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## **A Pragmatic Solution to the Value Problem of Knowledge\***

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### **Abstract**

*We value possessing knowledge more than true belief. Both someone with knowledge and someone with a true belief possess the correct answer to a question. Why is knowledge more valuable than true belief if both contain the correct answer? I examine the philosophy of American pragmatist John Dewey and then I offer a novel solution to this question often called the value problem of knowledge. I present and explicate (my interpretation of) Dewey's pragmatic theory of inquiry. Dewey values competent inquiry and claims it is a knowledge-forming process, and I argue that it is competently conducting inquiry that explains why knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief. Knowledge is always the result of a process of competent inquiry (itself valuable) whereas belief can but need not be the result of inquiry. I end by considering and replying to reasonable objections to my pragmatic solution.*

**Keywords:** Epistemology, Knowledge, the Value Problem, John Dewey, American Pragmatism

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## Introduction

Let “p” represent a proposition. Whether someone has a true belief that p or knowledge that p, they possess the correct answer to a question whether p. Consider whether one may have a preference between knowing whether p or possessing a mere true belief. We value possessing knowledge more than mere true belief. This puzzle is the value problem of knowledge: *Why is knowledge more valuable than true belief if both contain the correct answer?*<sup>1</sup> In this essay, I use the American pragmatist John Dewey’s theory of inquiry to offer a novel solution. Dewey values competent inquiry and I argue that the value of knowledge that true belief lacks is explained by the process of conducting competent inquiry.

In section one, I present the value problem of knowledge. My method for illuminating the problem is to present an excerpt from Plato’s *Meno* that illustrates the problem in its most simple form. In section two, I explicate (my interpretation of) Dewey’s pragmatic theory of inquiry. Being as fair as I can to his theory as a systematic whole, I will extract certain principles from his writings relevant to a solution to the value problem of knowledge. In section three, I apply the principles of section two to the problem explicated in section one. I conclude that knowledge is more valuable than true belief because knowledge requires a process of inquiry which is itself valuable whereas belief may not be the result of some such process. To end, I consider and reply to objections, and I conclude that knowledge is also more advantageous than mere true belief.

### 1.0 The Value Problem of Knowledge

In the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Pritchard and Turri (2014) characterize the value problem in the following way.

The question why knowledge is distinctively valuable has an important historical precedent in Plato’s *Meno* in which Socrates raises the question of why knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief. Initially, we might appeal to the fact that knowledge appears to be of more practical use than true belief in order to mark this difference in value, but, as Socrates notes, this claim is far from obvious on closer inspection. After all, a true belief about *the correct way to Larissa* is surely of just as much practical use as *knowledge of the way to Larissa*—both will get us to our destination. Given that we clearly do value knowledge more than mere true belief, the fact that there is no obvious explanation of why this should be so creates a problem.

The value problem of knowledge dates back to Plato. From Plato’s *Meno*, many philosophers claim that the value problem’s solution cannot be that knowledge is more practical than true belief. This, of course, assumes that there exists both knowledge and true beliefs about practical things (for example *how* to reach Larissa). To avoid predetermining our solution to the value problem of knowledge in light of contemporary proclivities, I turn our attention to Plato’s text itself where we will see the value problem come to light in its original form.

The Larissa Excerpt from Plato’s *Meno*

Consider this short excerpt from Plato’s *Meno*.

*SOCRATES: ...A man who knew the way to Larissa, or anywhere else you like, and went there and guided others would surely lead them well and correctly?—Certainly.*

*SOCRATES: What if someone had had a correct opinion as to which was the way but had not gone there nor indeed had knowledge of it, would he not also lead correctly?—certainly.*

*SOCRATES: And as long as he has the right opinion about that of which the other has knowledge, he will not be a worse guide than the one who knows, as he has a true opinion, though not knowledge.—In no way worse.*

*SOCRATES: So true opinion is in no way a worse guide to correct action than knowledge.—So it seems.*

*SOCRATES: So correct opinion is no less useful than knowledge?*

*MENO: Yes, to this extent, Socrates. But the man who has knowledge will always succeed, whereas he who has true opinion will only succeed at times.*

*SOCRATES: How do you mean? Will he who has the right opinion not always succeed, as long as his opinion is right?*

*MENO: That appears to be so of necessity, and it makes me wonder, Socrates, this being the case, why knowledge is prized far more highly than right opinion, and why they are different.*

Socrates is asking whether someone with a true belief of the way to a town will be as good of a guide as someone with knowledge of the way. Meno answers that so long as someone has a *true* belief, he will be as good of a guide as someone with knowledge. Both will offer accurate directions.

