of process reliabilism. This challenge, sometimes called “the swamping problem”, holds that process reliabilism cannot explain the value of knowledge over true belief, or at least not under veritist assumptions. To address the swamping problem, Olsson extended veritist evaluations over different times. I argue that this extension keeps process reliabilism too close to internalism. The solution offered here is to extend veritist evaluations still further, over different agents. By considering the true beliefs that are expected to accrue to different agents, we can avoid the appeal to any given agent’s internal higher order capacities by making a more parsimonious assumption of credulity. Initial instances of a process issuing a belief require no appeal to higher order (internal) capacities whereas subsequent uses of the process may require evaluation of the process. My extension can be motivated as a more thorough-going externalist response to the swamping problem.

KEYWORDS

epistemology and epistemic value and externalism and Meno problem and process reliabilism and swamping problem and value of knowledge and veritism

1. Introduction

True belief is often taken to be the sole epistemic value. While apparently straightforward, the potential scope of this claim, often called *veritism*, has been underexplored.¹ Recent work by [Goldman and Olsson \(2009\)](#); [Olsson \(2007, 2009\)](#); [Olsson and Jönsson \(2011\)](#) has broadened veritism’s scope by considering true beliefs that may occur in the future. This essay suggests that the logical next step would extend veritism across *agents*, an extension that would allow veritism to address an important challenge—and also a few less important challenges. In particular, this project of broadening veritism allows us to capture the intuition that the value of epistemic states can come from beyond their temporal and agential positions, an intuition I take to be important for reliabilism.

The historical impetus for Olsson and Goldman’s work lay in responding to a challenge to the conjunction of veritism with process reliabilist theories of knowledge.²

¹[Goldman \(1999\)](#) introduced the term. [Jones \(1997\)](#) called the claim “epistemic instrumentalism”, but as will become clear, veritism is consistent with the value being indicative and *not* instrumental, so this is not an ideal term. [DePaul \(2001\)](#) uses the term “value monism”, which is a useful term, but perhaps not as informative. [Dutant \(2014\)](#) calls it “truth consequentialism about epistemic value”, which is an accurate and descriptive term, although to my ear ungainly.

²For the rest of the paper, whenever I use the term “knowledge”, I use it under a process reliabilist interpretation.

Process reliabilism holds that the justification needed for knowledge is provided by the belief's having been generated by objectively reliable processes, meaning processes which usually generate true beliefs. The conjunction of veritism and process reliabilism faces a challenge that Kvanvig (2003) labelled "the swamping problem" (cf. Olsson 2011; Pritchard 2007, for surveys of the discussion). The swamping problem is that the veritist is unable to account for any additional value of knowledge over mere true belief.³ In Kvanvig's terminology, the value of being a true belief swamps the value of being generated by a reliable process under veritism. Being generated by a reliable process, after all, neither makes a true belief *more* of a belief nor *more* true.

This has been taken to be a reason to reject veritism. Pritchard (2010, p. 16) claims that he "can see no way of objecting to this [swamping] claim" and that he is not "aware of any good objections to this thesis in the literature" while Olsson (2011, p. 877) writes in a survey that the swamping problem "was taken to be something of a knockdown argument", adding sagely that "One rarely finds knockdown arguments against anything in philosophy". Some have responded by jettisoning veritism, introducing fundamental epistemic values besides true beliefs, such as credit to the agent or epistemic virtues (Greco 2003; Riggs 2002; Sosa 1991, 2003; Zagzebski 1996, 2003).⁴

But the alternative to rejecting veritism which I argue for here is to embrace it even more closely, extending it to cover different agents and times. This extension has the implication that the swamping argument is invalid. We can hold onto veritism (as well as *both* process reliabilism and the claim that knowledge is more valuable than true belief) if we sufficiently broaden evaluation of the ways of coming to true belief. I suggest that Olsson has begun this extension of veritism, but that there is further extending to be done, so we should build on Olsson's work, improving on his response in the process. In doing so, we consider epistemic value in the world as opposed to value for or attached to agents, an epistemically axiological position with interesting implications. This is important because the provincial position that the value of epistemic states is limited to agents at a time cannot account for the intuition that some of the epistemic value of a state involves the likelihood of future valuable epistemic states. This paper, therefore, is a defence of veritism in a context where the attendant assumptions are highly restrictive and difficult to hold onto together; by relaxing those assumptions, veritism would be even more plausible. In short, this is a defence of veritism where it is most imperilled.

