



THE PROBLEM OF EPISTEMIC VALUE: FROM KNOWLEDGE TO UNDERSTANDING

WALDOMIRO SILVA FILHO

walddmiro.silva@pq.cnpq.br
Universidade Federal da Bahia
National Research Council (CNPq)

FELIPE ROCHA

frls.ba@gmail.com
Universidade Federal da Bahia

MARIA VIRGÍNIA DAZZANI

dazzani@superig.com.br
Universidade Federal da Bahia

ABSTRACT. In this paper, we will present, on the one hand, those formulations that have motivated research on epistemic value, and the other, discuss the fact that the recent discussions about the value of knowledge has begun to explore the possibility that there is not knowledge that has a special epistemic value, but another epistemic state, namely the *understanding*.

Keywords: knowledge; epistemic value problem; understanding

In general, epistemological investigations have focused on the discussion about the nature and the possibility of knowledge, designed according to the classical definition, as justified true belief. In these terms, knowledge would be a true state or disposition (since there could not be knowledge based on false belief) and justified (since it should only count as knowledge those true beliefs that the subject has reason to believe or were not acquired by mere luck). In this context, there was much discussion around the skeptical arguments that presented challenges to epistemological theories (see Stroud, 1984). One example is the “skeptical scenarios” such as those arguments that put the subject in a situation where he is unable to decide whether or not justified in believing in some belief – even if it is true (*e.g.* the dream argument, the argument of the evil genius, the argument of the brain in a vat).

However, there was little attention to the problem of the *value of knowledge*: which would make the knowledge something more valuable or important than the mere belief or which falls short of knowledge? Due to the great influence of two important epistemological theories, reliabilism (Goldman, 1979; 1986) and virtue epistemology (Sosa, 1991; Zabzebski, 1996; Kvanvig, 2003), the problem of epistemic value began to occupy the agenda of the epistemological debate in recent years (Pritchard, 2007; Haddock, Millar & Pritchard, 2009; Pritchard & Turri, 2012).

In this article, we will present, on the one hand, those formulations that have motivated research on epistemic value, and the other, discuss the fact that the recent discussions about the value of knowledge has begun to explore the possibility that there is not knowledge that has a special epistemic value, but another epistemic state, namely the *understanding*. In light of the debate over reliabilism and intellectual virtues, some epistemologists began to demonstrate an explicit dissatisfaction with the contemporary focus exclusively on the definition of knowledge and combat skeptical challenge. Philosophers such as Catherine Elgin (2004; 2006; 2009), Linda Zagzebski (1996; 2001; 2009), Jonathan Kvanvig (2003; 2009a), Duncan Pritchard (2008; 2009; 2010a) and Wayne Riggs (2002a; 2003), argue that epistemology should become an interest in the notion of “understanding,” arguing that the understanding would have more value than knowledge since this notion involves aspects such as presentation of reasons that make the process of producing more reliable beliefs, a sense of reflexivity and responsibility, a sense of understanding of the world and an idea of cognitive achievement. We conclude by arguing that the notion of understanding can contribute to research in the fields of science education and cultural psychology.

1. The Value of Knowledge

The question about the value of knowledge was first raised by Socrates in Plato’s *Meno* (see Plato, 97a–d). Socrates raises the question comparing knowledge with true opinion and at first, it seems that knowledge is no more valuable than true opinion (or true belief without justification) because we can suppose that a subject S that knows how to drive to her friend’s house because she was there before can get there in the same way as another subject Z that don’t know where her friend’s house is (i.e., does not have a true belief justified) but has a true belief about her friend’s house location. In contemporary philosophy, the value problem has been so important to the question about the nature of knowledge. This is especially true because they are both questions related to each other. Some philosophers (see Williamson 2000; Kvanvig 2003) argue that if a good knowledge of theory cannot explain the value of knowledge then this theory must be mistaken. It means

that a good theory about the concept of knowledge should be a good theory about the value of knowledge.

It is important to understand the distinction between the different questions that can be made that involves the idea of knowledge and value. For example, one of the questions is: why is the concept of knowledge valuable? This is not the question about the value of knowledge but instead, about the value of the concept of knowledge, or why we human beings need the concept of knowledge in our lives. Some philosophers¹ answer this question by showing the purpose of good information sources and flag this solid information in society. Others (for instance, Kepl, 2013) argue that the purpose of the concept of knowledge is to show when an agent is entitled to inquire no further into some questions, when we do not know the answers to questions. But still, none of these answers provides an answer about the value problem: *why is knowledge more valuable than mere true belief?*

Recently, one of the most influential theories of knowledge, *process reliabilism*, has received a lot of critics because it seems that it cannot explain the value of knowledge properly. And as pointed before, if the theory of knowledge cannot explain the value of knowledge, then it is not a good theory. Process reliabilism is the theory that says that a subject S knows p if and only if (1) p is true, (2) S believes p to be true, (3) S's belief that p was produced through a reliable process, and (4) a suitable anti-Gettier clause is satisfied (Goldman & Olsson, 2009: 22). Beliefs formed by highly reliable processes are intuitively justified; beliefs formed by processes known unreliable or untrustworthy are intuitively unjustified. In this explanation, knowledge is better than true belief because it is formed by a reliable process that can produce more true beliefs than false beliefs. This suggests that what adds value to knowledge is the only reliable process.

