

© 2013 The Author

Metaphilosophy © 2013 Metaphilosophy LLC and Blackwell Publishing Ltd

Published by Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK, and
350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148, USA

METAPHILOSOPHY

Vol. 44, Nos. 1–2, January 2013

0026-1068

MENO AND THE MONIST

KRISTOFFER AHLSTROM-VII

Abstract: Recent critiques of veritistic value monism, or the idea that true belief is unique in being of fundamental epistemic value, typically invoke a claim about the surplus value of knowledge over mere true belief, in turn traced back to Plato's *Meno*. However, to the extent Plato at all defends a surplus claim in the *Meno*, it differs from that figuring in contemporary discussions with respect to both its *scope* and the *kind* of value at issue, and is under closer scrutiny fully compatible with veritistic value monism. Consequently, contrary to what seems to be supposed in the literature, the critics of monism have little to gain from turning to the *Meno* for support.

Keywords: epistemic value, value of knowledge, monism, pluralism, Plato.

In contemporary discussions about the value of knowledge, it is often maintained that knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief. For example, Ward Jones writes: “I want all of my beliefs to be true—otherwise I would not believe them—but I would also rather they be known beliefs than mere true beliefs” (1997, 424). And Jones is by no means alone. Duncan Pritchard begins an overview of recent literature on the value of knowledge by stating what he correctly takes to be an assumption shared by virtually everyone involved in the relevant discussions, namely, that “we clearly do value knowledge more than mere true belief” (2007, 87). While there are many ways in which knowledge might be more valuable than mere true belief, including moral or practical, the relevant claim is the following:

(K) Knowledge is more *epistemically* valuable than mere true belief.

After all, only on this reading will the relevant surplus claim present a challenge to the thesis against which it is typically directed, that is, *veritistic value monism*.¹ Veritistic value monism is the idea that believing truly

¹ Recent proponents of veritistic value monism include Goldman (1999), David (2005), and Olsson (2007). The term “veritistic” is borrowed from Goldman (1999), who talks about

© 2013 The Author

Metaphilosophy © 2013 Metaphilosophy LLC and Blackwell Publishing Ltd

is unique in being of fundamental epistemic value. This claim calls for some elaboration.

Epistemic value is the kind of value that arises in contexts of inquiry, where inquiry encompasses the range of inquisitive practices concerned with posing and answering questions for the purpose of attaining true belief, knowledge, understanding, and so on. That for the purpose of which we are posing and answering questions are the *goals* of inquiry.² Such goals determine what activities, states, processes, practices, and so on, are epistemically valuable.³ The veritistic value monist holds that there is only one goal of inquiry, namely, true belief. If she is right, everything that is an effective means to believing truly is of *instrumental* epistemic value. Something is of *mere* instrumental epistemic value if and only if its epistemic value is exhausted by its thus being an effective means. Moreover, something is of *non-instrumental* epistemic value if and only if it is epistemically valuable, but not of mere instrumental epistemic value.

Why not simply frame veritistic value monism in terms of true belief being the only non-instrumental epistemic value? Because veritistic value monism allows for other things being of non-instrumental epistemic value besides mere true belief. By way of illustration, veritistic value monism is compatible with knowing being of non-instrumental epistemic value in virtue of true belief being a component of knowing. This brings us to the idea of *fundamental* epistemic value. Something is of fundamental epistemic value if and only if its non-instrumental epistemic value does not derive in full from the value of any of its components. What the truth monist denies is that any state that involves true belief as a mere component is of anything but derived non-instrumental value.

Fundamental value should not be confused with *final* value, that is, value that pertains to that which is valuable irrespective of any considerations about conduciveness whatsoever. Again, if true belief is a goal of inquiry, then true belief is of fundamental *epistemic* value. This, however, is perfectly compatible with also claiming that true beliefs are of fundamental epistemic value only in so far as they are of instrumental *non-epistemic* value (e.g., practical, prudential, or moral), for example, by pertaining to questions posed by some relevant set of inquirers (see Goldman 1999, 94–96). Differently put, it might be necessary—but *not*

“veritistic epistemology” as the kind of epistemology concerned with the production of true belief. Veritistic value monism is sometimes referred to simply as epistemic value monism, e.g., by Zagzebski (2004).