In §2, I begin by introducing the swamping problem. In §3, I introduce Olsson's "conditional probability solution" to the swamping problem. His solution expands the veritist evaluation across time, allowing us to capture the reliabilist intuition that the value of an epistemic state need not be limited to the content of that state. I also introduce an objection I call the "Externalist's Worry". In §4, I move beyond Olsson's inter-temporal expansion of veritism to my suggested inter-agential expansion. My expansion allows the veritist to address the Externalist's Worry, while also avoiding Olsson's commitments to several contingent claims. In §5, I illustrate the strengths of

³Some have argued that there are more general versions of swamping problems, such as the "deeper problem" identified by Sylvan (2017) or the "generalized swamping problem" discussed in Pritchard (2010), versions which go beyond reliabilism to many other forms of justification (Gardiner (2017) additionally applies the swamping problem to modal epistemic conditions). However, the scope of my discussion is the traditional swamping problem as applied to process reliabilist justification; as will become clear, the suggested solution depends on the expected outcomes of reliable processes themselves, not justification more broadly.

⁴Those who think veritists are missing fundamentally important epistemic values can take my claims as hypothetical or conditional on the veritist assumption or as seeing how far a veritist project can go. This is also an option for those who do not think there is a deep epistemic axiological fact about which epistemic value(s) is (or are) fundamental.

this account with a reverse-swamping example, one where the value of being generated from a reliable process swamps the value of the true belief itself. This also demonstrates the invalidity of the swamping problem. In §6, I discuss several potential objections before concluding in §7 with some of the fruitful implications of thinking of the value of knowledge in these inter-agential terms. Since this expansion includes a conception of epistemic value that goes beyond single agents, it offers new ways of broadening the discussion on epistemic value.

2. The Swamping Problem

The swamping problem concerns the putative inability of process reliabilism and veritism to account for any value of knowledge over mere true belief. It was named in the contemporary form by Kvanvig (2003).⁵ This section introduces the problem.

Zagzebski (2003) uses a helpful analogy which helps to make the intuitive case for the swamping problem. The basic idea is that the source of a true belief does not improve the epistemic standing of that true belief, at least given veritism. The analogy is between true belief and a tasty espresso. Consider two espressos, both of which are in fact tasty.⁶ One was brewed by a reliably good espresso-maker whereas the other was brewed using an unreliable process. Intuitively, the one generated by the reliable process, if *indeed* tasty, has no additional value in light of being produced by this reliable process. The two tasty espressos are equally valuable. The analogy is supposed to relate these espressos to true beliefs, which are equally valuable (under veritist assumptions) whether or not they were generated by reliable processes. Therefore, knowledge under a reliabilist account is of no value over (mere) true belief, at least when the beliefs in question are stipulated to be true. Both are true beliefs, which is all that the veritist counts as of fundamental epistemic value.

3. Expanding Veritist Evaluation Across Times

The way that Olsson has tried to address the swamping problem is by taking the veritist assumption and expanding it over different times.⁷ In particular, he suggests that we consider the state of that agent's *having* a reliably produced true belief, compared to having a non-reliably produced true belief. The first state, he argues, has a higher (objective) probability of being followed by that agent's having more true beliefs. More precisely, we can say that, conditional on a true belief's being generated by a reliable process, the agent with that belief is (objectively) more likely to have more true future beliefs than conditional on that true belief's being generated by an unreliable process. For this reason, this solution is called the *conditional probability solution* (which Olsson calls "CPS"). In this section, I introduce and motivate the

⁵Pritchard (2010, 2007) calls it the "primary value problem" and Brady (2006) calls it simply "the value problem". An early version of the argument can be found in Kvanvig (1998).

⁶To keep this in the spirit of reliabilism, we should abstract away from whether or not you are able to try them and determine whether they are indeed tasty.

⁷This response was first given by both Goldman and Olsson (2009) but Goldman (2009) has indicated that the response was primarily developed by Olsson and is dispreferred by Goldman so I will write "Olsson" throughout, albeit with this caveat in mind. Interestingly, Gardiner (2017) reports that Pritchard has taken a similar response in defending the *safety* condition, namely that the value of safety can be cashed out in increased future true beliefs. I agree with her that this is an unsatisfactory response—there is no clear mechanism whereby a safe true belief will lead to further true beliefs compared to an unsafe true belief.