1.1 The Failure of Reliabilism to Explain the Value of Knowledge

Linda Zagzebski (2003: 13) has argued that fact that knowledge is formed thru a reliable process knowledge does not give more value. She uses an analogy to show that what matters is not the process, but the truth of the belief. She says that:

The good of the product makes the reliability of the source that produced it good, but the reliability of the source does not then give the product an additional boost of value [...] If the espresso tastes good, it makes no difference if it comes from an unreliable machine [...] if the belief is true, it makes no difference if it comes from an unreliable belief-producing source. (Zagzebski, 2003: 13)

In Zagzebski's reasoning, if taste is what really matters, then it does not matter if the coffee was produced by a reliable or unreliable machine. The same applies to knowledge: if what really matters in the end is that we have a true belief then it does not matter if the process was reliable or not because we have a belief that is true after all². And if this argument succeeds then it shows that reliabilism should be abandoned.

One reliabilist answer to this objection is the *conditional probability solution* (CPS). This solution shows that the true belief formed by a reliable process is more valuable than a mere true belief because it has the valuable property and an epistemic that the mere true belief does not have. This property is based on the reliability of the process that is more probable and will produce more true beliefs in the future and this is a "greater conditional on S's knowing p than conditional on S's merely truly believing that p" (Goldman & Olsson, 2009: 28). Goldman and Olsson illustrate their solution with the same espresso machine analogy: if we have an espresso machine that is reliable and produces a good cup of espresso, it is more than probable that the next cup of espresso will be good than that if it was produced luckily by an unreliable machine.

Olsson and Jansson (2011: 215) writes that the main idea contained in the CPS is a state of cognitive impairment that is also a state of acquisition of reliability and therefore it is important that, on one hand, is indicative of the fact thus acquired and belief, on the other hand, means that this way produces more true beliefs. The basic claim of the CPS is the belief that the future is likely to be true. It means that this reliable process remains at one's disposal, so the probability that this process's product will be a good one is much higher than if it is a product of the process. Applied to knowledge, the probability we will obtain for a true belief by a reliable process is higher than the probability to obtain a lucky true belief. In order to explain how knowledge obtains reliable information value from the process, says Goldman, the probability of the process to produce more true beliefs depends on four empirical regularities: non-uniqueness, cross-temporal access, learning, and generality (Goldman & Olsson, 2009: 29). Goldman's four regularities explain this as follows:

[...] suppose S knows that p. By the reliabilist definition of knowledge, there is a reliable method M that was invoked by S so as to produce S's belief that p. By non-uniqueness, it is likely that the same type of problem will arise again for S in the future. By cross-temporal access, the method M is likely to be available to S when this happens. By the learning assumption, S is likely to make use of M again on that occasion. By generality, M is likely to be reliable for solving that similar future problem as well. Since M is reliable, this new application of M

is likely to result in a new true belief. (Goldman & Olsson, 2009: 29)

When one of these conditions fails to satisfy, then knowledge has no value in present tense. So for the reliabilist solution, there are cases where we have knowledge but it does not have value because one of the empirical regularities fails. It is interesting to notice that of the four empirical regularities, one of them is about the agent: the learning criteria. Learning is a cognitive ability and there are different ways of understanding it: one of them is when we refer to have some information in memory. I learned that the President of Brazil is Dilma Rousseff. I learned this because I can recall this information every time someone asks me. But it is not this kind of learning that Goldman refers to. He is talking about learning how to use the method. 'Learn' here means to be able to know that this method is successful in producing true beliefs most of the time. In another work, Olsson use the term track-keeping instead of learning, but with almost the same meaning. He says that

[t]he thesis presupposes, as we saw, the holding of some identifiable empirical conditions. One of these conditions is track-keeping, stating that the person maintains a record of how a given belief was arrived at, i.e., of the type of belief-acquisition process that terminated in the belief in question. Only then can the subsequent discovery of the unreliability of a given fixation method lead to the discrediting of other beliefs previously fixed using that same method or process. Without track-keeping this is hardly possible. (Olsson, 2007: 350)

In this case, learning (and in some sense, track-keeping) is the cognitive ability to understand the rule and decide to follow it because it will help to achieve the goal that we have when we are in the pursuit for knowledge, i.e., to be good informants, to help in practical reasoning and to be a good and reliable source of information and knowledge in our society. So in order to be successful, the conditional probability solution, has to rely on the agent's cognitive ability, the reliabilist would answer. But even though, this solution only shows that knowledge has an instrumental value because the process has more reliable probability producing true beliefs and this is instrumentally important and valuable. And although the value question can be formulated in a way that instrumental answer is satisfied, our intuitions about the value problem are not that knowledge is somehow instrumentally valuable but knowledge has value *per se*, i.e. , has the *final value*. And the reliabilist answer is unable to show why and how knowledge has the final value.

The virtue epistemology solution to the value problem, in a similar way to the reliabilist solution, relies on the agent cognitive abilities, but not only

on learning. And differently to reliabilism, virtue epistemology does not use one solution to explain what knowledge is and another to explain the value of knowledge: with this solution, knowledge has value – final value – precisely because knowledge is defined as success because of the exercise of cognitive ability.

Virtue epistemology in the sense that is understood in this solution³, argues that S knows p if and only if one's believing p truly is because of the exercise of cognitive ability. It means it is not enough that the true belief should be produced by a reliable process, but instead, this process should be a reliable *cognitive ability*. In this sense, virtue epistemology is still one form of reliabilism, but instead of being a process reliabilism, it is an 'agent of reliabilism' (see, for instance, Greco, 1999). An intellectual virtue is that quality or competency that allows the agent to achieve the primary objective of which is intellectual truth and, considering this, virtuous agents are reliable trainers of true beliefs. In that way, knowledge is a kind of success from ability. This approach has some interesting advantages comparing to other approaches: it proposes to explain difficult cases in epistemology, like Gettier cases: it is said to finally answer the value problem and it is supposed to deal with a larger range of cases that other theories cannot deal with.