² Could we take just *anything* to be a goal of inquiry, beyond the paradigmatic candidates of true belief, knowledge, understanding, and so on? As I have argued elsewhere (Ahlstrom-Vij forthcoming *b*), the answer seems to be no.

³ As this characterization makes clear, I will take a broadly *consequentialist* approach to epistemic evaluation. For prominent alternatives, see the virtue-theoretic approach of Zagzebski (1996) and the deontological approach of Clifford (1866).

sufficient—for true beliefs to be of fundamental epistemic value that the relevant beliefs are of instrumental non-epistemic value. Consequently, taking true belief to be a (or even the only) goal of inquiry does not imply that true belief is valuable independently of any considerations about conduciveness whatsoever.

Having clarified the monist's position, let us return to (K). (K) presents a challenge for the monist since it can be accounted for neither in terms of the non-instrumental value that derives from the factivity of knowing nor in terms of any additional instrumental value contributed by the non-factive component of knowing. As for the latter, while both truth and truth-conducivity are good things, it is not clear that a true belief will be any *more* worth having for also being formed by way of a truth-conducive process. As Jonathan Kvanvig (2003) puts the point, the presence of truth seems to “swamp” the epistemic value of truth-conducivity.⁴ While this does not mean that the monist cannot account for knowledge being epistemically valuable, it does throw doubt on his ability to account for (K). Moreover, according to the monist's critics, this provides a reason for pluralism.

In response to this, some monists have gone on the defensive and argued that they can account for (K) (e.g., Goldman and Olsson 2009). But the monist may also go on the offensive by calling (K) into question.⁵ After all, before invoking (K) in any argument against monism, we need a *theory-independent* reason for taking the intuition it typically is taken to capture at face value. A theory-independent reason is a reason that does not presuppose any particular epistemological theory, for example, regarding the nature of knowledge. Disregarding theory-dependent reasons is in the interest of both parties in the debate, since the dialectical deck can be stacked either way. For example, allowing for theory-dependent reasons to motivate or discredit (K) allows for a very simple reply by the monist: taken together, process reliabilism and aforementioned swamping considerations imply that (K) does not hold. No one has pursued this strategy, and the reason for this is simple: those involved in the debate (*a*) assume that *if* (K) amounts to a constraint on theories of

⁴ Similar points have been made by Zagzebski (2003), Sosa (2003), Swinburne (1999), and Jones (1997).

⁵ With the exception of Ahlstrom-Vij forthcoming *a*, no contribution to the debate has pursued the option of rejecting (K). Baehr (2009) raises doubt about the extent to which the intuition typically reported in the form of (K) really is fully general, in the sense of concerning *all* instances of knowledge, but seems to accept (K) as a rough generalization. Greco (2009) questions the idea that there is widespread intuitive support for the further idea that knowledge is more valuable than any subset of its constituents, while accepting (K). Kvanvig (2003) denies that knowledge is more valuable than any subset of its constituents but accepts that (K) holds in virtue of the surplus value of justified true belief over mere true belief. Pritchard (2010) initially rejects (K) but re-establishes it (at least in part) with reference to the value of understanding, arguing that knowledge typically goes hand in hand with understanding.

knowledge, it amounts to a constraint on *any* theory of knowledge, and (b) acknowledge that reasons flowing from particular theories of knowledge carry no cross-theoretical force.

As I have argued elsewhere (Ahlstrom-Vij forthcoming *a*), however, it is hard to find convincing arguments for (K) in the literature that appeal to theory-independent reasons. This puts real pressure on those wishing to push a pluralist line with reference to (K) to muster further support for the relevant surplus claim. The most natural way to do so is to rest more heavily on historical pedigree. For example, Kvanvig writes:

[P]art of the challenge of explaining the value of knowledge is explaining how it has more value than other things, one of these other things being true opinion—as Meno claims after acquiescing to Socrates’ point that true belief is every bit as useful as knowledge. “In that case, I wonder why knowledge should be so much more prized than right opinion” (97c–d). Meno expresses here a common presupposition about knowledge, one that is widely, if not universally shared. Given this presupposition, an account of the value of knowledge must explain more than how knowledge is valuable. It must also explain why the value of knowledge is superior to the value of true opinion. (Kvanvig 2003, 3–4)

Similar statements about (K) having an important historical precedent in the *Meno* can be found in Kvanvig’s more recent work, as well as in the writings of a wide variety of epistemologists on both sides of the divide between monists and pluralists.⁶ In fact, Socrates’s observation in the *Meno* about the surplus value of knowledge over mere true belief has become such a common point of reference that the problem of accounting for (K) is often referred to simply as *the Meno problem*.