CPS as a response to the swamping problem. I will argue that CPS is ultimately unsuccessful, however, since it is in deep tension with the reliabilist project that it is meant to be saving. However, the direction of CPS is, I believe, the right one and the solution I will offer is inspired by—but goes beyond—CPS.

Olsson rejects the claim that the value of a reliably produced true belief lies simply in its being a true belief. He points out that if we compare a reliably produced true belief to an unreliably produced one, we are committed to there being a reliable process which was used by the agent. That agent may well reuse that process and, in virtue of its reliability, reliably generate more true beliefs. This, then, is the CPS:

Conditional probability solution (CPS): Conditional on there being an agent with knowledge, the objective probability of true beliefs of that agent in the future is greater than conditional on there being an agent with merely true beliefs.

Two things are worth noting about CPS. First, it expands the veritist evaluation beyond the belief at hand to include the state of *there being* a reliably formed belief—a state which has potential implications for future beliefs. Second, it requires certain *assumptions about the agent and reliable process* in question. Let us consider these in turn.

Expanding the veritist evaluation beyond the current belief is a way of expanding the interpretation of veritism across time. This point also requires expanding the value beyond the epistemic state itself (as well as beyond the current instant) to the state of the world which *includes* there being a certain epistemic state.⁸ Intuitively, beyond what is going on with the agent, epistemically speaking, we also include the (existence of the) reliable process and the agent’s present and potential future use of that process. While this paper takes this epistemic axiological claim on in order to see how we can improve on Olsson’s position, we can be meta-theoretically agnostic about whether it is the *true* epistemic axiology and adopt it explicitly as an assumption to see what implications it has and how it can help address the swamping problem.⁹

However, expanding the veritist evaluation requires assumptions about the agent and the processes. Most importantly here, some of these assumptions are difficult to square with the externalist project the reliabilist is committed to.¹⁰ Olsson makes assumptions about the agent herself: that she will be expected to face similar problems in the future (*non-uniqueness*), that she will have access to the reliable process in question (*cross-temporal access*), and, most problematic in my view, that she will in fact reuse the process in these circumstances (*learning*). I will argue that my solution avoids or weakens these conditions, although my solution does—along with Olsson—assume that the reliable process remains reliable (*generality*). I do not think generality is a strong assumption as I take it to be intuitively part of what makes it a reliable process to begin with.¹¹ Here, I will focus on the externalist aspect because it generates a tension with the learning condition. The externalist aspect was important for some reliabilists because, if you had no ability to determine whether the processes that provided information—to wit, one’s memory and sensory processes—were reliable, reliabilism was an answer to the question of how that foundation could be built. The

⁸Bates (2013) claims that considering the state which includes the reliable process violates a condition on addressing the swamping problem. I return to this in §6; I respond that this condition is difficult to motivate in the context of *externalism*, since externalism is defined as concern with issues beyond the epistemic states themselves.

⁹In §6, I also briefly consider some ways to motivate this assumption within externalism.

¹⁰In Olsson’s case, very explicitly: “My approach to the value problem is thoroughly externalist” (Olsson 2009, p. 99)!

¹¹Thanks to [blinded].

foundation of our epistemic projects could be justified with reference to the processes themselves, not to one's trust in them (or even conscious reflection upon them). In general, the externalist holds that one need not have or exercise higher order capacities with respect to those processes.

Although Olsson tries to sidestep it, CPS is in tension with this foundational assumption. CPS relies upon agents' learning about those processes in order to reuse them; learning about the reliable processes in order to reuse them seems to require internalist conditions (for instance, in light of your *evaluation* of a process as reliable, you *decide* to seek it out or employ it in the future or *endorse* it as potentially epistemically respectable as a method of acquiring more beliefs¹²). Olsson (2009, p. 95) writes "if a particular method solves a problem once, and you have no reason to believe that it did so unsuccessfully, then you will tend to use the same method again, if available", but weighing reasons seems like a paradigmatic evaluative activity. We can see this more clearly when we consider what would be required to do this by a third party. After granting *arguendo* that epistemic value can be recognized by the agent, Olsson (2009, p. 99) writes:

Y [a third party] may now decide to inform X [the believing individual] about the unreliability of the process leading up to X's belief and inform X about a reliable method to arrive at the same belief. So, while it may be difficult, if not impossible, for X to appreciate the difference between knowledge and mere true belief and hence difficult, if not impossible, for X to make that difference matter in his conduct, it is quite possible for another person Y not only to appreciate the difference but to let that difference influence his conduct.