Consider now for example the following Gettier case, from Keith Lehrer (1965):

Case 1: On the basis of excellent reasons, S believes that her co-worker Mr. Nogot owns a Ford: Nogot testifies that he owns a Ford, and this is confirmed by S's own relevant observations. From this S infers that someone in her office owns a Ford. As it turns out, S's evidence is misleading and Nogot does not in fact own a Ford. However, another person in S's office, Mr. Havit, does own a Ford, although S has no reason for believing this.

The natural diagnosis for this case is that S does not know someone in her office that has a Ford assuming that he has good evidence for this belief true. And how does virtue epistemology explain this? In Case 1, S uses his cognitive abilities, his reasoning, to form a belief. But it is not *because* of his abilities that he believes the truth. It is not *because* of his reasoning that he forms the true belief that someone in her office owns a Ford. This belief is true simply because someone else in the office owns a Ford. So, in Case 1, the true belief was not because of the exercise of cognitive ability, so it is not knowledge.

Consider now another well-known Gettier case, by Roderick Chisholm (1989):

Case 2: S takes there to be sheep in the field and does so under conditions which are such that, when S does thus take there to be a sheep in the field, then it is evident to him that there is a sheep in the field. S, however, has

mistaken a dog for a sheep and so what he sees is not a sheep at all. Nevertheless, unsuspected by S, there is a sheep in another part of the field. Although there exists a reliable cognitive power – S’s vision – that makes him believe that there are sheep in the field, it is not *because* of this that S believes the truth. This belief is true because there is a sheep in another part of the field. That is why it is not correct to say that S knows there is a sheep in the field.

One would argue that S use her reliable cognitive powers to get the true belief that there is a sheep in the field and this should be enough to say that S knows we need another non-virtue clause in the concept of knowledge. But the key is that S’s belief is not true because his cognitive powers in the sense that S uses the cognitive ability, does not explain why S has a true belief. The use of the cognitive power is not the most salient part of the explanation about why S has the true belief. That is why S does not know in this case as well as in the Ford case and virtue epistemology can explain this in a correct way in those cases where the agent has a true belief because of luck.

These examples shows that even though sometimes there are some cognitive abilities doing some work in each case, in order to be considered, the belief knowledge should be true because of the exercise of the cognitive ability, i.e., a type of achievement, the cognitive achievement.

1.2 The Failure of Reliabilism to Explain the Value of Knowledge

Usually the way we think about achievements is that achievements have ultimate value. We can have in mind a very skilled Formula 1 racer car driver. After he wins a race beating other very skilled adversaries, one always praises the driver because of his achievements: it was because of his abilities that he achieved praise in the first place and this has value in itself, or in other words, it has the final value. But if we change the story to say that an amateur racer, racing for the first time in a Formula 1 event won the race because all the others professional racers got sick, although he had to use some skill to run the race until the end, it was not because of this skill that he won. It was not because of his abilities, so his victory was not actually an achievement. It was luck. That’s why we do not give the same-value to both racers and we do not praise both racers in the same way.

If the natural way of thinking about achievements is that achievements have final value, and if knowledge is a cognitive achievement, than we can conclude that knowledge has final value because it is a kind of achievement. Pritchard (2010a: 31) summarizes this argument in the following way:

- (P1) Achievements are those successes that are because of ability;
- (P2) knowledge is a cognitive success that is because of cognitive ability;

- (C1) so, knowledge is a cognitive achievement;
- (P3) achievements are finally valuable;
- (C2) knowledge has final value.

Now we can see how virtue epistemology answers the value question. It can explain in a simpler way than what reliabilist knowledge is and why it is more valuable than mere true belief, or why it has the final value after all.

There are different ways to challenge the virtue theory approach, to show that although it seems to be a good theory about knowledge and about the value of knowledge, it has serious problems that make the theory false. Pritchard challenge the reasoning above arguing that the premise P2 is false and because of that, the conclusion C2 that knowledge has final value does not follow. The strategy to argue against P2 is showing examples of achievements without knowledge and knowledge without achievements.

To show that it is possible to have achievement without knowledge Pritchard give the following case:

Archie case: Suppose Archie, a skilled archer, goes to a shooting range, selects a target at random and fires a skilled shot which hits the target right in the centre. Intuitively, Archie's success constitutes an achievement. His success is due to the exercise of his arching ability. Now suppose that, unbeknownst to Archie, he is shooting at the only target at the range that has not been fitted with a forcefield that would repel any shot fired at it.

Pritchard concludes that it is a matter of luck that he is successful, even though we credit Archie success because of his skill. As Pritchard says, "It is, after all, because of his skill that he is successful, even though he could very easily have not been successful in this case. That is, his success in this case is still primarily creditable to his archery abilities, even despite the luck involved in that success." (Pritchard, 2010a: 35). The challenge to virtue epistemology is that if Archie success is an achievement, then analogous cases to Archie case will provide examples of cognitive achievements counting as knowledge even despite the luck involved.

One analogous case is the fake barn case:

Barn Case: Henry is driving in the countryside and sees a barn ahead in clear view. On this basis he believes that the object he sees is a barn. Unknown to Henry, however, the area is dotted with barn facades that are indistinguishable from real barns from the road. However, Henry happens to be looking at the one real barn in the area.

