

Cheryl E Fitzgerald
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Reliabilism Cannot Capture What Is Special About Knowledge

Uncontroversially, *knowledge* is a special kind of true belief, such that what makes it special thereby makes it more epistemically valuable, and thus, more desirable than mere true belief. The added ingredient(s) and the explication of its(their) nature by which knowledge gains this special status above mere true belief has been the central focus of debate in epistemology; nonetheless, the majority of epistemologists agree that there is *something* intuitively special about knowledge as distinct from mere true belief. The sharpest divide, I think, regarding the nature of this special feature of knowledge is exemplified in the debate between internalists and externalists, a debate I take to be only about that special feature itself and not about knowledge.¹ That which precisely divides internalists and externalists is by no means clear, for not only are there are many versions of both, but each side defines his opponent in a particular way conducive to his own project, and his opponent may very well reject the definition.

For this reason, my present project is very narrow and shall focus only on a particular brand of process reliabilism, hereafter referred to merely as reliabilism, espoused and made popular by Alvin Goldman. I will argue that reliabilism is unsuccessful in capturing what is, arguably, intuitively special about knowledge over mere true belief, for ultimately, reliabilism leaves us incapable of distinguishing between mere true belief and genuine knowledge.²

¹ While there may be some who claim there are internalist or externalist conceptions of *knowledge*, either such conceptions are, I think, absurd, or really only focused on defining and explicating that special feature. In the former, the absurdity lies in the fact that, of the two constituents of *true belief*, the most basic ingredients of knowledge, the former is externalist and the latter internalist, thereby automatically making *true belief* alone neither an internalist nor an externalist notion.

² Despite that I find the well-known generality problem devastatingly unsolvable for reliabilism, I set it aside for the purposes of this essay. Goldman is aware of the problem and expresses confidence that it *can* be solved, so in the effort of giving reliabilism the benefit of the doubt, I tentatively grant him that confidence.

Goldman and Olsson, in a co-authored essay, have addressed a particular kind of attack against reliabilism for its inability to capture that special, valuable feature of knowledge. I will first argue that the attack, dubbed the swamping argument, is unsuccessful as an attack against reliabilism, or even externalist theories in general, and is, thus, problematic in itself, even though the spirit of the argument is rightly motivated. Despite a rather clever attempt to get around the swamping argument, Goldman and Olsson miss the point of it, for what they end up with is *not* a special feature of *knowledge* that imbues it with the value we so think it has, but rather a feature of the processes by which reliabilism claims we obtain knowledge. Furthermore, for all that Goldman and Olsson argue reliabilism still inevitably fails to capture the intuitively special feature of knowledge. While I think that only an internalist theory can capture the nature of that feature, I will do little more than suggest this, since a full-fledged argument in support of an internalist theory is beyond the scope of the present essay.

I. Reliability as Justification

Goldman agrees with much of traditional epistemology that at least one substantially special ingredient that converts mere true belief into knowledge is *justification*. His disagreement with the tradition resides in what he explicates the nature of justification to be. In his well known essay “What Is Justified True Belief?”³ he presents cases that intuitively represent unjustified beliefs even when those beliefs happen to be true, and states that what is intuitively recognized about each case is the lack of *reliability* of that by which the beliefs in question are formed. Conversely, processes through which we intuitively form justified beliefs, such as “standard perceptual processes, remembering, good reasoning, and introspection,” confer justification because they are deemed reliable, “where (as a first approximation) reliability

³ Goldman, Alvin. (1979). “What Is Justified True Belief?” Reprinted in Louis P. Pojman (ed.), *The Theory of Knowledge: Classical and Contemporary Readings*; Toronto, Ontario: Wadsworth (2003), 260-273.

consists in the tendency of a process to produce beliefs that are true rather than false.”⁴

Goldman contends that the principles by which a belief is justified must make reference to how the belief is caused;⁵ however, given his rejection of his earlier causal theory of knowing,⁶ the causal connection referred to is not between the fact that makes true the belief and the belief itself, but between some cognitive process of belief formation and the belief. This avoids known problems with the causal theory of knowing, such as how one can have knowledge of logical and mathematical truths, as well as general facts; in any of these cases, there is *some* reasoning process by which the belief is formed (or caused), and this is all Goldman needs for his theory. Additionally, Goldman acknowledges the possibility that that by which a belief is *initially* formed and that by which it is *sustained* can come apart; thus, he specifies that the sense in which the relevant justification-conferring process(es) cause a belief includes the notion of causally sustaining it, and not merely initiating the belief.⁷