If our questions can be answered as accurately by someone with knowledge as our questions can be answered by someone with a true belief, then all people with correct answers to our questions are equally useful for coming to possess the truth; given this, what is it (if anything) that makes knowledge more valuable than true belief?

Philosophers, some metaphysicians but chiefly epistemologists, have offered solutions to the value problem of knowledge. It's unfortunate for the literature that seldom have we considered a pragmatic approach. This paper fills the lacuna by offering a solution to the value problem that is grounded in a pragmatic theory concerning the process of inquiry. Before discussing pragmatism and offering a pragmatic solution, I'll make brief notes on key concepts.

## **1.2 The Concept of Knowledge**

Over 2000 years ago, Plato investigated the nature of knowledge and concluded that knowledge is *neither* perception itself *nor* a true judgment with an account.<sup>2</sup> In 1963, Edmund Gettier concluded that knowledge is *not* a justified true belief.<sup>3</sup> No one has provided a set of independently necessary and jointly sufficient conditions commanding universal agreement on what knowledge is. Some have concluded that knowledge is unanalyzable

(Williamson, 2000). Several philosophers think that discovering the value of knowledge will provide insights into the nature of knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

One thing about knowledge is clear: one can acquire knowledge in many ways and from various sources. If I want to know whether *p*, I can see that *p* and gain (perceptual) knowledge. However, I may infer that *p* and gain (inductive) knowledge. Otherwise, I could be told that *p* and gain (testimonial) knowledge.

Almost all western philosophers grant that knowledge is factive. That is, every possession of knowledge is the possession of truth. We seldom dispute whether the truth of *p* is a necessary condition for knowing that *p* because only the truth can be known. Following suit, I will assume that only true propositions are knowable.<sup>5</sup>

### 1.3 The Concept of Belief

Like knowledge, *true belief* is factive in every case. Belief, in general, however, is not factive. We have true beliefs and false beliefs. Whereas what one knows cannot be false because what one really knows is always true, one may believe falsely.

The value problem of knowledge results from juxtaposing knowledge with *true belief*. If what one knows is true, and what one believes is true, then why is knowledge more valuable than true belief?

## 2.0 Lessons from John Dewey: American Pragmatist

I will now discuss the work of John Dewey, in whose theory my solution is grounded. I will present Dewey's theory of inquiry so that I may make clear how the process of competent inquiry explains why knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief.

### 2.1 Dewey's Theory of Inquiry

According to John Dewey, it is possible for us to turn our irritating doubts into settled conclusions. We do this through a logical process of inquiring. Brown (2012) reminds us, "Logic just is, for Dewey, a theory of inquiry." Inquiring through the apt use of logic adequately modifies our doubts into conclusions that qualify as "knowledge." Through inquiry, then, we can modify a situation in which something is not known into a situation in which one knows (what was not known before).<sup>6</sup> Defining the function of inquiry, Dewey says, "Inquiry is the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is so determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole."<sup>7</sup> Of course, this is not Dewey's definition of any inquiry. This is the definition of *competent* inquiry. I understand this as inquiry that is successful *because* it is controlled or directed by the laws of logic.<sup>8</sup>

The first step to inquiry, according to (my interpretation of) Dewey, is for one to realize that she is in a situation that requires inquiry (Dewey, 1938:107). For Dewey, "situation" has a technical sense of which Brown (2012) offers the following characterization.

It is a “contextual whole” that forms the background of experiences and judgments about objects and events. Dewey rejects the idea that experience contains isolated particulars: “In actual experience, there is never any such isolated singular object or event; an object or event is always a special part, phase, or aspect, of an environing experienced world—a situation” (LW 12:72). [...] A situation is environing in that it involves an environment... a situation is experienced as a whole: “A situation is a whole in virtue of its immediately pervasive quality” (LW 12:73). A situation is experienced but is not a subjective state; situations include real objects, events, agents, their relations, the background on which all of those things appear, and a qualitative, experienced, or experienceable qualitative unity... The qualitative character of this unity... includes (but is not limited to) situations that are doubtful, confused, and indeterminate (Brown, 2012).

Following Brown, I interpret Dewey’s conception of a “situation” as the unity of one’s experience. This unity—thus, a situation—includes historical and geographical contexts in addition to relations between significant aspects of the material and nonmaterial conditions of the environment as a contextual whole.