Here, the higher order capacities belong to a third party, but when Olsson claims that the reliable process are more valuable than unreliable true, we see that appeals to higher order capacities are required. With this point in mind, we can consider the more usual case where the believer X is recognizing this point herself. Given some surprise or conflict with respect to the beliefs formed by a process, X would both need to determine whether to continue using the process, meaning she would need to *evaluate whether the process is reliable or whether she should switch*, work that is being done here by the third party.

In short, this type of learning seems to rely upon the same type of internalist processes that worried the foundationalists. We can put it quite simply in what I will call

The Externalist's Worry: If what makes an epistemic state *knowledge* is independent of an agent's reflection on the justification, why would that state's *value over mere true belief* require an agent's reflection on the justification?

The Externalist's Worry is a way of explaining the dialectical pressure on CPS.¹³ CPS requires that the agent's use of the process is responsive to the outputs of that process.

A first response to the Externalist's Worry, a response which Olsson alludes to, is that although these claims have an air of paradox, they are not outright inconsistent. In Olsson's words, CPS does conform to "an externalist *analysis of knowledge*" (2009, emphasis in original). We could simply accept this analysis while holding that the extra value of knowledge sometimes requires reference to agential higher order capacities like evaluation. But the cost of acceptance is not just the paradoxical-seeming endorsement of both the externalist analysis and internalist evaluation, but also, as noted above,

¹²As Davis and Jäger (2010, p. 100) put it, the subject needs to "have suitable metabeliefs" before it becomes more likely that she will reuse the reliable process over the unreliable process.

¹³Thanks to [blinded] for discussion in which he formulated a version of this worry.

the tension with the deeper foundationalist program and its motivations. This is much more theoretically costly.

A second, more substantial, response, which Olsson (2009) also suggests, is to diffuse the commitment to the internalist requirements. In particular, while learning seems to require reflection, it could instead be more like a reflex: he writes that using the reliable method could be the same type of “use” as in “The cat uses its teeth to clean its claws” (Olsson 2009, p. 108). Presumably, the cat neither requires nor exercises any higher order capacities in order to use its teeth in this manner; indeed, such movements are plausibly instinctive and automatic.

But this generates a dilemma for Olsson. On the one hand, the closer the response to reliable processes get to conscious evaluation, the greater the tension with the externalist project. On the other hand, the closer the response to reliable processes gets to automatic actions, the less plausible it is that the beliefs will actually recommend the process producing it. After all, the point of CPS is that the agent will learn that processes are (un)reliable and continue to use them in order to generate more true beliefs. If Olsson’s endorsement of the second horn of the dilemma is right, the agent will use processes reflexively—*whether or not they prove to be reliable*. If the agent is *not* keeping track of the processes which appear reliable, then why would the agent continue to use the reliable as opposed to unreliable processes? After all, the world is a noisy place; for many beliefs, you may not get clear, immediate signals about whether those beliefs are true.

Let us more carefully evaluate Olsson’s cat response. Consider the claim that it truly is automatic, in the sense that agents (unreflectively) will reuse *whatever* processes for generating beliefs are accessible. This position would be much easier to accommodate with externalist assumptions, since we require no (or minimal) appeal to higher order capacities.

The first thing to say is that this position is demonstrably not what Olsson intended to endorse, exegetically speaking. For instance, Olsson (2009, p. 105) writes that, to see why getting true and false beliefs from a reliable process are different in learning,

it is important to consider the exact formulation of the learning assumption that underlies the CP[S] approach. According to that assumption, when spelled out in full, a method will tend to be reemployed when the occasion presents itself provided that the previous employment was unproblematic. A problematic employment would be one resulting in some sort of conflict or surprise. In this respect there seems to be a difference between true and false belief.

In short, reusing the process requires *at the very least* responsiveness to previous failures (and, perhaps, successes). This shows a tension between the two claims, somewhat ironically from the same paper. One might think Olsson could respond that the agent does not robotically reject a process every time such a surprise occurs, and that it depends on the type of surprise and the quality or quantity of previous successes, but this would require appealing to exactly the kind of internal evaluation procedures the externalist should be worried about. What we would be left with is an agents’ using the process automatically until there is a surprise upon which she rejects the process, regardless of how successful it has been in the past or the level or importance of the surprise. The point is that it is very difficult to incorporate previous experience with a process into expectations about the continuation of usage without invoking internal processes.