Crucial to understanding the motivation behind Goldman’s reliabilism is keeping in mind a few key aspects of his theory that he points out. First, he states that he is presenting an *explanation* of what makes a belief justified; in other words, we should take his theory to be a descriptive project rather than a prescriptive one, as he seems openly to state:

Unlike some traditional approaches, I do not try to prescribe standards for justification that differ from, or improve upon, our ordinary standards. I merely try to explicate the ordinary standards, which are, I believe, quite different from those of many classical, e.g., “Cartesian,” accounts.^{8, 9}

⁴ *Ibid.*, 265.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 265.

⁶ Goldman, Alvin. (1967). “A Causal Theory of Knowing,” reprinted in Louis P. Pojman (ed.), *The Theory of Knowledge: Classical and Contemporary Readings*; Toronto, Ontario: Wadsworth (2003), 129-138.

⁷ Goldman (1979), 265.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 260.

⁹ One thing we might point out as problematic from the start is the focus on “ordinary standards,” something Goldman readily admits throughout his essay is thoroughly vague. Such a notion feels dangerously close to another

Related to this, Goldman expresses his naturalistic motivations in saying that he aims “to specify in non-epistemic terms when a belief is justified.”¹⁰ As an explanatory theory aimed purely at describing the facts, he further points out an unsurprising result—something all externalist theories share—namely, that one who has knowledge need never be aware of the fact that he has knowledge, and it may even be the case that he *cannot* become aware of this fact.¹¹ This result is actually appealing insofar as one hopes that a theory of justification (and thus, of knowledge) allows us to declare that unsophisticated adults, children, and cognitively advanced animals have knowledge. This runs directly counter to access internalism, which requires that that by which a belief is justified for an individual is cognitively accessible for that individual.¹²

II. Reliability Fails at Capturing Knowledge

However, this very motivation that drives reliabilism has the consequence that the theory is unable to capture what we intuitively feel is special about knowledge that distinguishes it from mere true belief. Towards the end of his essay, Goldman states:

What we really want is an *explanation* of why we count, or would count, certain beliefs as justified and others as unjustified. Such an explanation must refer to our *beliefs* about reliability, not to the actual *facts*. The reason we *count* beliefs as justified is that they are formed by what we *believe* to be reliable belief-forming processes. Our beliefs about

slippery, and perhaps purely rhetorical term that some philosophers use, namely, “commonsense” ideas of certain theoretical notions they aim to explicate. I am unmoved by the appeal to “ordinary” or “commonsense” notions or intuitions, since these words are never given alongside any explanation of *whose* ideas they actually refer to aside from those of the philosopher using them. If they are meant to express the intuitions of the majority of non-philosophers, then such would be an empirical claim, for which no evidence is ever provided. On the other hand, there is a sense in which we, as philosophers doing theoretical work, cannot ever entirely detach ourselves from the use of intuitions. But perhaps identifying *our* intuitions with “ordinary” and/or “commonsense” intuitions is a bit hasty, for it is quite likely that our intuitions are shaped by the skills we have learned; furthermore, it would not be at all unreasonable to suggest that sometimes the intuitions of the majority of non-philosophers might be misguided, and thus, not entirely something upon which we would want to found our theories.

¹⁰ Goldman (1979), 260.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 261.

¹² This is not to say that what provides the justification is something *within* the individual’s mind, but only that he may be aware of it. What does the justificatory work may be external to his mind, it must simply be something of which he can be aware, and for which he can understand the relationship between it and his belief that results in its conferring justification on his belief.

which belief-forming processes are reliable may be erroneous, but that does not affect the adequacy of the explanation.¹³

The rather curious consequence here is that, because the facts of the matter regarding the actual reliability of those belief-forming processes are external to us as cognitive agents, the question remains as to what reason we have to believe that certain processes are reliable. Since Goldman has established that those facts are external and *may be* entirely inaccessible to us, then the notion of reliability, which he explains as “a ‘tendency’ to produce beliefs that are true rather than false [which]...could refer either to *actual* long-run frequency, or to a ‘propensity,’ i.e., outcomes that would occur in merely *possible* realizations of the process,”¹⁴ would seem to be something about which we can never have *confidence* that our beliefs about it are right. In other words, in assessing belief-formation processes and whether or not they are reliable, my assessment must obviously take the form of evaluative beliefs about those processes; however, if I am only justified in those evaluative beliefs when I have formed them via some reliable process, then if I further wonder whether those evaluative beliefs are justified, I shall have to further evaluate the processes through which I arrived at them, something the reliabilist is committed to claiming I have no access. Furthermore, I would have to believe that I understood how the relationship between some particular belief-forming process and the belief it produces confers justification upon that belief.