Moreover, Dewey tells us that a situation requires inquiry in case it is in some way *confused* or *obscure* (Dewey, 1938:106-7). A situation is confused just in case the outcome is not in some way anticipated. A situation is obscure just in case the final consequences are undetermined. A situation that involves confusion or obscurity is uncertain or doubtful. These qualities make a situation indeterminate and requiring of inquiry (Ibid, 106).

There is a crucial distinction between *situational doubt*, (the situation in which a person finds himself is doubtful) and *pathological doubt* (there exists a mental state of doubt experienced by a person whether or not the situation calls for it).<sup>9</sup> It is situational doubt with which we are concerned.

It is the situation itself that requires inquiry. This is because it is the situation itself that is uncertain or doubtful. A situation is indeterminate just in case the environing conditions are characterized by doubtfulness or uncertainty.<sup>10</sup> For conducting inquiry, the environing conditions are crucial, Brown (2012) reminds us, because “according to Dewey, inquiry always takes place in, is immediately concerned with, and is guided by a situation.” The *environing conditions* are the conditions of the environment, and they are a matter of a specific interaction between some organism (for our purposes, an epistemic agent) and his environment. The indeterminateness that is required for inquiry is not said of the epistemic agent in a certain situation; yet it is the epistemic agent who inquires.

According to Dewey, common sense and scientific inquiry function to modify an indeterminate situation into a determinate situation.<sup>11</sup> It is through competent inquiry that the conditions of an indeterminate situation (uncertainty, doubtfulness) are modified into the conditions of a determinate situation. The process of inquiry comes to its proper end and is thus successful only when an indeterminate situation is actually (practically) replaced by a determinate situation.

The process of inquiry itself takes place as an intermediate stage between

the indeterminate situation and the determinate situation and involves practical reasoning called “judging.” (Dewey, 1938:136) This is the case for all processes of inquiry, including those perceptual.<sup>12</sup> Judging serves as the ground for warranted assertions established at the end of inquiry where the previously doubtful situation no longer exists (Ibid, 139). It is important for our purposes to note Dewey’s use of the concept *judgment*. Judgment and belief are colloquially interchangeable; for Dewey, judgment has a technical sense.

Judging amounts to more than believing. Judgment is the result of inquiry, and belief can but need not be. For Dewey, the inquiry does not appropriately terminate in believing that p but instead terminates in judging that p.<sup>13</sup> Recall the distinction between pathological and situational doubt, and that Dewey claims competent inquiry terminates situational doubt. Failing to conduct a competent inquiry, one may still acquire the belief that they are no longer in a doubtful situation.

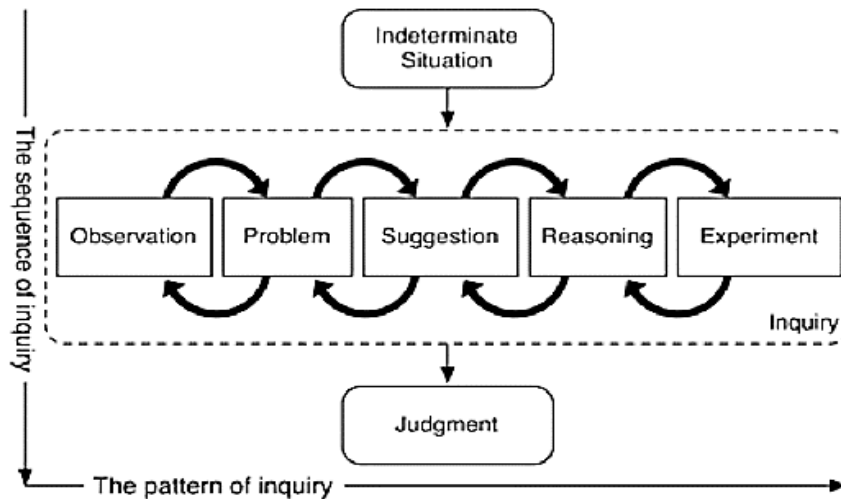
In contemporary epistemology, knowledge is typically characterized as a true belief in addition to something; however, Dewey calls knowledge the result of competent inquiry characterized by judgment and not belief.<sup>14</sup> Infact, Dewey warns us of the ambiguity of belief. He says, Belief is a “double-barrelled” word. It is used objectively to name what is believed. ... [B]elief also means a personal matter; something that some human being entertains or holds... merely a mental or psychical state... The ambiguity of the word thus renders its use inadvisable for the purpose at hand (Dewey, 1938:7).