The second thing to say is that this seems descriptively inadequate. People are

perhaps overly credulous or otherwise epistemically vicious.¹⁴ However, in general, once we use a belief-generating process, we are not sufficiently credulous or epistemically vicious to *automatically* reuse it in general.¹⁵ Depending on the source, we might provisionally believe it and wait to see if we can corroborate or verify the claims, especially if we have used it only once. This might be the case if we recognize that the reliable process involves sources that have a professional or personal stake in the matter, for instance. Since this appeals to good epistemic hygiene, we can think of this as the *optimistic objection* to Olsson’s solution.

The third thing to say is that even if we adopt this view, it will rarely work in practice.¹⁶ In particular, belief-forming processes issue in beliefs which have contents that appear true to the agent, so agents tend to require more than a preponderance of evidence to revise beliefs. For this reason, the contexts in which those beliefs are challenged in ways that produce “conflict or surprise” can be expected to be rare to a fault. In other words, Olsson’s “problematic employment” of a process will be difficult for an agent to recognize *as* problematic.¹⁷ Davis and Jäger (2010) make a similar point: given that we do not want to limit ourselves to reliable processes that are only personally accessible (for instance, sensory processes and memory), single successes must be sufficient to reuse the process. But as Davis and Jäger rightly point out, the reliability of the process is not transparent to the agent after a single time (or perhaps even after some series of uses). Since this appeals to the difficulty of determining what is true or reliable in the world, we can think of this as the *pessimistic objection* to Olsson’s solution.

While this fully automatic interpretation of CPS might meet the Externalist’s Worry, it is not what those in the literature have suggested—and for good reason: it is implausible as a description of our epistemic situation, whether on optimistic or pessimistic grounds. We can conclude that the CPS response to the swamping problem cannot meet the Externalist’s Worry.

4. Expanding Veritist Evaluation Across Agents

Although the CPS faces the Externalist’s Worry, there is a better way to address the swamping problem. This is to perform our veritist evaluations not only across different times, but also across different *agents*. However, to avoid making assumptions about how the agents evaluate or respond to previous evidence from the process, we consider only the *initial* uses of the process. The key is that the *first* time a process is used to generate a true belief, there is no required assumptions about its reliability as there is when deciding whether to *re-use* a process; if a process can form beliefs, its merely existing (as opposed to an unreliable process existing) makes it likelier that different people will come across and use it at least to try it out. This way, we can avoid making any internalist assumptions about the responsiveness to previous uses. I call

¹⁴I personally find it disappointing how few people use fact-checking websites like <https://www.snopes.com> or, for political claims, <https://www.politifact.com>, <https://www.factcheck.org/>, or <https://euvsdisinfo.eu/>. I think that responsible citizenship requires a good-faith effort to ascertain the truth or falsity of the claims which can easily propagate around the internet.

¹⁵Here, I am not thinking of sub-personal processes, such as memory or perception, but personal processes, such as testimony.

¹⁶I thank [blinded] for suggesting this response.

¹⁷This is one reason that Olsson’s case of a navigation system as a reliable process stacks the deck in his favor: unlike most sources of beliefs, if a navigation system provides false information, you are likely to discover it very readily and conclusively.

this strategy “Draining the Swamp, Together”. Draining the Swamp, Together allows us to address the Externalist’s Worry while also addressing some lesser challenges that arise out of the connection between the agent holding the belief and the reliable process. In terms of the espresso analogy, the reliably made tasty espresso is more valuable if you value tasty espressos *in general*, especially since the reliable espresso-maker can be used by anyone.¹⁸

The Externalist’s Worry arises because the veritist is not being sufficiently externalist—by considering the given agent’s ability to learn, we end up relying on some internal capacities or states. The solution of evaluating true beliefs over time over all agents lies in increasing the level of externalism:

Draining the Swamp, Together: Conditional on there being an agent with knowledge, the objective probability of true beliefs of agents in the future is greater than conditional on there being only an agent with merely true beliefs.

The Externalist’s Worry can be met by expanding veritism across agents; the conditional probability of future true beliefs occurring is greater. It may be easier to think in frequentist terms: the frequency of future true beliefs is greater in the case of knowledge than in the case of mere true beliefs.

