

I know. Therefore, I understand

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The so-called Meno problem is one of the recent trendy topics in epistemology.¹ In a nutshell, the Meno problem is that of explaining why we value knowledge more than true belief. In his recent book *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding* Jon Kvanvig argues quite convincingly that no existing account of knowledge can accommodate the intuition that the value of knowledge exceeds the value of true belief.²

Kvanvig regards this as an incentive to revise our beliefs about what epistemology is all about. In the past knowledge has been one of the most central concepts of epistemology, but owing to the intractability of Meno-style problems, it is now time to revise our practices. Kvanvig suggests that we shift our epistemological focus from knowledge to understanding. Understanding, Kvanvig alleges, involves a grasp of the explanatory and other coherence-making relationships in a larger body of information. Because of this, the value of understanding exceeds both the value of true belief and the value of knowledge.

In this paper I take issue with these contentions. I argue that knowledge is just understanding (plus perhaps an anti-luck requirement). Hence, *if* understanding is more valuable than true belief, so is knowledge. After showing that the value of understanding does not exceed the value of knowledge, I go on to argue that the value of understanding does not exceed the

¹ See e.g. M. R. DePaul, "Is Truth Our Epistemic End?" (Pacific Division APA, 1989), L. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 300-302, "The Search for the Source of Epistemic Good", *Metaphilosophy* 34 (2003): 12-28, W. Jones, "Why Do We Value Knowledge?", *American Philosophical Quarterly* 34 (1997): 423-40, J. Kvanvig, "Why Should Inquiring Minds Want to Know?" *The Monist* 81 (1998): 426-51, and W. D. Riggs, "Reliability and the Value of Knowledge", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 65 (2002): 79-96.

² *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2003)

value of true belief. It thus seems that we are stuck with a Meno problem for understanding. But this appearance is illusory: in spite of the fact that the value of understanding does not exceed the value of knowledge, there is no Meno problem involving understanding. We are, however, stuck with the original Meno problem unless we give up on the anti-luck requirement. I conclude by suggesting a couple of ways to go from there.

I. Kvanvig on Understanding

Most of Kvanvig's book is dedicated to the project of showing that no theory of knowledge avoids the Meno problem. Kvanvig takes this to contain an important lesson about our epistemological practices. We have simply been focusing on the wrong concept all along. Knowledge does not deserve all the attention it has gotten in the past. Anti-luck considerations serve no real purpose. Instead of focusing on knowledge we should focus on understanding.

Kvanvig distinguishes two kinds of understanding: objectual and propositional.³ Ascriptions of objectual understanding are ascriptions of understanding of some object, as in 'John understands quantum mechanics'. Ascriptions of propositional understanding are ascriptions of understanding of something being the case, as in 'Mary understands that Kerry might have been president'. There are other cases that do not fall under these rubrics, most notably, understanding why, when, where, and what. But these other cases, Kvanvig says, 'are explicable in terms of understanding that something is the case'.⁴

Kvanvig takes knowledge and understanding to be factive. Nonfactive uses, he says, involve either 'misspeaking' or the expression of propositions that do not involve theoretically important concepts.⁵ Thus, 'Mary understands that Kerry might have been president' and 'Mary knows that Kerry might have been president' both imply that Kerry might have been president.

³ *The Value of Knowledge*, pp. 189ff.

⁴ *The Value of Knowledge*, p. 189.

⁵ *The Value of Knowledge*, p. 190.

Objectual understanding is not straightforwardly factive, as only propositions can be true or false. However, in these cases, Kvanvig says, factivity 'is in the background'.⁶ For example, to understand quantum theory is, among other things, to have true beliefs about it.

Kvanvig admits that we may correctly ascribe understanding to a person even if he or she has some false beliefs, especially if 'the false beliefs concern matters that are peripheral rather than central to the subject matter in question'.⁷ The presence of false beliefs concerning peripheral matters makes the understanding 'slightly defective', but it does not prevent the person in question from understanding. When the falsehoods are peripheral, we ascribe understanding on the basis of the remaining truths.

Understanding, on Kvanvig's view, differs in a number of ways from knowledge.