But at no point can I *check* whether or not any single application of a certain process was actually successful, for such would require me to step outside of my beliefs in order to compare my belief with the actual fact, something to which we have no access except *through* belief. And since reliability, at least in one sense, is defined in terms of frequency, I would never be able to

¹³ Goldman (1979), 270.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 266.

then tally up how many times such a particular process successfully produced true beliefs. Of course, none of this would be required, says the reliabilist, in order for me to actually *know* that my own belief-forming processes are reliable, for so long as my beliefs about those processes are reliably formed, I am fully justified and have knowledge that my belief-forming processes are reliable. Yet, because what justifies me is entirely inaccessible to me, I am left without any *reason* to have *confidence* in the truth of my beliefs. If asked, I could not provide justification, as it is conceived according to reliabilism, for my own beliefs, without appealing to some chain of reliable belief-formation processes that ultimately leaves me suspended in a hypothetical “if” regarding the *actual* reliability of those processes to which I have no access, but can only have beliefs about. If I am ultimately unable to provide any reasons by which I take some particular belief to be justified, and therefore, to be knowledge, then I am unable to pick out what distinguishes that belief as knowledge from another that may only merely be true, since unbeknownst to me, the one I *believe* is accidentally true might be fully justified on the reliabilist’s account, since it could have actually been produced by a reliable process.

It would seem that what is special about knowledge that we desire to capture by the notion of justification is something that lies behind the confidence one feels in readily *asserting* what he takes himself to know. I can think of no other motivation for such confidence in assertion than taking oneself to *have good reasons* for believing what one does, and that the notion of their being good reasons lies in our notion of what it means to be rational, namely, that one doesn’t believe things willy nilly and arbitrarily. But having good reasons for believing must be something that is within one’s cognitive abilities to grasp; it cannot be enough for a person to be justified that *there are* good reasons, for certainly the best reason for believing some true proposition is that it is actually true.

However, we also must allow that sometimes one has good reasons for believing something that is actually false; but this can only make sense if those reasons are reasons the person *has*, in the sense of cognitive access. From an objective perspective, there cannot *be* good reasons for believing a false proposition, since from the objective perspective, there is only the fact of the matter, which is, in that case, that the proposition is false. In other words, the only way we can make sense of there being good reasons for believing a false proposition is that *from* a particular individual's cognitive perspective, things look to be that way, so to speak, albeit erroneously. And for all the same reasons, error can only be made sense of from a particular individual's cognitive perspective. It is this sense of justification that reliabilism cannot possibly capture. (Indeed, it is a relevant question to ask the reliabilist what we are doing when we claim we *have* reasons for what we believe, reasons we take to be that by which we evaluate whether or not we are justified and rational in holding those beliefs. Are we merely fooling ourselves?)

It is true that reliabilism allows for the possibility that one obtains false beliefs via a normally reliable process, but there is no analysis in the reliabilist framework that *explains* both how an individual using that process in a specific situation got it wrong *and* that getting it wrong was rationally appropriate. That some particular process *usually* produces true beliefs, but sometimes gets it wrong cannot account for why it gets it wrong in a particular situation without appealing entirely to internal reasons within the individual's cognitive grasp that made the belief reasonable for him at that time. The reliabilist may claim that such a person relied on some particular belief-forming process that is in fact normally reliable, and was aware of doing so, but it so happened that the process got the belief wrong that time. However, to knowingly rely on some reliable process when one's reliance is purposeful because one takes the process to be reliable is an entirely internalist reason, for it is a *belief* in the reliability of a process that one

evaluates to be reliable because one takes oneself to be in the position of having good reasons (or evidence) to *assert* that the process has usually been reliable.