This taxonomy is misleading, however, in two respects. First, as pointed out by Dennis Whitcomb (2011), it is misleading to talk about *the Meno problem*. In fact, depending on exactly how the relevant surplus claim is spelled out, there are at least 540 different problems that one can mean to be addressing. Second, as I argue below, it is also misleading to talk about the *Meno problem*. To the extent that there is a surplus claim in the *Meno*, it is a claim that differs from (K) with respect to both its *scope* and the *kind* of value that is at issue. Consequently, the defender of (K) has little to gain from turning to the *Meno* for support—or so I will argue.

Before making the relevant case, however, a word is in order on what this article does *not* attempt to do. In particular, it does not attempt to provide anything like a complete account of Plato’s (or Socrates’s) epistemology and axiology. For one thing, such an investigation would be of a scope far greater than what can reasonably be expected from a single

⁶ See, e.g., Kvanvig (2010, 89), as well as Sosa (2011, 35), Pritchard (2010, 6), Millar, Haddock, and Pritchard (2009, 1–2), Goldman and Olsson (2009, 21–22), Baehr (2009, 42, n. 1), Greco (2009, 313–14), Riggs (2009, 331), and Olsson (2007, 343).

article. For another, providing such a complete account is not necessary for establishing the conclusion relevant to the present article. My aim here is simply to establish the following: If we look carefully at what Plato has to say about the value of knowledge in the *Meno*, we find nothing that counts for (K) or against veritistic value monism. As we have just seen, contemporary theorists about epistemic value have suggested otherwise. In what follows, I argue that they are mistaken.

In order to make the relevant case, let us start by considering the scope of the surplus claim that figures in the *Meno*. Towards the end of the dialogue, Socrates suggests that knowledge⁷ is no more useful than mere true belief (96c), and he illustrates his point with reference to how someone knowing the way to Larissa will be no worse of a guide to others with respect to getting them there than someone who merely has a true belief about the way to Larissa (97a). This, famously, makes Meno wonder “why knowledge is prized far more highly than right opinion, and why they are different” (97c–d).⁸ In response, Socrates invokes the idea that knowledge is true belief tied down through the process of giving an account:

[T]rue opinions, as long as they remain, are a fine thing and all they do is good, but they are not willing to remain long, and they escape from a man’s mind, so that they are not worth much until one ties them down by (giving) an account of the reason why. And that, Meno, my friend, is recollection, as we previously agreed. After they are tied down, in the first place they become knowledge, and then they remain in place. That is why knowledge is prized higher than correct opinion, and knowledge differs from correct opinion in being tied down. (97e–98a)

This is the passage that has led many contemporary epistemologists to suggest that Plato subscribed to something along the lines of (K) in the *Meno*. However, interpreting the passage in this way is problematic. As indicated by the parenthetical remark in Cooper’s translation, “(giving) an account of the reason why,” the relevant Greek phrase *aitias logismos* is generally thought to refer not to the product but to the *process* of reasoning (*logismos*) to the cause or explanation (*aitia*) (see Fine 2004, 58). Moreover, notice that Plato identifies the reasoning relevant to knowledge with *recollection*. Earlier in the dialogue, the process of recollection is invoked in a solution to the so-called paradox of inquiry, introduced by Meno and reformulated by Socrates in terms of a dilemma. According to the first horn, the inquirer “cannot search for what he knows—since he knows it, there is no need to search” (80e). On the second horn, the

⁷ I will assume that *episteme* is best translated as “knowledge.” This translation has supporters in the literature (e.g., Fine 2004) but is not altogether uncontroversial (see, e.g., Burnyeat 1980). However, if *episteme* should *not* be translated as “knowledge,” that is for the purposes of the present article just another reason not to invoke the *Meno* in support of (K).