First, where knowledge may be piecemeal, understanding may not. In theoretically interesting cases at least, 'there is no single proposition of which we ascribe understanding'.⁸

Second, a person can know many unrelated pieces of information, but understanding is achieved only when the person pieces together the informational items. Understanding thus requires 'the grasping of explanatory and other coherence-making relationships in a large and comprehensive body of information'.⁹ The explanatory and other coherence-making relationships are exactly those the coherentists have taken to be 'constitutive of justification'. But coherentism holds more promise as a theory of understanding than as a theory of justification, Kvanvig says, because 'standard ascriptions of understanding', unlike belief systems, 'come compartmentalized already'.¹⁰

Third, according to Kvanvig, 'it is awkward to speak of degrees of knowledge or of some knowledge being better or worse than other knowledge'. Understanding, on the other hand,

⁶ *The Value of Knowledge*, p. 191.

⁷ *The Value of Knowledge*, pp. 201ff

⁸ *The Value of Knowledge*, p. 195.

⁹ *The Value of Knowledge*, p. 192.

¹⁰ *The Value of Knowledge*, p. 195.

comes in degrees:¹¹ one person can have better understanding, or a greater degree of understanding, of a subject matter than another. Better understanding owes to a more inclusive and coherent body of information, and a greater degree of understanding owes to a better grasp of the explanatory and other coherence-making relations.

Fourth, where the essential properties of understanding involve coherence-making relations in a body of information, the essential properties of knowledge involve ‘non-accidental connections between mind and world’.¹² Knowledge is incompatible with epistemic luck; understanding is not. If, for example, S has a large number of true beliefs about quantum theory, but the physics books from which she got her information are generally unreliable sources of information, then S fails to know. But S would not necessarily fail to understand. In short: understanding requires a grasp of explanatory and other coherence-making relationships; knowledge requires an absence of epistemic luck.

In Kvanvig’s view, understanding is more valuable than knowledge, not only because it involves the finding of new connections among individual pieces of information, but also because finding such connections ‘organizes and systematizes’ our thinking about a subject matter.¹³ The pragmatic benefits of this sort of organization are that it enables us to reason from one bit of information to another related bit, work out what past interventions might or might not have been responsible for how things turned out, and intervene in the world successfully (e.g. now I understand why I should replace this not that part in the engine). Unstructured thinking provides no such ground for inference and intervention.

II. Propositional Understanding

Kvanvig’s motivation for shifting our focus from knowledge to understanding is persuasive. But, I will now argue, its appeal owes to the comparison of understanding of a larger body of

¹¹ *The Value of Knowledge*, p. 196.

¹² *The Value of Knowledge*, p. 197.

¹³ *The Value of Knowledge*, p. 202.

information to propositional knowledge. It is not surprising that understanding of a larger body of information is more valuable than knowledge of individual propositions. We prefer good understanding of a larger body of information to single pieces of knowledge. But, as I will argue, there is no reason to prefer good understanding of a larger body of information to knowledge of that body of information.

Before presenting my argument it is important to note that the alleged compatibility of understanding with epistemic luck does not make understanding more valuable than knowledge. According to Kvanvig, the characteristic value of understanding derives from our grasp of coherence-making and other explanatory relations. Hence, the question of whether understanding is more valuable than knowledge boils down to the question of whether it is only understanding that requires a grasp of explanatory and other coherence-inducing relationships. I shall argue that it is not.

We begin with propositional forms of knowledge and understanding. Propositional knowledge, or knowledge-that, is very common. Understanding-that is more rare. As Kvanvig points out, there are lots of idiomatic uses of ‘understanding-that’. For example, I may begin a conversation with ‘So John, I understand that you are a philosopher’ or ‘So John, I understand that you writing a paper on Lewis’ counterpart theory’. I agree with Kvanvig that such uses are idiomatic.

But there are also non-idiomatic propositional uses of ‘understand’. For example, I may say to the airline attendant: ‘Look, I understand that my flight was cancelled. What I don’t understand is why you can’t book me on another flight’. In such cases ‘understand’ seems interchangeable with ‘know’. I might as well have said ‘Look, I know that my flight was cancelled’.

However, let us grant, at least for argument’s sake, that ‘knowledge-that’ and ‘understanding-that’ are not interchangeable. Let us also grant that ‘knowledge-that’ and ‘understanding-that’ are both factive.