By my lights, Dewey is noting that belief is said in two ways. Belief refers to (a) the content of a belief (what it is that is believed), and to (b) the psychological (or mental) state of belief itself. Dewey’s general shift away from *belief* makes his theory suitable for engaging with the value problem of knowledge.

During the process of inquiry, Dewey maintains that *judging* amounts to practical reasoning governed by the laws of logic. Of course, for some kinds of knowledge such perceptual or introspective knowledge, this judging takes place seemingly instantaneously. Inquiry conducted competently leads to a final *judgment* which represents the termination of inquiry.<sup>15</sup> It is thus judging, and not believing, that functions to terminate inquiry. Moreover, it is thus a final judgment, and not a final belief, that signifies the termination of inquiry. While beliefs may themselves be, and can result in, propositions that affirm or deny, acquiring a belief does not satisfactorily terminate inquiry. Whereas acquiring a belief does not necessarily modify an indeterminate situation into a determinate situation, forming a final judgment does.

The process of inquiry is constituted by practical reasoning called judging that terminates inquiry through the settlement of a final judgment but also requires intermediate judging. Initiating inquiry calls for one to determine what the situation is, what method is most suitable to solve or resolve the situation, what conclusions should be drawn from suggestions constituted by possible solutions, or to contemplate what experiments should be performed

to test the possible solutions. So, there exist intermediate judgments before reaching a final judgment. These intermediate judgments involve estimating, appraising, and evaluating. Brown (2012) presents his understanding of Dewey's theory of inquiry through the following illustration.



Brown explains: Dewey's two-dimensional theory of inquiry. The First dimension is the linear sequence of temporal stages captured by Dewey's "definition" of inquiry. The second dimension is the nonlinear set of functional phrases that Dewey calls the "pattern of inquiry" (Brown, 2012). One may notice that Brown and I are using slightly different labels for the stages of inquiry. Notice too that our readings of Dewey's theory of inquiry are compatible. The three stages of inquiry are, then, (I) an indeterminate situation, (II) inquiring itself, and (III) judgment. What is labeled in Brown's illustration as "judgement" represents the determinate situation no longer characterized by uncertainty or doubtfulness. What Brown labels "observation, problem, suggestion, reasoning, experiment" is what I have been explicating as the process of inquiry marked by estimating, appraising, and evaluating through intermediate judging.

Dewey's term for the final settlement of a judgment is "warranted assertion" (Dewey 1938: 7-9). Dewey says,

Knowledge, as an abstract term, is a name for the product of competent inquiries. [...] That which satisfactorily terminates inquiry is, by definition, knowledge; it is knowledge because it *is* the appropriate close of inquiry. [...] When knowledge is taken as a general abstract term related to inquiry in the abstract, it means "warranted assertability" (Ibid, 8-9).

Summarizing Dewey's theory: Competent inquiry involves judging that is controlled and directed by the logical rules of reasoning and modifies an indeterminate situation into a determinate situation. The termination of inquiry is represented by a final judgment with warranted assertability and

this counts as knowing (Ibid, 138, 139 and 159). Note, the judgment resulting from competent inquiry simply enables one to make a warranted assertion hence Dewey's use of the term "warranted assertability."<sup>16</sup> Dewey's theory of inquiry can provide contemporary epistemology with a framework from which to solve the value problem of knowledge.<sup>17</sup>

### **3.0 A Pragmatic Solution to The Value Problem of Knowledge**

Recall that I presented an excerpt from Plato's *Meno* in which Socrates and Meno are discussing two concepts: knowledge and true belief. Why, they wonder, is knowledge prized more highly than true belief? The question becomes increasingly irritating once they agree that someone with a true belief that p and another person with knowledge that p both have an equally good (true) answer to the question whether p. Now, I will evaluate the value problem of knowledge from a pragmatic perspective informed especially by Dewey's theory of inquiry.

#### **3.1 Knowledge is the result of that which True Belief is not**

Knowledge and true belief are the results of two different processes. I suggest this is one answer to why knowledge is more valuable than true belief.

Knowledge, Dewey maintains, is the result of competently inquiring. In other words: the process that leads to knowledge is inquiry. One cannot acquire knowledge, according to Dewey, without inquiring competently. So, someone who possesses knowledge must have gone through a method of investigation that is appropriate to what was indeterminate in their situation and subsequently successfully modified the situation in which they were. Dewey claims that inquiry is valuable in its own right and shows us that knowledge inherently involves inquiry.