In this case we should not attribute knowledge to Henry because it was a matter of luck that his belief is true, although he used his cognitive abilities to produce this belief. This kind of luck is called by Pritchard *environmental luck*, and even if virtue epistemology is capable of preventing 'Gettier' style of luck, it is not able to avoid cases of environmental luck, where the agent use his cognitive powers to produce a true belief but be-

cause it is a matter of environmental luck, his belief could easily be wrong. Pritchard then says that this shows that it is possible that there is sometimes *more* to knowledge than just a cognitive achievement and that merely exhibiting a cognitive achievement “will not suffice to exclude all types of knowledge-undermining epistemic luck” (Pritchard, 2010a: 36).

The other strategy to show that virtue epistemology is wrong is showing cases of knowledge without achievement. To show an example of knowledge without achievement, Pritchard asks to consider the following example, by Jennifer Lackey:

Jenny Case: Jenny arrives at the train station in Chicago and, wishing to obtain directions to the Sears Tower, approaches the first adult passer-by that she sees. Suppose further that the person that she asks has first-hand knowledge of the area and gives her the directions that she requires. Intuitively, any true belief that Jenny forms on this basis would ordinarily be counted as knowledge.

The point of this example is that “it is not *primarily creditable* to Jenny that she has formed a true belief in this case, and this is where the true moral of these cases resides.” (Pritchard, 2010a: 41). Of course, Jenny deserve some credit because she didn’t ask for information from a dog or a lamp-post and if someone had told her that in order to go to Sears Towers she should take a space-ship to the moon, of course she would easily refused this information. But even deserving some credit, her beliefs are not primarily creditable to her cognitive abilities, i.e., “Jenny has a true belief in this case does not seem to be *because* of her cognitive abilities, but rather because of the cognitive abilities of the informant who knows this proposition on a non-testimonial basis” (Pritchard, 2010a: 41).

If these two arguments against virtue epistemology succeed then it shows that knowledge is not a cognitive achievement or at least not always because there are cases of knowledge that are cognitive achievements and there also cases of knowledge without cognitive achievements. Pritchard proposes a weaker virtue epistemology, called anti-luck virtue epistemology. His theory accepts that it is not necessary, nor sufficient for knowledge that the cognitive achievement must be primarily creditable to the agent. And although his view seems to deal with cases like the barn case and Jenny’s case, he admits that it fails to explain why knowledge has final value especially because his view admits cases of knowledge without ability and ability without knowledge. This is to say that sometimes knowledge has final value because sometimes knowledge is a cognitive achievement. But sometimes this does not happen.

The failure in virtue epistemology to answer the value question brought light to epistemology in the sense that the idea that a cognitive achievement is valuable should not only be used, but brings light to our intuition that

knowledge should have a final value. Because of the fact that the most natural and paradigmatic cases of knowledge are in fact cognitive achievements – and because of that it has final value – it is natural to believe that we should generalize this idea to all cases of knowledge. But as Pritchard argues, this generalization fails because we should accept that there are cases of knowledge without achievement. But this failure shows that maybe the right question should not be about knowledge but another kind of epistemic concept that has final value: understanding.

2. The Value of Understanding: Three Perspectives

For many philosophers “[u]nderstanding has a special kind of epistemic value that other states such as knowledge do not. This fact threatens the justification for the focus on knowledge that displays the history of epistemology” (Kvanvig, 2009: 95). As we have seen, the interest of contemporary epistemology around the notion of knowledge is centered on a specific conception of knowledge, namely, propositional knowledge. The trend inaugurated by Virtue Epistemology however, shifted the center of attention from states and propositional doxastic attitudes to performances and abilities of the agent. This attention to the skills required to cognitive agent resulted in a radical change in the traditional approach to epistemology. Roughly speaking, we can say that the classical analysis of knowledge was centered on the nature of belief while for this new trend epistemology should be focusing on the character of the agent (Battaly, 2008: 4): ‘belief-based’ epistemology is the primary object of epistemological evaluation and consequently the fundamental concepts and properties are ‘knowledge,’ ‘justification,’ and ‘justified belief’ (Battaly, 2008: 4). In the Epistemology of Virtue the agents of the primary object of epistemological evaluation and the central concepts are ‘virtues’ and ‘vices’ of the agent (Battaly, 2008: 4–5). This not only reignited interest in the epistemic value, but introduced a new question about the epistemic value.

Authors like Zagzebski and Kvanvig have given a new motivation for the question about the epistemic value (hitherto neglected) and made authors pay attention to the notion of understanding. In this section we discuss four topics on the value of understanding that tend to highlight four aspects: a) understanding, unlike knowledge, there has as object states propositional; b) a description of the understanding may involve a certain kind of epistemic transparency; c) understanding is not vulnerable to Gettier-style cases; and d) understanding is necessarily a cognitive achievement. This contrasts with the definition of ordinary propositional knowledge that involves: A) belief and truth, B) the possibility of not being transparent to the agent and C) vulnerability to Gettier-style cases.

Note that, in fact, the question should not be *why the understanding is more valuable than knowledge (or one of its parts, as true, true belief, justified belief)?* But *why the understanding is more valuable than propositional knowledge?* (cf. Pritchard, 2010a; Grimm, 2012). When these philosophers argue that understanding is more valuable than knowledge, they have been clear that the kind of knowledge they have in mind is propositional knowledge, or the knowledge that something is the case⁴.