According to Kvanvig, the difference is that unlike knowledge, understanding requires ‘an internal grasping or appreciation of how the various elements in a body of information are related to each other in terms of explanatory, logical, probabilistic, and other kinds of relations.’¹⁴ However, the claimed difference seems highly suspect in the case of understanding-that. You can understand *that* your flight was cancelled without appreciating any explanatory or coherence-inducing relations in a larger body of information. Of course, if it is assumed that the object of understanding is an ‘informational chunk’ rather than individual propositions, and that propositional understanding ‘results via abstraction from this primary form’,¹⁵ then one cannot understand that *p* without understanding a larger body of information containing *p*. However, Kvanvig says that this assumption is ‘not central to the issues [he wants] to raise about the connection between knowledge and understanding’.¹⁶

But if understanding-that does not require a grasp of explanatory and other coherence-inducing relationships, then it is not more valuable than knowledge-that.

III. Understanding-*wh* and Knowledge-*wh*

A similar lot befalls understanding-why, -when, -where, and -what. According to Kvanvig, *understanding-why, -when, -where, and -what* can be explicated in terms of *understanding-that*. I understand *why* the house burned down only if I understand *that* there was a short circuit, *that* there was a fire, *that* the short circuit was a cause of the fire, and so forth. However, in order for a person to understand why something is the case, she must piece together separate pieces of information. If I understand that there was a short circuit, and I understand that there was a fire, but I fail to understand or grasp the explanatory relationship between ‘there was a short circuit’ and ‘there was a fire’, I fail to understand why the house burned down.

¹⁴ *The Value of Knowledge*, pp. 192-3

¹⁵ *The Value of Knowledge*, p. 192.

¹⁶ *The Value of Knowledge*, p. 192.

Understanding-*wh* thus requires a grasp of explanatory and coherence-inducing relations in a larger body of information. But so does knowledge-*wh*. So-called reductionists think knowledge-*wh* can be explicated in terms of knowledge-*that*. To know-*wh* is to know that *p*, where *p* is the true answer to the indirect question of the *wh*-clause:^{17, 18}

Reductionism: S knows-*wh* iff Ksp, where *p* is the true answer to the indirect question of the *wh*-clause.

For example, to know why the house burned down is to know that *p*, where *p* is the true answer to the indirect question ‘why did the house burn down?’ To know whether George W. Bush or Janet Jackson is on television is to know that *p*, where *p* is the true answer to the indirect question ‘is Bush or Janet Jackson on television?’

However, for reasons pointed out by Jonathan Schaffer,¹⁹ the reductive account of knowledge-*wh* is inadequate. Schaffer offers the following counterexample to the reductive view. If Bush is speaking on television, ‘Is Bush or Janet Jackson on television?’ and ‘Is Bush or Will Ferrell on television?’ have the same true answer, namely ‘Bush is on television’. So, on the reductive view, ‘I know whether Bush or Janet Jackson is on television’ and ‘I know whether Bush or Will Ferrell is on television’ are equivalent. This is counterintuitive. After all, the question of whether Bush or Janet Jackson is on television is easy. But the question of whether

¹⁷ Jaakko Hintikka, “Different Constructions in Terms of the Basic Epistemological Verbs: A Survey of Some Problems and Proposals”, *The Intensions of Intentionality and Other New Models for Modalities* (Dordrecht, 1975), 1-25, David Lewis, “Whether Report”, in Tom Pauli (ed.), *Philosophical Essays Dedicated to Lennart Aqvist on his Fiftieth Birthday* (Uppsala, 1982): 194-206, Steven Boer and William Lycan *Knowing Who* (Cambridge, 1986), James Higginbotham, “The Semantics of Questions”, in Shalom Lappin (ed.), *The Handbook of Contemporary Semantic Theory* (Oxford, 1996), 361-383, Jason Stanley and Williamson, “Knowing How”, *Journal of Philosophy* 98 (2001), 411-44.

¹⁸ The question of whether there is a unique answer to every question is a delicate issue. Most authors think there is not. Consider, for instance, ‘where can I buy an Italian newspaper?’ or ‘what do two of these computers cost?’ It would probably be better to say that to know-*wh* is to know that *p*, where *p* is a contextually appropriate true answer to the indirect question of the *wh*-clause. However, I shall ignore that complication here. For discussion see e.g. Jeroen Groenendijk and Martin Stokhof, “Questions”, in J. van Bentham, and Ter Meulen, *Handbook of Logic and Language* (Elsevier Science, 1994).

¹⁹ Schaffer, “Knowing the Answer”, typescript.