Belief, to contrast, does necessarily require that one perform an inquiry. Many things can prompt belief. To acquire a true belief, it need not be the case that one inquired competently. It need not be that one inquired at all. We believe things that are true and false and we believe things for good and bad reasons. Sometimes the possessor of a true belief came upon it by mere luck.

Since true belief does not require a competent inquiry for its formulation, knowledge is more valuable than true belief. The value of knowledge is higher than true belief because the source of what one knows, competent inquiry, is itself valuable.

Consider the following case. Suppose that a town named Larissa is a tourist's desired destination.<sup>18</sup> The tourist becomes confused about which way to travel and wanders along a street until approaching two people, Neverbeen and Hasbeen. Both are responsible, reliable, adult locals. The tourist greets them, "I need to reach Larissa, can one of you guide me?" Neverbeen is someone who has never been to Larissa but possesses a cellular device with access to the internet. Hasbeen has family (whom he adores) in Larissa and has thus been to Larissa many times. In response to the tourist, Neverbeen and Hasbeen simultaneously say, "I can guide you!"



It seems intuitive that Neverbeen can guide the tourist on the way to Larissa. Neverbeen can use the compass rose displayed on the ground positioning system of his cellular device for orientation and offer directions to the tourist. Suppose Neverbeen is looking at his GPS. When the tourist questions Neverbeen about his directions, Neverbeen defers to the displayed step-by-step instructions. In short, it seems clear that Neverbeen has a true belief about the way to Larissa and can guide the tourist.

It seems intuitive that Hasbeen can guide the tourist on the way to Larissa, too. Hasbeen can dictate step-by-step instructions for how to reach Larissa without the aid of anything beyond his skull. Whereas Neverbeen's reliance on the electronic device betrays his general lack of knowledge, Hasbeen's experience traveling the particular path to the desired destination betrays his knowledge. While Neverbeen may assert true propositions about where to turn left or right, Hasbeen asserts true propositions based on first-hand experience actually turning at those intersections. Neverbeen's true propositions are the result of reiterating directions based on a GPS map, while Hasbeen's true judgments are the result of conducting successful experiments (namely, reaching Larissa). In short, it seems clear that Hasbeen knows the way to Larissa and can successfully guide the tourist.

For reasons mentioned above, Neverbeen and Hasbeen can both lead the tourist to Larissa. Even if both guides would be successful, I argue that Hasbeen is a better guide than Neverbeen. I argue that Hasbeen is a better guide than Neverbeen because Hasbeen has previously successfully conducted this inquiry (how to get to Larissa). Since only competent inquiry results in knowledge, I argue that Hasbeen possesses knowledge whereas Neverbeen possesses mere true belief.

Despite Neverbeen and Hasbeen's true utterances that, "I can guide you," only one of them utters a warranted assertion called knowledge. Recall the way warranted assertions are generated in Dewey's theory of inquiry. A warranted assertion is the result of some process of competent inquiry involving practical reasoning called judging according to logical laws. Hasbeen satisfies what it takes to conduct competent inquiry by successfully traveling the path and reaching Larissa as his travels are something like a geological survey of the path to Larissa. So, Hasbeen's directions to Larissa are warranted assertions about the path to Larissa. Neverbeen may have reliable access to directions for reaching Larissa through his GPS through which one discovers accurate directions. This, however, grants Neverbeen knowledge of what the map indicates. By consulting a map, Neverbeen only conducts a competent inquiry into what the map depicts and not the actual way to Larissa. Hasbeen's true assertion about the way to Larissa, but not Neverbeen's true assertion about the way to Larissa is the result of competent inquiry *about the path to Larissa*.

Albeit Neverbeen and Hasbeen have conducted some kind of inquiry into something, only Hasbeen has conducted competent inquiry into the path to Larissa. If this is correct, then not only does Hasbeen enjoy the value that results from possessing the correct answer to some question, Hasbeen also enjoys the value that is entailed by having successfully conducted inquiry.

Neverbeen's proposition, because true, enjoys the value that comes with possessing the correct answer to some question. However, Neverbeen's true belief about the path to Larissa, because grounded on a map and not based on traveling to Larissa, does not enjoy the additional value of possessing an idea that is the direct result of inquiring competently into the question, "how do I travel to Larissa?". Even though Hasbeen and Neverbeen have correct answers to the tourist's question, Hasbeen offers the preferable directions because his answer is the consequence of a process (inquiry) that has intrinsic value; that is, because only Hasbeen has knowledge of what the tourist wants to know.