2.1 Transparency

Even if it is common to accept that the common understanding should be designed as a kind of knowledge or variation (see, for instance, Achinstein, 1983), the authors associated with the Epistemology of Virtue have argued that understanding is not a kind of knowledge⁵ – and it is precisely this that rests its special value. For Linda Zagzebski (2001: 241), two points are crucial to establish the distinction between knowledge and belief:

a) understanding is a state acquired by learning an art, skill or *techne* (to make a referral to platonic vocabulary). An agent gains understanding through ‘knowing how’ something well. In this sense, the understanding cannot be understood only as a process and cognitive state, expressed propositionally. Therefore, Zagzebski (2001: 242) argues that “understanding is the state of comprehension of non-propositional structures of reality” (we have an understanding of things like an automobile engine, a musical piece, a work of art, the character of a human person, the map of a city, a causal, ideological structure, or reality itself).⁶

b) understanding, unlike knowledge – since it does not have as its object propositions – is not directed to an object, but it involves the development of a perspective on the elements that relate and compose a whole. And often, the understanding can dispense propositional knowledge and true belief on discrete objects, since their focus is broad comprehension of reality (when, for example, investigated a worldview, a theory or a representation of reality). And, in fact, a person can know a proposition individual without thereby having an understanding of it. But understanding “involves seeing how the parts of that body of knowledge fit together and where the fitting together is not itself in propositional form” (Zagzebski, 2001: 244).

These two points lead us to two aspects of the notions of understanding: i) understanding aimed at comprehension and not the exactness, belief and truth (Zagzebski, 2001: 244) and; ii) understanding is a property of persons, it is carried by not propositions or states of belief (Zagzebski, 2001: 245). This reflects a perspective that seeks to overcome a tendency rooted in epistemology to deal with today’s atomistic phenomena of language, focusing

on the evaluation of propositions or states or individuals singular belief.
For her:

Understanding is not a state directed toward a single propositional object at all. This is not to deny that there is a sense in which one can be said to understand a proposition *p*. But understands *p* is not directed primarily at *p* itself. (Zagzebski, 1996: 49)

However, the main aspect that distinguishes knowledge of understanding is the fact that the understanding has the character of transparency that is absent of knowledge (Grimm, 2012: 106). This is because what matters in the notion of understanding is precisely the fact that a cognitive agent can establish consciously associative links between various sets of information about the world. Thus, the object of understanding is these connections that the agent can do consciously:

It may be possible to know without knowing that one knows, but it is impossible to understand one without understanding what one understands ... [U]nderstanding is a state in which I am directly aware of the object of my understanding, transparency and conscious is a criterion for understanding. (Zagzebski, 2001: 246–7)

In this sense, understanding ‘internalist’s conditions’ for its realization, something that is not requiring knowledge. It was precisely this requirement of ‘internalist conditions’ which was harshly rejected by contemporary epistemology, especially by reliabilism. To reliabilism, if we preserve the requirement of justification in our definition of knowledge, it does not mean that the agent has access to this justification, simply because the agent is in a trusted process. As stated by Alvin Goldman (1994), “S’s belief in *p* is justified if and only if it is caused (or causally sustained) by reliable cognitive processes, or a history of reliable processes.” What does it mean that the belief is justified although the agent does not have privileged access to the reasons and, therefore, can demonstrate these reasons (see Goldman, 1979: 112–121).

Understanding distinctly criteria have internally accessible to the agent and can be described as characterized by a kind of ‘transparency.’ Such access and transparency, however, cannot be confused with theories about internalist justification of knowledge (e.g. Chisholm, 1989) that suggest that to be justified would require a long series of other faiths also were justified and that the agent had cognitive access to the entire chain of beliefs. But understanding is the result of the effort to form an epistemic comprehension of relationships, chains, connections and, therefore, cannot but be transparent to the conscience of the agent.

Understanding, when we attribute it to an agent, we can say that the subject held – and was successful – an investigation into the conditions of

the formation of his belief. We cannot say the same of propositional knowledge, as when we say that a guy knows propositionally all that can be said is that it is always possible that the subject receives the benefit of good fortune or misfortune of bad luck. No, he cannot. Time distinguishing what situation he finds himself. Therefore, there is one aspect that is essential in understanding, namely, the position of first – person and satisfaction of quality or intellectual ability of the subject.

2.2 Quasi-factive View

In a similar direction, Kvanvig (2003) argues that the epistemic value, as it appears in Plato's *Meno*, concerns understanding, not knowledge. He insists that understanding is fundamentally a matter of understanding or seeing connections between beliefs. For him, the nature of understanding with regard to how we establish connections between information about the world: understanding "is to grasp the variety of such connections" (Kvanvig, 2009a: 96), formulating explanatory relations, conceptual and logical, our assumptions about the world. The focus hits on structural relationships between different pieces of information captured by a cognitive agent. An element that was absent in Zagzebski approach is the notion of factivity or, as Kvanvig prefers in his later texts, 'quasi-factivity.'

The form of understanding that I am interested in (...) is objectual understanding, the kind of understanding in which the content of the attitude is an object of some sort (person, theory, part of reality, etc.). Such understanding is related, presumably constitutively, to various pieces of information, and on the quasi-factive view, the pieces of information that are central to the understanding in question must be true. (Kvanvig, 2009b: 341)

The 'objectual understanding' is not knowledge of a single object but understanding that we have on a broad body of information on a topic or subject.

To Kvanvig (2009a: 97), when an epistemologist asks if a person knows, what he has in mind is things like evidence, reliability, reasons for belief, justification, and, of course, the non-occurrence of epistemic luck. As in Zagzebski, to Kvanvig (2003: 192), "when understanding is achieved, the object of understanding is an 'informational chunk' rather than the number of single propositions."