⁸ All translations of Plato are from Cooper 1997.

inquirer also cannot search successfully “for what he does not know, for he does not know what to look for” (80e).⁹

Socrates’s solution to the paradox, involving the famous interrogation of the slave boy about how to double the area of a square (82b–85c), is that “the man who does not know has within himself true opinions about the things that he does not know” (85c) and that “if he were repeatedly asked these same questions in various ways, you know that in the end his knowledge about these things would be as accurate as anyone’s” (85c–d). In other words, the reason we can engage in successful philosophical inquiry is that we have tacit yet true belief.¹⁰ Since the true beliefs in question do not amount to knowledge, there is still a need for inquiry, which is why we avoid the first horn. Moreover, in so far as our inquiry is guided by such tacit belief, we might still know what to look for, even in the absence of explicit knowledge, and as such avoid the second horn. All it takes is an *elenchus*; through a persistent, dialectical inquiry in the form of question-and-answer adversary argument, we may recollect what we used to know when disembodied, but that has since been demoted from explicit knowledge to tacit but nevertheless true belief.

That said, the claim that the theory of recollection is invoked by Plato to solve the paradox of inquiry is not altogether uncontroversial. For example, Dominic Scott (2006) argues that the theory is instead invoked in a psychological strategy of carrot and stick, attempting both to exploit Meno’s weakness for the exotic through allusions to ancient myths in a context where he is getting tired of Socrates’s constant refutations and to arouse a sense of shame in Meno by suggesting that he is weak for wanting to leave the discussion.¹¹ To the extent that the theory of recollection is introduced to solve any philosophical problem, Scott argues, it is introduced to address a challenge that (Scott maintains) is ignored in Socrates’s reconstruction of Meno’s challenge, namely: “[I]f you really stumble upon it [i.e., the definiens], how will you know that this is the thing you didn’t know before?” (80d). Scott refers to this question as posing a *problem of discovery*.

⁹ While Plato formulates the second horn in terms of *searching*, what is at issue must surely be *successfully* searching. If searching is all that matters, there is an obvious manner in which the inquirer may manage to do so even if she does not know what to look for, namely by searching *aimlessly*.

¹⁰ Some (e.g., Taylor [2008] and Scott [2006]) would prefer to talk about tacit *knowledge*, and point to how Socrates (at 85d) talks about “the knowledge he [i.e., the slave boy] now possesses.” Other commentators (e.g., Fine [2003]) suggest that Socrates here is referring to an envisaged future time when the slave boy has undergone a successful *elenchus*, and point to how Socrates denies (at 85c) that the slave boy knows anything at the end of the interrogation. I’m working here with the latter interpretation, but the arguments to be made can be made just as easily on either interpretation.

¹¹ Hence, Socrates suggests that “we would be better men, braver and less idle, if we believe that one must search for the things one does not know, rather than if we believe that it is not possible to find out what we do not know and that we must not look for it” (86b–c).

There is no reason to deny the possibility that Plato introduced the theory of recollection to play a subtle rhetorical role in relation to Meno. It is less clear, however, why acknowledging that possibility rules out that the theory was *also* meant to solve the problem of inquiry, that is, the more general problem that Socrates elicits from Meno's immediate concern. On this point, notice that Meno does not resist Socrates's reconstruction (81a). And why should he? Meno's worry about not knowing that you have stumbled upon that which you did not know before can be understood as pinpointing the very *reason* the second horn presents a problem. That is, the reason the inquirer cannot search for what she does not know is that she would not know that she has stumbled upon that which she does not know, were she to do so—unless her inquiry is guided by tacit true belief, as postulated by the theory of recollection. That is why successful inquiry is *possible* and the inquirer avoids the second horn. Moreover, given that the beliefs guiding her do not constitute knowledge until tied down through the relevant process of reasoning (that is, through recollection), inquiry is still *worthwhile*, and the inquirer avoids the first horn.

All of this is relevant here for the following reason: If (a) the kind of knowledge that Plato has in mind when having Meno and Socrates suggest that knowledge is prized far more highly than mere true opinion is the kind of knowledge that results from true belief being tied through a process of reasoning; (b) to undergo the relevant process of reasoning is, as Socrates suggests, to recollect; and (c) recollection is introduced for the purpose of explaining why philosophical inquiry is possible, then it seems reasonable to assume that the kind of knowledge that Plato is concerned with in the *Meno* is not just any kind of knowledge—it is the particular kind of knowledge had by those who have gained successful insight into the nature of things. In short, it is *philosophical* knowledge, not knowledge in general.