We can now compare this response with Olsson’s in terms of the conditions that are required to make it work. The most important difference is that using processes for the first time never requires evaluation or endorsement of those processes. In short, I am assuming that we have some *credulity* default with respect to new processes. When a process issues in a belief, we are inclined to adopt that belief without reflecting on the process that generated it. This is unlike CPS because it requires no *learning* in Olsson’s sense. Furthermore, while forming a belief may involve some internal processes in *some* sense, that processes issue in beliefs is something that is integral to the reliabilist project. Finally, while credulity is an empirical claim, there is some empirical support (e.g. Gilbert 1991). Given credulity, there is no need for the agent to reflect on either the belief or the source of the belief; she only need form the belief when (initially) using the process, even when she knows little or nothing about the process.

We can now turn to CPS’ personal assumptions: we do not need to assume that any *given* agent (in particular, the agent under consideration who knows or merely truly believes) is expected to face similar problems in the future (non-uniqueness) or will have access to the reliable process (cross-temporal access). We only require much weaker social analogues to these assumptions: that *some* agents will face similar problems in the future and that *some* agents will have access to the reliable process. Indeed, if credulity is true, we might not even need that the agents are motivated to use the process because of any particular problem so we might *only* need some social analogue of cross-temporal access.

As mentioned before, the one assumption that both Olsson and I require in full is a generality assumption; we require that the process is likely to be reliable in the future.¹⁹ However, this seems to me to be a minimal requirement for a reliabilist epistemology since a process which ceases to be reliable is in an important sense unreliable.

Furthermore, the case allows us to address other worries that have arisen with respect to veritism. So, for instance, Aschliman (Forthcoming) worries that the veritist

¹⁸But, naturally, not without asking you for permission, first.

¹⁹What if the reliable process is not as reliable as other available processes (Horvath 2009; Davis and Jäger 2010)? Other agents using it might reduce the objective probability of coming to true beliefs by using that process compared to others. But the key is that they would reduce the objective probability *even more* if they used the unreliable process. So the conditional probability for knowledge remains higher.

cannot countenance an intuition that an epistemically irresponsible agent’s belief has very little epistemic value, regardless of whether it is accidentally true or false. For instance, one might have the intuition whereby someone who consults tarot cards to determine whether there is a car and who forms a(n accidentally) true or false belief on that basis should have little epistemic value attached to that belief. This intuition seems difficult for the veritist to explain or predict, Aschliman worries, since one of these is a true belief (the only fundamentally valuable thing the veritist is concerned with) whereas the other is a false belief. However, if we are Draining the Swamp, Together, this is not difficult to address: since both agents are appealing to non-reliable processes (tarot card readings), the expected negative epistemic value indicated conditional on *using* those processes outweighs the positive value of those particular beliefs, when compared to the conditional for using reliable processes.²⁰ So both do have relatively low expected epistemic value veritistically speaking, although the one that is actually true has the marginal gain over the one that is false. This account thus allows us to endorse Aschliman’s intuition and defend veritism.

The strengths of Draining the Swamp, Together can be further illustrated by introducing a reverse-swamping case, a case where the epistemic value of the true belief itself is swamped by the value of future true beliefs.

5. A Case of Reverse-Swamping

To illustrate the strength of this expansion, we can present a reverse-swamping case. In this case, not only does the value of a true belief *not* swamp the value of its generation by a reliable process, the value of its generation by a reliable process swamps *the value of the true belief*. The key is that, in this case, the true belief—while still epistemically valuable qua true belief—is of little importance whereas the reliable process is chosen to be of almost limitless expected epistemic value. The process is also specified in such a way that it is generally applicable and easily usable by different agents.

Consider the following case:

Bodhisattva: Tamara encounters a bodhisattva who is highly knowledgeable about things great and small and who reliably tells the truth. The bodhisattva informs Tamara that the number of blades of grass in her backyard is odd. Via this testimony, Tamara comes to truly believe that the number of blades of grass in her backyard is odd.

While the true belief Tamara has formed is indeed epistemically valuable *qua* true belief, that epistemic value is negligible, both intuitively and in the literature (e.g. Baehr 2009).²¹ However, the *expected* epistemic value indicated by Tamara’s knowledge is incalculable. The fact she has a reliably formed true belief implies the existence of a reliable belief-forming process—here, the bodhisattva’s testimony—which could be used by her *and others* in the future. The bodhisattva can provide accurate testimony and is potentially accessible to anyone. Indeed, it seems that the only limitation is how fast questions could be asked to the bodhisattva. In short, the expected epistemic value of Tamara’s knowledge being formed by this reliable process *swamps* the value of the true belief itself, which is itself of negligible value.