Bush or Will Ferrell is on television is hard. So, one might know whether Bush or Janet Jackson is on television without knowing whether Bush or Will Ferrell is on television.

Here is a further reason to question the reductive view. Suppose that S knows that Lisa left the party early, but has never heard of Lisa's boyfriend Jim. Suppose, furthermore, that Lisa's boyfriend Jim is upset because Lisa left the party early. If to know why Jim is upset is to know that Lisa left the party early, then S knows why Lisa's boyfriend Jim is upset. But if someone were to ask S why Jim is upset, then S would be unable to provide an answer. This is highly counterintuitive.²⁰

Schaffer suggests the following revision of existing knowledge-*wh* accounts:

Schaffer: S knows-*wh* iff KspQ, where Q is the indirect question of the *wh*-clause, and p is its true answer.

For a person to have knowledge-*wh*, on Schaffer's view, it is not sufficient that she knows that p; she must know the answer to the indirect question "as such". Thus, S knows whether Bush or Janet Jackson is on television in the envisaged circumstances iff S knows that Bush is on television, as the true answer to 'is it Bush or Janet Jackson who is on television?'

Schaffer's account of knowledge-*wh* can be made more explicit for our purposes.

Knowing that p, *as* the true answer to Q, seems to require knowing that p *is* the true answer to Q.

Thus, the following minimum requirement on knowledge-*wh* is indispensable:

Knowledge-*wh*: to know-*wh* is to know that p is the true answer to the indirect question of the *wh*-clause.

²⁰ This counterexample may be thwarted by requiring that the true and complete answer to 'why is Jim upset?' be 'Jim is upset because Lisa left the party'. However, this response is not available to Kvanvig. For the point would still stand that knowing-*why* requires grasping the explanatory relations between individual propositions. I shall therefore ignore the counterexample here.

Thus, S fails to know why Jim is upset, even if he knows the answer to the question of why Jim is upset. S also fails to know why Jim is upset if he knows the answer to the question of why Jim is upset, *and* knows that Jim is upset, but is unaware of the explanatory relationship between the two.

These considerations, of course, carry over to understanding. Kvanvig suggests that understanding-*wh* can be explicated in terms of understanding-*that*. But a reductive account of understanding fails for much the same reasons that a reductive account of knowledge fails. If S understands that Lisa left the party early, and understands that Jim is upset, but fails to understand that Jim is upset because Lisa left the party early, then S does not understand why Jim is upset. Understanding why Jim is upset requires understanding that ‘Lisa left the party early’ is the true answer to ‘why is Jim upset?’

The upshot is that if a person knows or understands a number of unrelated claims pertaining to the relevant question of why p is the case but is unaware of how the claims are pieced together, then she does not know or understand why p is the case. Since knowledge-*why* and understanding-*why* both require true beliefs about explanatory and coherence-making relationships, knowledge-*why* is no less valuable than understanding-*why*.

Kvanvig might raise the following objection. Understanding of a large body of information comes in degrees. Knowledge does not. Let S be a set of true individual propositions that one must believe to have very good understanding of why the house burned down (I say ‘a set’ because what counts as good understanding is a vague matter). Thus, if one must understand that the short circuit was a cause of the fire in order to have good understanding of why the house burned down, then the proposition that the short circuit was a cause of the fire is a member of S. On a “low-standards” account of knowledge, however, knowing why the house burned down would require knowing only some of the members of S. So, very good understanding of why the house burned down would involve believing more truths and grasping

more explanatory and coherence-inducing relationships than knowledge of why the house burned down.

There are two ways of responding to this objection. First, even if very good understanding is more valuable than knowledge on a “low standards” account of knowledge, very good understanding is not more valuable than knowledge on a sufficiently “high standards” account of knowledge. For on a sufficiently “high-standards” account of knowledge, knowledge of why the house burned down might require knowledge of every proposition in S.²¹

Second, one could deny that knowledge why, when, where, and what is an all-or-nothing matter. That knowledge is an all-or-nothing matter is only obviously so in the case of knowledge-*that*. It makes little sense to say that I know that my flight was cancelled better you do.²² Notice, however, that it makes a lot of sense to say that John’s knowledge of why the house burned down is better than Mary’s. On a degree account of knowledge-why, the value of comprehensive understanding would exceed the value of poor knowledge, but the value of comprehensive understanding would not exceed the value of comprehensive knowledge.