Philosophical knowledge, as it figures as a topic of discussion in the *Meno*, is the kind of knowledge involved in teaching virtue (100a) (more on this below). Notice, however, that to suggest that this is the kind of knowledge that concerns Plato in the *Meno* is *not* to suggest that Plato was committed to a theory of Forms already in the *Meno*. The one theme that is recurrent throughout Plato's dialogues is an inquiry into *essences*, or that by which the phenomena under investigation are what they are.¹²

¹² Hence, when Socrates asks in the *Meno*, "If I do not know what something is, how could I know what qualities it possesses?" (71b), he not only seems to appeal to an implicit distinction between essential and non-essential properties but also follows up the request for an account of the latter (at 72b) by asking for the nature of something, using the same word (*ousia*) he uses in the *Euthyphro* (at 11a–b) when asking for the essence of piety. The same distinction between the essential and the non-essential appears in other pre-Form dialogues, including the *Laches* (189e–190c), *Protagoras* (312c and 360e–61d), and *Gorgias* (463c).

Given the epistemology of recollection introduced in the *Meno*, interpreting that by which virtues “have one and the same form which makes them virtues” (72c) in terms of proto-Forms is tempting but not necessary for present purposes. It suffices to note that, as far as the *Meno* is concerned, claims about the surplus value of knowledge apply to the kind of knowledge relevant to recollection, and the kind of knowledge relevant thus is philosophical knowledge, as in knowledge of essences, whether or not such essences are to be spelled out in terms of Plato’s later ontology of Forms, or in terms of his earlier ontology of essences more generally.

Maintaining that the *Meno* seems to be exclusively concerned with philosophical knowledge is also not to suggest that Plato necessarily took philosophical knowledge to be the only kind of knowledge there is.¹³ If he did, then no qualification would be needed, since there would no longer be a distinction between philosophical knowledge and knowledge in general. Be that as it may; the only things necessary to make the present point is that (a) contemporary epistemologists looking to the *Meno* in support of a claim about the surplus value of knowledge do *not* restrict their claims to philosophical knowledge, while (b) the kind of knowledge at issue in the *Meno*’s discussions about the value of knowledge seems to be philosophical and *only* philosophical knowledge—that is, the kind of knowledge relevant to teaching virtue—whether or not Plato at any point took that to be the only kind of knowledge there is.

One potential counterexample to (b) is the fact that the distinction between true belief and knowledge is introduced in the *Meno* with reference to knowing the way and guiding others to Larissa (97a). Taken literally, this example suggests that Plato’s concerns in the *Meno* were not exclusively with philosophical knowledge. However, the topic of the dialogue, that is, virtue (*arete*), is an inherently *political* concept as far as the *Meno* is concerned (see Scott 2006, 14). In light of this, it is not clear that we should understand the Larissa example as anything but a mere metaphor for the kind of guidance that Socrates ultimately seems to be concerned with, that is, the kind that Themistocles et al. are engaging in when leading their cities (99b). After all, Larissa only figures twice in the dialogue; first, as a place inhabited by people admired for their wisdom (70b), and, then, in the aforementioned example, as illustrating the absence of a distinction between knowledge and mere true belief as far as usefulness is concerned. At no point in the dialogue does Socrates concern himself with the kind of knowledge that literal, geographical guidance would have to pertain to, that is, empirical knowledge. Consequently, it is far from clear that the Socrates we encounter in the *Meno* would say that we may literally *know* the way to Larissa, in the way that we (if genuinely virtuous)

¹³ There is some indication to the effect that Plato took knowledge to be restricted to knowledge of Forms in the *Republic* (see particularly the end of book V and books VI–VII). See Taylor (2008, 178–79) for a discussion.

may know how to lead a city, which is the kind of knowledge occupying the discussion at large.¹⁴

In light of this, we may conclude that, to the extent that Plato subscribes to anything like (K) in the *Meno*, he seems at most to be committed to the following:

(K*) *Philosophical* knowledge is more epistemically valuable than mere true belief.

Understood thus, there is a clear difference in scope between the surplus claim found in the *Meno* and that defended by recent epistemologists who, as already noted, are concerned with knowledge *in general*. Consequently, it is not clear that the passages typically quoted from the *Meno* provide great—or indeed any—support for (K).