Unlike the notion of knowledge, understanding not subject to Gettier-style cases: "(...) knowledge lacks the unique value under discussion here because of the Gettier problem; understanding does not because one can be lucky in having understanding" (Kvanvig 2009a, p. 100). To support his point of view, Kvanvig (2003: 197–8) presents the following example: Suppose a person is directed to a shelf in the library and choose a book on the

history of Indians in the United States and read a chapter on the area of the South plains Comanche. After reading it seems to 'understand' why the Comanches dominated that region of America. However, imagine that the book you choose is indeed a historical reliable and true while most other books that are in the same rack on this subject are full of inaccuracies and errors. If she had read one of these books other beliefs about the Comanches would not only be different, but mostly, it would be false. In a way, she was lucky to get a reliable book.

Since the beliefs that she formed about the history of the Comanches involved a good deal of luck, if we follow the model common definition of knowledge, then we could conclude that she has no knowledge about the history of the Comanches. Unfortunately, this person is in an environment that involves a situation similar to a Gettier-style case where a dose of good luck (finding a trustworthy) cancels the bad luck (finding a library full of books unreliable). But what matters is that Kvanvig, regardless of the fact that this situation prevents the subject forming knowledge, that, meanwhile, has no impact on their ability to form an understanding of the history of the Comanches. Therefore, Kvanvig (2003: 198) writes:

Understanding does not advert to the etiological aspects which can be crucial for knowledge. What is distinctive about understanding, once we have satisfied the requirement truth, is internal to cognition. It is the internal seeing or appreciating of explanatory relationships in the body of which information is crucial to understanding. When we think about knowledge, however, if we have learned our lessons from the Gettier literature, our focus turns elsewhere immediately: we think about the possibility of fortuitousness, of accidentality, of being right only by chance. We focus on what kind of further external connections there are between mind and world, beyond the fit required for the belief to be true.

For him, while the notion of knowledge is incompatible with epistemic luck, the understanding is not. And therefore, the understanding would not be a kind of knowledge⁷.

While for confabialists, knowledge can be opaque, without prejudice to its successful cognitive understanding involves the notion epistemically internist, it is difficult to imagine how an agent could understand if he does not have access to what supports this cognitive achievement. The understanding thus cannot be 'opaque' to the subject. The understanding is especially valuable – and more valuable than knowledge, because

It is constituted by subjectively justified true belief appropriately across an individuated body of information that is organized and systematized in the process of achieving understanding,

subjectively. The justified true belief that *is* systematized in this way *is* valuable. (Kvanvig, 2003: 202).

Even though both knowledge and understanding are factive and are at the service of our human effort to avoid deception, knowledge can be extremely fragmentary, whereas understanding requires a high degree of coherence and amplitude.

2.3 Understanding as Achievement

Zabzebski and Kvanvig claim that understanding has ‘internalist’s conditions,’ while propositional knowledge do not (Kvanvig, 2003: 198). Zagzebski (2001: 246) what is distinctive in understanding is its transparency. Duncan Pritchard (2010a: 76–78) do not fully agree with this statement and does not accept that failure (of reliabilism and virtue epistemology) in the definition of epistemic value leads to a return to internalism.

Returning to the problem of epistemic value, to Pritchard (2009b: 128–148; 2010a: 5–8) there is no one but actually three problems of epistemic value : “...what it means to say that knowledge is distinctively valuable”; b) “...why knowledge is more valuable than that which falls short of knowledge” (belief, truth, justification) and c) “...why knowledge has not just a greater *degree* but also a different *kind* of value than whatever falls short of knowledge.” A good theory of knowledge, to him must know how to respond, especially, the item ‘c.’ Answer the question why knowledge is more valuable not only in degree but have a specific type of value is to defend that knowledge has a final value (Pritchard, 2010a: 25–47). His position – assessed disputes between internists and externalists, reliabilists and virtuedists – is that no theory has been successful in this, for all fall under the scrutiny of epistemic luck (luck deny, but cannot function well if they are not benefited by luck) .

For Pritchard (2009; 2010a) understanding is more valuable than propositional knowledge because understanding necessarily involves a ‘cognitive achievement,’ while the same cannot be said of propositional knowledge. At this point, Pritchard proposes a step beyond Virtue Epistemology. In fact, for Virtue Epistemology (which Pritchard calls Robust Virtue Epistemology), knowledge is a cognitive achievement, that expresses an agent’s cognitive success due to cognitive ability. However, one could find objections to *Robust Virtue Epistemology*, within considerations of, for example, knowledge testimonial: agents can often depend epistemically on other people in their cognitive community (see Kallestrup & Pritchard, 2012).

Achievements are things that interest our cognitive and practical lives. And it is common for one to desire a life full of achievements and ascribe value to achievements. Let us look at Pritchard’s examples (2010b). A person

can be appointed to a job as a result of his own talent; and hard work is more rewarding and worthy of receiving an appointment than through other means such as nepotism. How about an athlete who achieves a gold medal for being the best in their sport, after a heated battle with competitors, who is also prepared and motivated and has a different sense of accomplishment than another who wins simply by good luck (injury to an opponent or the like). Achievements involve success and skills. They require that such success is because of the exercise of one's relevant abilities. Success is credited primarily through the exercise of skill rather than some other factor external to one's agency or pure luck (Pritchard, 2010b: 21).