Only someone with knowledge has warrant built into their assertion through the process of inquiry. Thus, the additional value enjoyed by knowledge but not true belief is grounded in conducting that inquiry competently. The reason why we prefer knowledge to true belief and prefer being directed by someone with knowledge as opposed to mere true belief is because knowledge is always the result of a valuable process and true belief is not.<sup>19</sup> But this is not the only reason why knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief.

### **3.2 Knowledge is more advantageous than True Belief**

I discussed earlier that the source of knowledge is of inherent value, and I'll shift views now discussing how knowledge entails the possession of more information than mere true belief because it is a result of the inherently valuable process of inquiry. Knowledge is the result of competent inquiry and inquiry involves making provisional judgments. So, possessing knowledge entails a certain familiarity with related information in addition to familiarity with the direct object of knowledge. For example, the person who is forming a judgment that *p* probably considers whether it is possible that  $\sim p$  before settling the final judgment that *p*. Someone with a true belief that *p*, however, need not have reflected on whether  $\sim p$ . This suggests that knowledge is more advantageous than true belief because someone with knowledge that *p* has familiarity with information related to *p* in addition to grasping *p* itself.

Imagine that you are the tourist asking for a guide. Your options are Neverbeen and Hasbeen, and each has agreed to take you themselves. Suppose you select Neverbeen as your guide. You come to the second intersection at which point the GPS says to turn left. Yet on the road to your left, there is a "Road Closed for Construction" sign in addition to "Do Not Enter" tape. You look to Neverbeen for guidance. Neverbeen looks to his GPS for guidance. You both hope there is an alternative list of directions. Suppose there are no listed alternatives because now, in the middle of two towns, the GPS is not providing any directions. How to proceed? Neverbeen can no longer help. This is an indeterminate situation. It is not clear whether you will reach Larissa.

What constitutes a problem for the tourist guided by Neverbeen does not constitute a problem for he who selects Hasbeen as a guide. Having carried out this inquiry before, Hasbeen is able to guide you to your destination even

in the case of a road closure. It is even possible that Hasbeen knows the shortcuts that avoid the main roads often closed for construction. So, you may still reach Larissa if you are being guided by Hasbeen and approach a closed road.

Whereas someone who has never experimented with some set of procedures *may* recognize when something has gone wrong, one who successfully conducts an experiment in which something has gone wrong will quickly recognize the error. Only someone who has successfully conducted an experiment has a clear idea of what to expect and can make adjustments to obtain the correct results. So, someone with knowledge has more information than someone with a true belief.

Hasbeen has more information than Neverbeen. Someone with knowledge about the way to Larissa, but not someone with a true belief based on accessing a map, is in a good position to correct for errors or other setbacks. The grounds upon which Neverbeen's true belief was generated required no access to alternative routes or other additional information. A true belief that *this is the road to Larissa* does not entail additional information like *if this path becomes closed, another route is available*. Mere true belief does not, therefore, entail familiarity with related information in addition to the true belief itself.

This suggests that someone with true belief does not actually offer directions valued equivalently to the directions offered by someone with knowledge. If something unexpected were to occur during the process of following a certain set of directions, one's true belief may be revealed as lacking the ability to correct unanticipated errors. Being guided by someone with knowledge, one will be in a better practical situation. Someone with knowledge can detect and correct what someone with a true belief may fail to recognize. We prefer knowledge to true belief and prefer being led by someone with knowledge as opposed to true belief because knowledge will prove more advantageous given its wider scope of relevant information.

### **Implications**

The quotation from the SEP, recall, says, "After all, *a true belief about the correct way to Larissa* is surely of just as much practical use as *knowledge of the way to Larissa*—both will get us to our destination." But after considering Dewey's theory of inquiry we see *practical* in a new light. It turns out that knowledge *is* more practical than true belief. Albeit Hasbeen and Neverbeen are offering the same true propositions, their directions are the results of different processes and may therefore result in different practical consequences. When things go wrong, for example, Hasbeen is preferred to Neverbeen because he is in a better position to continue assisting us. Knowledge is more practical than true belief because being led by someone with knowledge is more advantageous than being led by someone with mere true belief.