In fact, further consideration of what Plato has Socrates say about the value of knowledge suggests that Plato's take on the value of knowledge differs from (K) not only with respect to scope but also with respect to the *kind* of value involved. As we saw above, Socrates takes (philosophical) knowledge to be more valuable than mere true belief for being tied down through a process of reasoning about the relevant essences in virtue of which the knowledge at issue, unlike the untied work of Daedalus, will “remain in place” (98a). In other words, philosophical knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief (philosophical or otherwise) on account of the former's *stability*. Why is stability valuable? Surely it cannot be because it makes philosophical knowledge more fit for use in action, since Socrates explicitly denies that there is any difference between knowledge and mere true belief on this score (98c).

A more plausible interpretation stays true to the central theme of the *Meno*, that is, the relation between possessing philosophical knowledge and being able to teach virtue (100a). The connection between teachability and stability is not immediately obvious from Socrates's brief remarks in the *Meno*, but we may begin to see what is going on if we follow Gail Fine (2004) in looking beyond the *Meno* toward the *Republic*. According to Fine, the kind of stability at issue in the *Meno* should be understood in terms of what is said in the *Republic* (540b–c) about how someone who knows (at least in the limiting case of someone grasping the Good itself), unlike someone who merely believes truly, is invulnerable to refutation.¹⁵ The same goes, of course, for someone who just happens to be extremely

¹⁴ A similar point can be made about the passage where Socrates talks about knowing who Meno is (71b), which, as Scott (2006, 21) points out, “is best treated as a pedagogical device to give Meno an intuitive hold on the idea of one question (‘what is x?’) having priority over another (‘what is x like?’).”

¹⁵ See also *Euthyphro*, where Euthyphro complains that “whatever proposition we put forward [for cross-examination] goes around and refuses to stay put where we establish it” (11b), which prompts Socrates to make an allusion to Daedalus (11b–e).

dogmatic, which suggests that what is valuable about the relevant kind of stability is not invulnerability per se but rather the particular kind of invulnerability that arises from judging things “in accordance with being” (543c).

Differently put, philosophical knowledge is valuable not because it is tied down but because of what it is tied down *to*, that is, an account of the essence of things. Why is it valuable for knowledge to be tied down to such accounts? As Socrates proposes in the *Meno*, having one’s beliefs be tied down thus is to have philosophical knowledge, and to have philosophical knowledge is, as Socrates goes on to suggest towards the very end of the dialogue, to be able to teach virtue and, in effect, “make another into a statesman” (100a). This, of course, raises two further questions. First, what is valuable about *being* virtuous? Second, what is valuable about having philosophical knowledge and, in effect, being able to *teach* virtue?

Let us consider the first question. Throughout the *Meno*’s discussion about the value of virtue (87d–89a), the only value that virtue is explicitly said to have is that which it has on account of enabling one to use one’s assets correctly and, in effect, produce happiness (*eudaimonia*, at 88c). In modern parlance, virtue is thereby *instrumentally* valuable, in virtue of its conduciveness to happiness. In other words, as far as the *Meno* is concerned, both philosophical knowledge and philosophical true belief is instrumentally valuable, since attaining either enables one to use one’s assets correctly and, thereby, produce happiness.¹⁶

Turning to the second question, however, having philosophical knowledge is of *greater* instrumental value than having true belief (philosophical or otherwise) because someone endowed with the former will not only be able to use his assets correctly, and thereby *be* virtuous, but also be capable of *instilling* the same capacities in others, and thereby bring about happiness on a much greater scale. More specifically, in so far as one has philosophical knowledge as opposed to mere true belief, one will in general (more on this qualification below) be able to bring about a much greater amount of happiness, since the beneficial consequences of having such knowledge extends beyond the correct use of one’s *own* assets by also including the aggregate benefits of one’s students of virtue managing *their* assets correctly as well. Consequently, philosophical knowledge is, as *Meno* puts it, prized far more highly than mere philosophical true belief for the simple reason that bringing about *more* instrumental good is better than bringing about *less* instrumental good.