If achievements are finally valuable, however, then that puts them among pretty exalted company, since very little that we value is finally valuable. The good, whatever that is, is certainly finally valuable. Other plausible candidates include friendship, beauty, truth, wisdom and virtue, but not much else. If achievements are valuable for their own sake, then that means that they are a very special kind of thing indeed. (Pritchard, 2010b: 22)

Pritchard (2010a: 73–77) considers this final value to explain why understanding is more valuable than simply knowing. The understanding seems, by its very nature, to be the result of an agent's activity. Knowledge, as the whole epistemological tradition considers, on the contrary, it may simply be given to a person by means of conjunctions natural or by reliable testimony of another person (as in reliabilism). The understanding seems to always require some kind of cognitive work meaningful to an end. As in Zabzebski (2001), one sees that the effort of an agent is indispensable. The agent must face and overcome obstacles to understand and exercise a 'significant cognitive ability.'

3. From Knowledge to Understanding

As seen in the current epistemological debate, there is a strong tendency to consider understanding as an epistemic value greater than knowledge if we accept that an agent has knowledge, even when he has no reason to defend or justify this belief. However, it seems that three elements are detachable on the notion of understanding: a) there is some degree of transparency and accessibility of the agent to the reasons or, at least, to what makes the agent is inclined to believe; b) is directed to understanding broad understanding of the world and reality; and c) understanding is identified as a type of intellectual achievement which somehow makes the agent responsible (Grimm, 2012: 106).

In our way of seeing things, this interest in the value of understanding, among other possibilities, may favor two different investigations: i) the research on teaching and knowledge transfer, namely, scientific knowledge, and ii) investigations in Cultural Psychology. Regarding point 'i,' it seems advantageous to conceive that there is a big difference in the scenario of a living-teaching science in saying that teaching is aimed at 'understanding' and not 'knowledge,' since the agent would be exposed to a situation that would require mastering sets of information in order to understand, articulate, reflect, compare theories, explanations and worldviews. On item 'ii,' Linda Zagzebski and Jonathan Kvanvig, in several passages, using the example of understanding, the act of understanding a person designing your reasons, interpreting his words, to establish a relationship of sympathy, even in circumstances of social and moral difference.

Therefore, finally, the contribution of this paper is to suggest a path for future research.

NOTES

1. Craig (1990) and others that follow his ideas, as Greco and Pritchard, for example.

2. On this point, known as "the swamping problem," see Pritchard (2010: 8–11).

3. Philosophers who defend the relevance of the 'virtues' agree that intellectual virtues express a kind of 'cognitive excellence.' However, despite this, there is no consensus on the Epistemology of Virtue or even about what is an intellectual virtue (Baehr, 2008: 469). Following a formula presented by Guy Axtell (2000) and widely accepted, the epistemology of virtue is organized in two different positions: a) *Reliabilist Virtue Epistemology* associated to the arguments of Ernest Sosa and John Greco; and b) *Responsibilist Virtue Epistemology* associated with arguments of Linda Zagzebski, Jonathan Kvanvig. An excellent overview of the different positions in virtue epistemology lies in Greco and Turri (2012).

4. Stephen Grimm (2012: 104–106) points out that the problem of the value of understanding can be understood on different angles: "[A] Why is understanding more valuable than knowledge?", "[B] Why is understanding better than propositional knowledge?", "[C] Why is any item of understanding more valuable than any item of propositional knowledge?" and "[D] Why is any item of understanding more valuable than the corresponding item of propositional knowledge?"

5. Kvanvig (2009: 98) notes that the difference between understanding and knowledge is not reflected in common language (and many times is interchangeable), but has philosophical relevance.

6. Zagzebski (2001: 242) states that "[t]here is no reason to think any of these things that has an exclusively propositional structure, if indeed it has a propositional structure at all," but even so, points out that "I am not denying the reality of possibility that all can be represented propositionally, but I am denying that the proposition is the only form in which reality can be made intelligible to the human mind."

7. Kvanvig (2009a) insists on the factive character understanding since, for him, something might just count as understanding it can be the object of a true belief.