We have shown that the value of understanding-*that* and understanding-*why* does not exceed the value of knowledge-*that* and knowledge-*why*, except perhaps on a low-standards account of knowledge. Parallel remarks can be made about understanding when, where, and what. Knowing what caused the fire and understanding what caused the fire both require knowing or understanding a number of individual claims as the true answer to the indirect question of the *wh*-clause. Knowledge-*where* and knowledge-*when* may be relatively piecemeal. For example, knowing when the talk begins, if it begins at 3 p.m., merely requires knowing that

²¹ As Jonathan Schaffer has pointed out (in conversation) it might be worth thinking about whether the standard contextualist arguments about knowledge (e.g. DeRose’s bank case) could be equally used to defend contextualism about understanding. To the extent that the arguments work in parallel ways for knowledge and understanding, which Schaffer thinks they do (and I agree), this would be evidence for thinking that knowledge just is understanding.

²² See Jason Stanley, “On the Linguistic Basis for Contextualism”, *Philosophical Studies* 119 (2004), 119-46. But see Stephen Cade Hetherington, *Better and Worse Knowledge* (Oxford University Press, 2001) for defense of a degree account of propositional knowledge. Hetherington gives examples like the following: ‘I know better that I am in pain than that you are in pain’.

‘the talk begins at 3 p.m.’ is the true answer to the indirect question ‘when does the talk begin?’ But the same holds for understanding-where and understanding-when. Understanding when the talk begins merely requires understanding that ‘the talk begins at 3 p.m.’ is the true answer to the indirect question ‘when does the talk begin?’

IV. Objectual Knowledge and Objectual Understanding

Another theoretically important kind of understanding, according to Kvanvig, is objectual understanding. On this use, ‘understand’ takes objects as compliments, as in ‘John understands quantum theory’. ‘Know’, on its objectual use, also takes objects as compliments, as in ‘John knows quantum mechanics’.

There has been much recent debate about which knowledge claims are properly characterized as objectual.²³ One mark of the objectual ‘know’ is that it involves a different lexical item in several languages, such as German ‘kennen’ (rather than ‘wissen’). Thus, ‘John knows Peter’ translates in German as ‘John kennt Peter’, whereas ‘John knows that Peter is the teacher’ translates as ‘John weißt das Peter der Lehrer ist’. However, some claims are ambiguous between propositional and objectual knowledge claims. For example, ‘John knows the way to San Jose’ can be translated in German as either ‘John kennt den Weg nach San Jose’ or ‘John weißt den Weg nach San Jose’.²⁴ The former conveys familiarity with the way, while the latter just conveys basic knowledge of the directions. ‘Knows’, as it occurs in ‘John knows quantum theory’, however, seems to be unambiguously objectual. It does not involve different lexical items in other languages.

²³ For example, at Brian Weatherson’s weblog *Thoughts, Arguments, and Rants*. Weatherson and Schaffer have suggested that ‘knowing-the’, as in ‘John knows the way to San Jose’, involves an objectual form of ‘know’. Schaffer’s considered view is that all English K-DP constructions (of which the ‘... know the ...’ constructions are species) are ambiguous between kennen and wissen, though in some cases the meaning of the DP may favor one sort of reading.

²⁴ Thanks here to Kai von Fintel and Patrick Taylor.

As Kvanvig observes, objectual understanding and objectual knowledge are not factive in the standard sense. However, says Kvanvig, ‘factivity is in the background’.²⁵ For example, to know quantum theory is, among other things, to have true beliefs about it. Cognitive achievements, Kvanvig says, do not constitute “real knowledge” or “real understanding” without the presence of truth.

This claim, however, needs clarification. To say that cognitive achievements do not constitute real knowledge or real understanding without the presence of truth seems obviously false on one reading. It seems obviously false that cognitive achievements do not constitute real knowledge or real understanding unless the subject matter is true. One can, in a theoretically important sense of the terms, understand or know Lewis’ counterpart theory even if modal realism is false. To know or understand a subject matter involves, among other things, an ability to provide answers to questions about the implications of the theory. But knowing or understanding a theory does not require the theory to be true.

To take another example, John can know Greek mythology without believing that any of the sentences in Greek mythology are true, witness the awkwardness of A’s response in the following dialogue:²⁶

A: Zeus’ hammer Mjollnir was made for him by the dwarfs Brok and Eitri.