This interpretation makes sense of Socrates’s approval of *Meno*’s suggestion that philosophical knowledge is prized more highly than mere

¹⁶ In the *Republic*, Plato famously sets out to defend the claim that justice is not only good as an instrument but also an integral part of the good life, at least on the standard interpretation (see, e.g., Irwin 1995; see Butler 2008 for a different interpretation). No analogous claim is made about the value of virtue in the *Meno*.

philosophical true belief, as well as of Socrates's explanation in terms of stability and recollection. It does, however, require that we read Socrates's comment about knowledge being prized more highly than mere true belief (98a) as a claim about what is *generally* the case. After all, the aforementioned line of reasoning does not go to show that every instance of philosophical knowledge is more valuable than every instance of mere philosophical true belief. We can surely imagine a statesman of mere true (philosophical) belief bringing about an immense amount of good on account of ruling a massive city correctly, while another statesman, albeit endowed with knowledge, is unable to find either subjects or students in whom to instill virtue on account of geographical isolation or other external circumstances. Is this a problem?

As a matter of interpretation, it comes down to the idea that we should not commit Plato to more than we have to. When some kind x is prized more highly than another kind y , this could be because *every* x is more valuable than every y ; or it could be because *most* instances of x are more valuable than most instances of y . Lacking any reason to commit Plato to the former (and stronger) claim about the comparative value of knowledge over mere true belief, it seems reasonable to stick to an interpretation in terms of the latter. After all, many things (e.g., veal) might be prized more highly than other things (e.g., hot dogs), even if some instances of the latter kind might be more valuable than some instances of the former kind (e.g., veal that has gone bad). By the same logic, we may understand what Socrates sets out to show in terms of how philosophical knowledge is *rightly* prized more highly than mere true belief, since philosophical knowledge *in general* gives rise to more happiness than does mere true belief.

This leaves us with one final question about Plato's take on the value of knowledge in the *Meno*: What *kind* of value applies to philosophical knowledge? If philosophical knowledge is valuable because it enables the knower to not only instantiate but also multiply virtue, and virtue is valuable because it enables one to use one's assets correctly and, in effect, produce happiness, it seems right to say that whatever value attaches to knowledge on account of being generally conducive to happiness, it is *not* of an epistemic kind, as such value is understood by contemporary epistemologists interested in (K). This holds even if we take into consideration the possibility highlighted at the outset to the effect that fundamental epistemic values (e.g., true beliefs) are valuable only if they constitute instrumental non-epistemic values, for example by pertaining to questions that the inquirer wants answered on moral, practical, or prudential grounds. On that possibility, it is necessary but *not* sufficient for something to be of fundamental epistemic value that it be of instrumental non-epistemic value. The view we find in the *Meno*, however, is different. On that view, it is *sufficient*, whether or not it is also necessary, for something to be valuable in the relevant sense that it is conducive to

happiness. In the contemporary epistemological debate, however, a paradigm case of a non-epistemic value is the kind of value had simply on account of conduciveness to happiness. Consider, for example, a false belief the having of which brings great happiness. Having such a belief might be valuable, but whatever value it thereby has is not of an *epistemic* kind.

In other words, in so far as Plato subscribed to anything like (K) in the *Meno*, the most plausible interpretation seems to be the following:

(K**) Philosophical knowledge is more *non-epistemically* valuable than mere true belief.

Setting aside the issue that (K**), like (K*), pertains only to *philosophical* knowledge, notice that (K**) is compatible with monism, which is a thesis exclusively about epistemic value. More generally, given that it does not follow from something being valuable on *one* qualification (e.g., *morally* valuable, *prudentially* valuable, or what have you) that it is valuable on *every other* qualification, (K**) is compatible with monism no matter how the relevant non-epistemic value is spelled out. In fact, even if I am wrong in suggesting that the surplus claim in the *Meno* should be framed in terms of instrumental value, and the dialogue actually is concerned with some kind of final value, the dialogue still presents no problem for the monist.¹⁷ After all, since it does not follow from something being valuable *without* qualification that it is valuable on *every* qualification, even a construal of (K**) in terms of knowledge being of greater final value than mere true belief is compatible with monism, which—again—is a thesis exclusively about epistemic value.

In conclusion, contrary to what seems to be assumed in the literature, it is far from clear that contemporary critics of monism have much to gain in terms of support from Plato's *Meno*. As I pointed out at the outset, however, I have made no attempt here to provide anything like a fully comprehensive account of Plato's epistemology and axiology. Providing such an account would not only require an investigation of a scope going far beyond that of a single article but also not be necessary for answering the question the present article set out to answer, namely, whether what Plato has to say about value in the *Meno* provides any support for (K) and as such conflicts with veritistic value monism. Contemporary theorists working on the value of knowledge have suggested that the answer is yes, and that this spells trouble for the monist. If what I have argued above is correct, however, a careful reading of the *Meno* reveals that the answer is no, and that those maintaining otherwise to that extent are mistaken.