REFERENCES

- Achinstein, P. (1983), *The Nature of Explanation*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Axtell, G. (2000), "Introduction," in Axtell, Guy (ed.), *Knowledge, Belief, and Character: Readings in Virtue Epistemology*. Lanham-Boulder-New York-Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, xi–xxix.
- Baehr, J. (2008), "Four Varieties of Character-based Virtue Epistemology," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 46: 469–502.
- Chisholm, R. M. (1989), *Theory of Knowledge*, 3rd edn. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Craig, E. (1990), *Knowledge and the State of Nature: An Essay in Conceptual Synthesis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Elgin, C. (2004), "True Enough," *Philosophical Issues* 14: 113–31.
- Elgin, C. (2006), "From Knowledge to Understanding," in Hetherington, Stephen (ed.), *Epistemology Futures*. New York: Oxford University Press, 199–215.
- Elgin, C. (2009), "Is Understanding Factive?" in Haddock, Adrian, Millar, Alan, and Pritchard, Duncan (eds.), *Epistemic Value*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 322–330.
- Goldman, A., and Olsson, E. J. (2009), "Reliabilism and the Value of Knowledge," in Haddock, A., Millar, A., and Pritchard, D. (eds.), *Epistemic Value*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 19–41.
- Goldman, A. (1979), "What is Justified Belief?" in *Liaisons: Philosophy Meets the Cognitive and Social Sciences*. Cambridge, MA: Bradford, 105–126.
- Goldman, A. (1986), *Epistemology and Cognition*. Cambridge, MA-London: Harvard University Press.
- Goldman, A. (1994), "Naturalistic Epistemology and Reliabilism," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 19: 301–320.
- Greco, J., and Turri, J. (2012), *Virtue Epistemology: Contemporary Readings*. Cambridge, MA-London: MIT Press.
- Greco, J. (1999), "Agent Reliabilism," *Philosophical Perspectives* 13: 273–296.
- Grimm, S. R. (2012), "The Value of Understanding," *Philosophy Compass* 7(2): 103–117.
- Haddock, A., Millar, A., and Pritchard, D. (eds.) (2009), *Epistemic Value*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kallestrup, J., and Pritchard, D. (2012), "Robust Virtue Epistemology and Epistemic Anti-individualism," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 93: 84–103.
- Kelp, C. (2013), "How To Motivate Anti-Luck Virtue Epistemology," *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 88: 119–33.
- Kvanvig, J. L. (2003), *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Kvanvig, J. L. (2009a), "The Value of Understanding," in Haddock, A., Millar, A., and Pritchard, D. (eds.), *Epistemic Value*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 95–111.
- Kvanvig, J. L. (2009b), "Responses to Critics," in Haddock, A., Millar, A., and Pritchard, D. (eds.), *Epistemic Value*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 339–351.
- Lehrer, K. (1965), "Knowledge, Truth, and Evidence," *Analysis* 25(5): 168–175.
- Olsson, E. J. (2007), "Reliabilism, Stability, and the Value of Knowledge," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 44: 343–355.
- Olsson, E. J., and Jonsson, M. L. (2011), "Kinds of Learning and the Likelihood of Future True Beliefs: Reply to Jäger on Reliabilism and the Value Problem," *Theoria* 77: 214–222.
- Plato (2005), *Meno and Other Dialogues: Charmides, Laches, Lysis, Meno*. Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Robin Waterfield. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pritchard, D., and Turri, J. (2012), "The Value of Knowledge," in Zalta, Edward N. (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved 20 July, 2013 from <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/knowledge-value/>.
- Pritchard, D. (2007), "Recent Work on Epistemic Value," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 44 (2): 85–110.
- Pritchard, D. (2008), "Knowing the Answer, Understanding and Epistemic Value," *Grazer Philosophische Studien*, 77 (1): 325–339.
- Pritchard, D. (2009), "Knowledge, Understanding and Epistemic Value," in O'Hear, Anthony (ed.), *Epistemology*. Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement 64. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 19–43.
- Pritchard, D. (2010a), "Knowledge and Understanding" in Pritchard, D., Millar, A., and Haddock, A. (eds.), *The Nature and Value of Knowledge: Three Investigations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1–88.
- Pritchard, D. (2010b), "Achievement, Luck, and Value," *Think* 19: 19–30.
- Pritchard, D., Millar, A., and Haddock, A. (2010), *The Nature and Value of Knowledge: Three Investigations*. Oxford : Oxford University Press.
- Riggs, W. D. (2002a), "Reliability and the Value of Knowledge," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* LXIV(1): 79–96.
- Riggs, W. D. (2002b), "The Value Turn in Epistemology," in Hendricks, Vincent, and Pritchard, Duncan (eds.), *New Waves in Epistemology*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 234–289.
- Riggs, W. D. (2003), "Understanding 'Virtue' and the Virtue of Understanding," in DePaul, Michael, and Zagzebski, Linda (eds.), *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 203–226.
- Sosa, E. (1991), *Knowledge in Perspective: Selected Essays in Epistemology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stroud, B. (1984), *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Williamson, T. (2000), *Knowledge and Its Limits*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Zagzebski, L. T. (1996), *Virtue of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zagzebski, L. T. (2001), "Recovering Understanding," in Steup, Matthias (ed.), *Knowledge, Truth, and Duty: Essays on Epistemic Justification, Responsibility, and Virtue*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 235–251.

Zagzebski, L. T. (2003), "The Search for the Source of the Epistemic Good," *Metaphilosophy* 34: 12–28.

Zagzebski, L. T. (2009), *On Epistemology*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Waldomiro J. Silva-Filho is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Federal University of Bahia (UFBA), and receives a Productivity Research Grant of the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq). He was visiting scholar at Harvard University (2009–2010). His research interests are focused on a range of issues in epistemology, moral philosophy, philosophy of language and contemporary skepticism. He has books and papers published on philosophy. He is affiliated with the Graduate Studies Program in Philosophy at Federal University of Bahia.

Felipe Rocha is a graduated student in the Graduate Studies Program in Philosophy at Federal University of Bahia. He is writing a doctoral thesis on "virtue epistemology" and the "know how/know that problem." His research interests are focused on epistemology. Part of his doctoral research was conducted at the University of California – Irvine under the academic guidance of Sven Bernecker.

Maria Virginia Dazzani is Professor of Graduate Programs in Psychology and Education at the Federal University of Bahia. She is a member of the Basic and Scientific Advisory Boards as well as the Technological Assessment Board in the area of Humanities and Education since March 2013. She is the author of *Rorty and Education* (2010), published by *Authentic* and co-editor of *Student Graduate Studies: concepts and methodological possibilities in program evaluation* (2012), published by EDUFBA. She has extensive experience in the area of school psychology, acting on the following themes: knowledge and learning about family – school-community, family and academic performance and school guidance complaint. Her research expertise lies in the interface between psychology, cultural development and education. Her research interests center on the study of development in cultural context including: (a) analysis of developmental transitions, considering the family and school contexts as cultural development (practices related to family participation in school life, the creation of children, etc.) and (b) the analysis of the demands of learning difficulties and understanding of the phenomenon of school failure. The analysis of this material is geared towards the identification of semiotic processes present in the cultural construction of family-school relationship – community. She participates in the Center for Development Studies and Cultural Contexts (CNPq) and Kitchen Seminar Network. She is a member of the GT School and Educational Psychology (ANPEPP).