B: You clearly don’t know your Greek mythology. Mjollnir is Thor’s hammer, and figures in Norse mythology. Zeus didn’t use a hammer. When he was pissed he threw lightning bolts.

A: What are you talking about? Greek mythology is false. There is nothing there to know.

²⁵ *The Value of Knowledge*, p. 191.

²⁶ Thanks here to Monte Johnson and Jonathan Schaffer.

A, of course, is equivocating on the word 'know'. Even though Greek mythology is false, there is obviously something there to know, as long as 'know' is construed objectually. Knowing Greek mythology, in the objectual sense, does not require the sentences in the story to be true. It only requires the known claims to be true according to Greek mythology. Thus, one cannot have real knowledge or real understanding of a theory without the presence of true beliefs about which claims are essential to the theory in question, but one can have real knowledge and real understanding without these claims being true.

Objectual knowledge and objectual understanding of a theory are thus in an important sense non-factive. But there is also a sense in which they are factive. For they both require true beliefs about which claims are essential to the subject matter in question.

Does the value of objectual understanding exceed the value of objectual knowledge? Would it be correct, for example, to say that John knows quantum theory if John does not grasp the explanatory and other coherence-inducing relationships in the body of information constituting it?

It seems not. If John is able to comprehend some of the central claims of quantum theory but fails to grasp the explanatory and other coherence-making relations among the claims, then John does not know quantum theory. Since a grasp of the explanatory and other coherence-inducing relationships is required for both objectual knowledge and objectual understanding of a subject matter, objectual understanding of a subject matter is not more valuable than objectual knowledge of the subject matter.

There is one sort of understanding that we have left out. We sometimes talk of understanding the world around us. Kvanvig might even insist that this is the most theoretically important form of understanding, because the real goal of inquiry is to understand the world. Understanding the world, however, does not seem to be an objectual form of understanding. To understand the world is to understand what the world is like. If this is right, then understanding the world can be explicated in terms of understanding that something is the case. Is there any

relevant difference between knowing what the world is like and understanding what the world is like?

I dare claim that on a sufficiently “high-standards” account of knowledge, knowing what the world is like and having good understanding of what the world is like require a grasp of exactly the same explanatory and other coherence-inducing relationships. If a short circuit was a cause of a fire, and I know that there was a short circuit and that there was a fire, but fail to know that the short circuit was a cause of the fire, then it is hardly the case that I know what this part of the world is like.

In sum, the value of understanding does not exceed the value of knowledge. If Kvanvig’s claim that a shift to a focus on understanding can solve the value problem, then so can a shift to the right kinds of knowledge. Kvanvig’s general lesson, then, may be taken to be that the strong focus on knowledge-that in contemporary epistemology should be replaced with a focus on other forms of knowledge.

V. Solving the Value Problem?

We have argued that the value of understanding does not exceed the value of knowledge. It follows that if understanding is more valuable than mere true belief, so is knowledge. The problem is, understanding does not seem more valuable than true belief. To see this, consider again the case of Jim being upset because Lisa left the party early. Suppose you believe that the following propositions are true:

I

Lisa left the party early

Jim is upset

If you believe that these propositions are true but fail to grasp any explanatory connections between them, then you fail to understand why Jim is upset. If, on the other hand, you appreciate or understand that the first bit of information explains the second, then you have at least some degree of understanding. But now if you appreciate that the first explains the second, then you believe all of the following propositions:

II

Lisa left the party early

Jim is upset

Jim is upset because Lisa left the party early

Truly believing every proposition in II is just as valuable as truly believing every proposition in I, *and* grasping the explanatory connections between the propositions in I. So, understanding is no more valuable than true belief after all.

The good news is that there is no Meno problem involving understanding. The reason that the Meno problem is an intractable problem for most accounts of knowledge is that most accounts take knowledge to differ from true belief. Unlike true belief, knowledge requires non-accidental connections between belief and world. If we were willing to give up on the anti-luck requirements, the value of knowledge would not exceed the value of true belief.

But understanding is compatible with epistemic luck. Factive understanding just is a set of true first-level beliefs and true higher-level beliefs about the explanatory and other coherence-making connections among the first-level beliefs. Since factive understanding just is a set of true beliefs, we should not expect understanding to be more valuable than any set of true beliefs. We should only expect it to be more valuable than any set of true first-level beliefs.