¹⁷ See my footnote 16. Thanks to an anonymous *Metaphilosophy* reviewer for pushing me on this point.

Department of Philosophy
University of Kent
Canterbury, CT2 7NX
United Kingdom
h.k.ahlstrom@kent.ac.uk

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Hilary Kornblith, Erik J. Olsson, Casey Perin, Raphael Woolf, and an anonymous *Metaphilosophy* reviewer for valuable comments.

References

- Ahlstrom-Vij, K. Forthcoming *a*. “In Defense of Veritistic Value Monism.” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*.
- . Forthcoming *b*. “Moderate Epistemic Expressivism.” *Philosophical Studies*.
- Baehr, J. 2009. “Is There a Value Problem?” In Haddock, Millar, and Pritchard 2009, 42–59.
- Burnyeat, M. F. 1980. “Socrates and the Jury: Paradoxes in Plato’s Distinction Between Knowledge and True Belief.” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* suppl. 54:173–91.
- Butler, J. 2008. “A Holistic Defense of Justice in the *Republic*.” *Apeiron* 41, no. 4:229–46.
- Clifford, W. K. 1866. “The Ethics of Belief.” In L. Stephen and F. Pollock, eds., *Lectures and Essays by the Late William Kingdon Clifford*, 2nd ed., 339–63. London: Macmillan.
- Cooper, J. M. 1997. *Plato: Complete Works*. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- David, M. 2005. “Truth as the Primary Epistemic Goal: A Working Hypothesis.” In M. Steup and E. Sosa, eds., *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*, 296–312. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell.
- Fine, G. 2003. *Plato on Knowledge and Forms: Selected Essays*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- . 2004. “Knowledge and True Belief in the *Meno*.” *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* XXVII:41–81.
- Goldman, A. 1999. *Knowledge in a Social World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Goldman, A., and E. J. Olsson. 2009. “Reliabilism and the Value of Knowledge.” In Haddock, Millar, and Pritchard 2009, 19–41.
- Greco, J. 2009. “The Value Problem.” In Haddock, Millar, and Pritchard 2009, 313–21.
- Haddock, A., A. Millar, and D. Pritchard, eds. 2009. *Epistemic Value*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Irwin, T. 1995. *Plato's Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jones, W. E. 1997. "Why Do We Value Knowledge?" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 34, no. 4:423–39.
- Kvanvig, J. 2003. *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2010. "The Swamping Problem Redux: Pith and Gist." In A. Haddock, A. Millar, and D. Pritchard, eds., *Social Epistemology*, 89–112. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Millar, A., A. Haddock, and D. Pritchard. 2009. "Introduction." In Haddock, Millar, and Pritchard 2009, 1–15.
- Olsson, E. J. 2007. "Reliabilism, Stability, and the Value of Knowledge." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 44, no. 4:343–55.
- Pritchard, D. 2007. "Recent Work on Epistemic Value." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 44, no. 2:85–110.
- . 2010. "Knowledge and Understanding." In D. Pritchard, A. Millar, and A. Haddock, eds., *The Nature and Value of Knowledge: Three Investigations*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Riggs, W. 2009. "Understanding, Knowledge, and the *Meno* Requirement." In Haddock, Millar, and Pritchard 2009, 313–21.
- Scott, D. 2006. *Plato's Meno*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sosa, E. 2003. "The Place of Truth in Epistemology." In M. DePaul and L. Zagzebski, eds., *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology*, 155–79. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2011. *Knowing Full Well*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Swinburne, R. 1999. *Providence and the Problem of Evil*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Taylor, C. C. W. 2008. "Plato's Epistemology." In G. Fine, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Plato*, 165–90. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Whitcomb, D. 2011. "Epistemic Value." In A. Cullison, ed., *The Continuum Companion to Epistemology*, 270–87. London: Continuum.
- Zagzebski, L. 1996. *Virtues of the Mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2003. "The Search for the Source of Epistemic Good." *Metaphilosophy* 34:12–28.
- . 2004. "Epistemic Value Monism." In J. Greco, ed., *Ernest Sosa: And His Critics*, 190–98. Oxford: Blackwell.