In comparing someone with knowledge to someone with a true belief, only the one who has conducted the inquiry sees their judgment as the result of inquiry. Someone with true belief has the correct answer but not necessarily

because they inquired competently. Thus, the additional value of knowledge stems from the value intrinsic to the conduct of inquiry which results in knowledge.

### **Objection**

Dewey seems to allow that there can be inquiries that involve a broad range of deliberative effort, and that makes it at least plausible that one could conduct inquiry into the question of how to get someplace simply by consulting a GPS device. If consulting a local passerby regarding the way to a nearby city is considered conducting inquiry, then surely consulting a map is too. Why does Neverbeen's consultation of GPS *not* count as inquiry?<sup>20</sup>

The objection raises a fair concern. According to my interpretation of Dewey, too, we can understand inquiring broadly. So, when Neverbeen consults a GPS, why not take it as performing an equally good inquiry? I concede the point that consulting a map *is* to engage in some sort of inquiry. If it is true that both have performed an inquiry, then why think that Neverbeen is offering the tourist something of lesser value than Hasbeen? More concretely: if I admit that someone with a true belief has inquired, why think that true belief which is the result of inquiry is worth less than knowledge?

My answer is that Neverbeen and Hasbeen conduct different inquiries. Recall that we are comparing Neverbeen's inquiry (consulting a GPS to offer directions) to Hasbeen's inquiry (physically traveling to the location to which directions are needed). Neverbeen conducts inquiry that is competent with respect to the question, *What does the map indicate is the way to Larissa?* The warranted assertion proposed by Neverbeen is limited to whatever is indicated by the map on his GPS device. This seems clear given that Neverbeen's propositions are generated by observing the GPS. It would be a separate and contingent matter whether Neverbeen's inquiry is competent with respect to the question, *What is the way to Larissa?* It would be contingent on the adequacy of the GPS or map as a source of information regarding the way to Larissa, and the inquirer's grounds for judging it to be adequate.

The tourist is not seeking what some map indicates is the way. Instead, the tourist seeks to learn the way to Larissa. Neverbeen's inquiry into what the GPS indicates is not ultimately competent with respect to the question, *What is the way to Larissa?* For answering the question about the way to Larissa, the most suitable form of inquiry consists in traveling there.

It seems clear to me that if Neverbeen and Hasbeen both offered to walk with the tourist to Larissa, being accompanied by someone who has walked the path before is preferable to being accompanied by someone who has but seen an aerial view of the land indicated by a map.

### **Objection**

You stipulate that Hasbeen has been to Larissa whereas Neverbeen has not been to Larissa himself but is holding a GPS device. You take this to be a case where Hasbeen has knowledge and Neverbeen has mere true belief

concerning the path to Larissa. This seems utterly wrong. Are you saying that if I am holding a GPS device, and intentionally consult it before offering a tourist directions that I somehow fail to know what I'm talking about? Surely you are not claiming that looking at an accurate map fails to serve as sufficient justification to know the way to Larissa. Both Hasbeen and Neverbeen have knowledge and are equal guides for the tourist.

Fair point. Yet, I do *not* think Neverbeen knows what Hasbeen knows. Neverbeen knows what the GSP says is the road to Larissa. Hasbeen knows the road to Larissa. While I am under the impression that Neverbeen counts as possessing a true belief about the actual road to Larissa (and not knowledge) from looking at a map, proving this is beyond the scope of this paper. Proving this would require that I define what knowledge is and then show how Neverbeen falls short of it. I gestured that Neverbeen falls short of knowledge and has mere true belief on account of Dewey's definition of knowledge as that which results from competent inquiry.

Even if Neverbeen has conducted an inquiry, he has inquired into a different question than Hasbeen, and his conclusions are not competent with respect to the tourist's aim. Yet even if Neverbeen could be said to know what Hasbeen knows, then still Hasbeen and Neverbeen have knowledge of unequal value. This is because Hasbeen possesses more information than Neverbeen.

Neverbeen possesses accurate directions to Larissa based on a map. That is, a map is Neverbeen's only grounds for claiming that he can direct the tourist. It is true that Neverbeen possesses information that the tourist wants to come to know: a way to arrive at Larissa. All Neverbeen knows, however, is what the map indicates. Amongst other things the tourist may need to know during his travels is how to navigate the roads in the case of a detour. A map does not identify, amongst other things, road closures. Having successfully conducted the experiment that the tourist aims to conduct (walking to Larissa), Hasbeen has *more* to offer the tourist than Neverbeen. Hasbeen can warn the tourist to avoid being distracted by the daisy's in the middle of the journey because the area in which they bloom is near quicksand. Neverbeen does not know these things. Even with an accurate GPS device and map-reading skills, Neverbeen is a less valuable guide than Hasbeen.