Now we can show how this expansion offers an improvement over CPS. While issues

²⁰Thanks to [blinded].

²¹To give this claim more structure, we can adopt the model in Goldman (1999), where the veritistic value of the beliefs depends on to what extent those beliefs answer questions that “interest” the believer. Tamara is interested in few (if any) questions that are answered by facts about the cardinality of blades of grass.

like those in the previous paragraph may be difficult in general for CPS, they do not arise once we consider that those who may “use” the bodhisattva to come to true beliefs *are not limited to Tamara*. The core notion of CPS is that the value of being generated by a reliable process depends on considering veritism across different times. When Draining the Swamp, Together, we can avoid contingencies about the link of Tamara with the bodhisattva. So yes Tamara might die (perhaps even at the bodhisattva’s hand!), or might fail to find the bodhisattva again, or might stick to asking the bodhisattva even when there are more reliable processes in the offing. But if we consider other potential agents, the contingent assumptions that Olsson requires for his account are no longer needed. The most important is the learning assumption. In order to learn, we need that Tamara can evaluate the reliable process. But the content of the testimony here—the oddness of blades of grass—is not clearly true or false from Tamara’s point of view. This is, I submit, representative: most beliefs are not readily or conclusively falsifiable. It is certainly the case here: whether the cardinality of the grass is odd or even is not something that Tamara’s beliefs or accessible evidence would address.

Furthermore, this account addresses the Externalist’s Worry. We do not need Tamara to evaluate the reliable process in order to learn to reuse it as with Olsson. All that we need is that if the bodhisattva tells Tamara something for the first time, like that the number is odd, she will believe the bodhisattva. We do not need her to have *any* higher order capacities at all.

Finally, in this case at least, the worry of [Horvath \(2009\)](#) about the potential gain over other processes can be met. Since the bodhisattva knows about all sorts of things, even trivial things like the number of blades of grass, Tamara has considerably more potential coverage when asking the bodhisattva compared with any other process in her purview. The gain in probability of true future beliefs over other processes for Tamara would be very high.

While Bodhisattva is admittedly an exotic case, it is indicative of much more mundane epistemic situations. So, for instance, the value of the first true beliefs you formed upon first reading *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, or *The New Yorker*, say, presumably pale compared to the potential future true beliefs available to readers in general from such reliable sources. Although sources like these are by no means indubitable or infallible, they are—let us stipulate—broadly reliable methods of coming to form true beliefs about the world. Furthermore, the variety of topics covered in such news sources is very broad.²² In light of both the significant inter-agential veritist value which such processes can generate and the broad variety of content these processes cover, an epistemic agent who did not value such reliable processes would struggle indeed.

6. Objections

In this section, I discuss a couple objections. The first involves the contingencies that remain in this account once some of Olsson’s empirical regularities can be jettisoned. The second concerns the source of the value and tries to put pressure on the claim that the value does not have to attach to the given agent.

The first set of objections revolve around the point that this extension does not answer why knowledge *must* be more valuable, just that it *could* be. What about the

²²For instance, an influential article in *The New Yorker* by [Paumgarten \(2008\)](#) both concerned a man who got stuck in an elevator and explained in significant detail how elevators work.

objection from Jäger (2011) that such analyses rely upon contingencies? Suppose, for instance, that the reliable method is never discovered again? Or that this is the last agent (or last epistemic state) on earth (limiting our search space to one where there are agents or future states)? In short, this account doesn't seem to justify intrinsic value (in the Moorean isolation test sense).

The former worry that the reliable method is never reused is not so much of a problem because it is the case both (a) for contingent reasons, we would expect there to be more than one agent to use a process (first, because of Olsson's reasons that the agent herself will reuse the process; second, because the agent is likely to refer the process to others, should she find it reliable) and (b) most fundamentally, it is objectively unlikely that a reliable process is not (re)discovered given sufficient time and space. As noted above, this fundamental point is independent of whether Olsson's (often-fulfilled) contingent claims about the agent are in a given case, fulfilled.