If knowledge is incompatible with epistemic luck, and knowledge is more valuable than true belief, then extra value must derive from the satisfaction of the anti-luck requirements. I

agree with Kvanvig that most accounts of knowledge are unable to account for the extra value that derives from the satisfaction of the anti-luck requirements. In an earlier paper I have argued that only a very austere internalist account of knowledge can explain the extra value of knowledge, so construed.²⁷ On this account, you know p iff you have an implicit or explicit higher-level belief that your first-level belief that p is well-grounded. If you have a true first-level belief, but you do not have a true higher-level belief about your first-level belief, then you fail to know. Since true belief is valuable, knowing p is more valuable than truly believing p.

Granted, the value of knowing p does not surpass the value of truly believing p and truly believing that the belief that p is well-grounded. But there is nothing that is particularly puzzling about this, for on the proposal under consideration, truly believing p and truly believing that the belief that p is well-grounded just is knowledge.

VI. Closing Remarks

According to Kvanvig, epistemology has for thousands of years focused on the concept of knowledge. But the value of knowledge does not exceed the value of true belief. For that reason we might as well not squander our theoretical efforts investigating it. There is, however, a different sort of cognitive achievement the value of which supposedly surpasses the value of knowledge. This sort of cognitive achievement is what we commonly call *understanding*. Understanding differs from knowledge, Kvanvig says, because unlike knowledge, understanding requires a grasp of the explanatory and other coherence-making relations in a larger body of information.

I have argued against Kvanvig that the value of understanding does not go beyond the value of knowledge. The belief that it does springs from a skewed comparison of understanding of a larger body of information with knowledge of individual propositions. Knowledge-*that* does

²⁷ “Can Virtue Reliabilism Explain the Value of Knowledge?”, forthcoming in *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*.

not require grasping explanatory and other coherence-making relationships, but neither does understanding-*that*. Knowledge-*wh* and objectual knowledge of a subject matter, on the other hand, require the same sort of grasp of explanatory and other coherence-inducing relations as objectual understanding and understanding-*wh*.

Kvanvig's distinction between understanding and knowledge holds up only if one defines 'knowledge' narrowly, that is, only if one defines it in such a way as to exclude knowledge of underlying logical and explanatory relations. But linguistically, of course, one can equally well speak of knowledge of such relations.

Though the value of understanding does not exceed the value of knowledge, the Meno problem remains a threat to most accounts of knowledge. This is because on these accounts, knowledge is incompatible with epistemic luck. It is this anti-luck requirement that makes trouble for most accounts. For it turns out to be rather difficult to explain the intuition that extra value emanates from a satisfaction of the anti-luck requirement.

There is an easy response to the Meno problem: an account of knowledge that takes knowledge to require higher-level true beliefs about the anti-luck connection turns out to have the ability to explain some of the extra value we have been searching for. The only downside is that reflexive knowledge of the sort required to solve the Meno problem is rather psychologically demanding and thus prevents perfunctory-minded individuals from knowing.

Is there an ultimate cure for the Meno problem? Well, if we give up on the standard anti-luck requirements, the problem disappears. Arguably, the anti-luck requirement is a bit overblown.²⁸ If you learned quantum mechanics from an unreliable textbook, you might still have mastered the theory, be a world-class expert, be able to answer any questions on the topic, and so on. So, it seems that you can still count as knowing quantum mechanics by every standard that matters. Further, to the extent that we can talk ourselves out of the intuition that one has real knowledge in such a case, we can equally talk ourselves out of the intuition that one has real

²⁸ Thanks here to Jonathan Schaffer for convincing me.

understanding. So, it seems that knowledge and understanding remain parallel even here. If so, then the way is open for saying that knowledge and understanding are one and the same thing. Equating knowledge with true belief may seem dissatisfying. But the feeling of dissatisfaction fades away if we shift our epistemological focus from knowledge of individual propositions to knowledge of large and more comprehensive bodies of information.²⁹

²⁹ Thanks to Andrew Black, Kai von Fintel, Monte Johnson, Jon Kvanvig, Gualtiero Piccinini, Ron Munson, Robert Northcott, Joe Salerno, Jonathan Schaffer, Jim Stone, George Streeter, Patrick Taylor, and the participants in my epistemology seminar at the University of Missouri—St. Louis, fall 2005 for helpful comments and/or discussion.