If Neverbeen knows anything at all, it is less than Hasbeen. I say, "*if* Neverbeen knows anything at all" because if Neverbeen has conducted inquiry in Dewey's sense, then he has knowledge of something. However, Neverbeen does not know what Hasbeen knows because they have conducted different inquiries. Moreover, the existence of such dangers as quicksand would tend to make it less likely that an inquiry into what the GPS indicates can be a suitable substitute for an inquiry carried out through multiple journeys under varying conditions, *et cetera*.

### **Conclusion**

To summarize, I propose we value knowledge more than true belief because we value the process of competently conducting inquiry.

Knowledge is necessarily the result of competent inquiry whereas true belief can but *need not be* the result of any inquiry. When knowledge and true belief are both the result of inquiry, knowledge is *still* more valuable because knowing entails a greater familiarity with related information. Thus, being led by someone with knowledge is more advantageous than being led by someone with mere true belief. Someone with knowledge is *more likely* to notice where things have gone wrong, why, and is also in a better position to offer corrections for those errors. The practical consequences of possessing knowledge are *more* beneficial—thus, more valuable—than those of possessing mere true belief.

### Notes

1. There are several distinguishable “value problems.” This version of the problem is typically referred to as *the Meno problem*. See Pritchard and Turri (2014) for more versions.
2. See Plato’s *Theaetetus*.
3. Gettier (1963). It is interesting to note that some dictionaries still include a “justified true belief” entry as a definition of knowledge.
4. See Williamson (2000).
5. Recent literature in epistemology is marked by general concern with the intimate relationship between the nature of knowledge and its value. See Kvanvig (2003) or Riggs (2007).
6. Falsehoods themselves cannot be known. However, a false proposition can be made known by being brought to light as a false proposition. One may know, for example, that “it is false that the Earth is flat” because it is true that the proposition “the Earth is flat” is false. Thanks to Ira A. Richardson for helping me see the light.
7. Compare what Dewey writes on page 108 in *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*. (Henry Holt, 1938) about this modification of a situation to what Peirce writes on page 113 of “The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings,” vol. 1. N. Houser and C. Kloesel, eds. Indiana University Press, 1992.
8. This quotation is found in Brown (2012), he cites Dewey’s *Logic*, LW 12:108. Brown then explicates this quotation, “Inquiry is the deliberate attempt to transform an indeterminate situation or perplexity into a resolved or settled state (relative to that particular indeterminacy or perplexity).”
9. See Browning, Douglas. 2002. “Designation, Characterization, and Theory in Dewey’s *Logic*.” In *Dewey’s Logical Theory: New Studies and Interpretations*, ed. F. Thomas Burke, D. Micah.
10. *Ibid.* Page 106. Note that I am using *mental state* loosely because it is not settled whether Dewey endorsed the existence of ‘mental states.’
11. *Ibid.* Pages 104-6. Brown (2012) describes the difference between common sense inquiry and scientific inquiry, “The difference between science and commonsense inquiry is a matter of (a) different subject matters or kinds of problems to be solved (LW 12:71), (b) the degree of distance from immediate need, and (c) the degree of precision, control, and systematicity.”
12. I don’t have the space here to explain how perceptual knowledge is the result of competent inquiry. Using work beyond Dewey’s writings, I argue for it elsewhere.
13. Thanks to Kent Staley for pointing this out to me.
14. Elsewhere, I argue that ‘belief’ is not a necessary condition for ‘knowledge’.
15. Dewey claims, “all logical forms (with their characteristic properties) arise

within the operation of inquiry and are concerned with control of inquiry so that it may yield warranted assertions” (LW 12:11). Cited in Brown (2012).

16. Thanks to Kent Staley for helping me see this point.

17. While I am proposing Dewey’s theory of inquiry to see what makes knowledge more valuable than true belief, some have argued that “Dewey vehemently opposed what he called the “industry of epistemology” (EW 5:7; MW 10:23).” See Brown (2012).

18. “Larissa” is now the capital of the Thessaly region of Greece.

19. See discussions of the swamping problem for reliabilism for objections to the general principle upon which my theory is grounded. Thanks for John Greco for bringing this to my attention.

20. Thanks to Kent Staley for this objection.

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