The latter worry about the last agent is not a problem because, while it is true that the expected value only occurs assuming future epistemic states (of the same or a different agent) and future times, this is as it should be. Once you have limited yourself to contingencies where there is no *epistemic future*, it is intuitive that knowledge is *not* more reliable than mere true belief.²³ So this implication is not problematic. In short, while this extension does not justify intrinsic value of reliabilist knowledge over mere true belief, this implication is exactly in line with the motivations one should have in endorsing reliabilism.

Even if one is worried about the cases in which the conditions are fulfilled, this solution dominates CPS in the sense that it allows for a relaxation of several of the conditions. I would also argue that credulity is more plausible as a general claim than learning, which is a very simple model for recognizing which processes to trust. Credulity, in contrast, only concerns defaults about initial instances without making any assumptions about how those initial instances are used for reusing those processes.

Another set of objections concern the locus of value. What about a single success (cf. Davis and Jäger 2010, p. 101)? Shouldn't knowledge be more valuable in the individual case? For instance, shouldn't the value accrue to the belief itself (Bates 2013)? Or to the agent herself?

Unlike Olsson, I don't need to explain why the agent's avoidance of failure in one instance improves the likelihood of reusing it, I just require that there was *a use* of a reliable process.

It is true that this response rejects the condition Bates (2013) suggests should be met in responses to the swamping problem, that the value of knowledge accrues to the belief *itself*, not to any broader state of affairs. But this is not a sensible condition for *externalists*; externalists are concerned with justification that can attach to true belief *regardless of the agents' recognition of the fact*. The externalists' concerns are broader than the agents' epistemic picture of the world, why should the externalist accept such limitations on the *value* of knowledge?

²³So, for instance, cf. Olsson's discussion of early motivations for reliabilism, invoking:

Armstrong's old proposal according to which reliabilist knowledge comes with the benefit of repetition. If you have reliabilist knowledge, you have by definition employed a reliable method. If the method is not narrowly specified, it may be used more than once, thus producing more true beliefs on future occasions. . . no added value in this sense arises if the problem was a one shot problem, or if the method at some point ceases to be reliable. (2011, p. 879).

There is something deeper to say here, too. The veritist should not be explaining why knowledge is more valuable in the *individual* case. The veritist should be considering true beliefs simpliciter, not a particular agents' true beliefs. Some may well find veritism too severe. Some may well be interested in the credit that goes to an agent in terms of being knowledgeable; some may well be interested in the epistemic utility of knowledge to the agent. But these are not the veritist's concerns. I believe that the veritist should be concerned solely with true beliefs. Although there are legitimate and interesting questions about when epistemic credit and value should attach to the agent, I suggest that these considerations justify the focus of this account—*qua* a veritist account—on inter-agential uses of reliable processes.

Once we are expanding veritism beyond the given instance, as with Olsson, we should go further and expand it beyond the given agent. After all, externalism was meant to show how agents end up with knowledge, regardless of whether the agents realize it or not. Under veritism, the value of knowledge over merely true belief is not about the agents themselves, it is about true belief. That means that we need to consider whether reliable processes increase the probability of true beliefs, including in the future, as Olsson rightly points out, but also for others. To stay within the externalist project, we should consider whether reliable processes are valuable, regardless of whether those employing them realize it or not.

7. Conclusion

Draining the Swamp, Together extends the externalist goals beyond where they started, with reliable memory and sensory organs, to where they should go, increasing true belief. It points to the important social implications of contemporary knowledge-formation. Furthermore, taking veritism in this direction has interesting implications. For instance, the value of knowledge is dependent on factors including the number of potential agents (more precisely, the number of potential epistemic states) that could access the reliable process—what we might think of as the size of the potential epistemic future. In this manner, the value of knowledge is far from fixed; one state of knowledge could be more valuable than another not in any respect having to do with the knowing agent herself, but, say, with respect to the accessibility or shareability of the processes she employed.

While the motivation of this extension was comparison of knowledge and mere true belief, as noted in §4, it could be applied to comparison between different states of knowledge—states which could have different indicative epistemic value. If one were to compare a world full of accidentally true beliefs and another where those were all knowledge, the veritist could say that they were equally valuable *at the time* but we would expect the knowledgeable population would be able to maintain their level of true beliefs or replace the stock of true beliefs, leading to more of what we might call “epistemic sustainability”. The proposed extension is therefore highly productive, in the sense that it introduces an underexplored way of considering the value of knowledge, a way with many potential interesting implications. And if I am right, we can explore these implications to come to many more true beliefs, together.

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