Reliabilism leaves us in an odd position to say the least. It certainly captures something that we might feel bears *some* epistemic force, the use of reliable processes for acquiring beliefs. We definitely place some value in certain processes that we have evaluated as being reliable and trustworthy, and we take such reliability and trustworthiness to contribute to the justification we tend to think we have for the beliefs we acquired via those processes. However, the way in which reliabilism claims that reliable processes actually contribute to our justification is quite contrary to what we expected when we thought we were appealing to reliability and trustworthiness of certain acclaimed processes. An *appeal* to the reliability of some process is a conscious act whereby one takes the positive evaluation of that process to be a good reason and good evidence for relying on the use of that process. Unfortunately, such an appeal assumes access to the reliability of that process, something that reliabilism in no way affords us.

The question is, what has reliabilism done in the way of capturing what we intuitively feel is special about knowledge? Aside from true belief, precious little. We normally take it that a person who genuinely possesses knowledge has some reasonable authority in asserting those propositions that comprise the content of his knowledge—whether he is asserting them to others, or to himself, the point about assertion is taking or declaring a proposition true—and that he may, if needed, establish the reasonableness of his authority, both for himself and for others. We take seriously having the ability to distinguish between lucky guessing or otherwise happening upon true belief without having had prior reason to hold the belief, or prior confidence in the belief. Having *good* reasons involves understanding appropriate relationships between other beliefs or mental states or states of affairs, or any combination thereof, such that, given those

reasons, we would agree to both, the individual having those reasons is right in connecting that belief with those reasons, *and* that *any* individual in the *same* epistemic position with regard to having that belief based on those reasons would also be right. It is this last idea that captures the normative force we tend to think is present in the relationship between justification and the belief it justifies, such that we can further utilize our understanding of such a relationship in guiding our cognitive lives in order to better our epistemic position. I think that we must believe that such a normative aspect exists in the relationship between knowledge and that upon which knowledge is justified, and that we really can have access to this normative aspect, so long as we also believe that we can employ special effort in trying to better our epistemic position in seeking knowledge and avoiding error. And it would seem that this normative aspect is something that simply cannot exist in the reliabilist framework.

III. The Swamping Argument

In their essay “Reliabilism and the Value of Knowledge,”¹⁵ Goldman and Erik J. Olsson defend reliabilism against the charge that it fails to provide an account of what value knowledge has over mere true belief. In particular, they defend the theory against the swamping argument, which is presented as follows: since what makes a true belief knowledge for reliabilism is that it be reliably produced, it would seem that production by a reliable process adds nothing of value to the belief, for its truth is already provided.¹⁶ The point of the argument is meant to hinge on the notion that reliability is defined as a tendency to produce true beliefs, which would make reliability valuable only for the fact that—if it is indeed a fact—it provides more true beliefs than false ones; in other words, the argument focuses on the fact that it seems as though reliability is

¹⁵ Goldman, Alvin and Olsson, Erik J. (forthcoming). “Reliabilism and the Value of Knowledge,” in D. Pritchard, A. Miller, and A. Haddock (eds.), *Epistemic Value*. OUP. (All page numbers refer to the ms. for this essay.) [http://fas-philosophy.rutgers.edu/goldman/Reliabilism and the Value of Knowledge.pdf](http://fas-philosophy.rutgers.edu/goldman/Reliabilism%20and%20the%20Value%20of%20Knowledge.pdf)

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5-7.

only instrumentally valuable for getting at truth, but if truth is already provided, then the fact that it was produced reliably gives no further value.

As the argument stands, presented by Goldman and Olsson, while suitably motivated in raising our attention to something about knowledge with which we ought to be concerned, the swamping argument could equally be posed against *any* theory of knowledge¹⁷ simply by swapping mention of reliable belief-processes with justification, or whatever other additional feature(s) is added to true belief that converts it to knowledge. The argument would then be:

(S1') Knowledge equals justified true belief.

(S2') If a given belief is true, its value will not be raised by the fact this it is justified.

(S3') Hence, knowledge is no more valuable than unjustified true belief.¹⁸

Clearly, something has gone wrong. It would seem that the argument only bears some force under the assumption that the sole epistemic goal is in the attainment of true beliefs. If this were the only goal, then surely, it wouldn't matter one bit whether a belief were produced by a reliable or respectable process, but nor would it matter that it were justified. In order to save any theory against the swamping argument, one must establish that whatever the added ingredient that converts mere true belief into knowledge, and so distinguishes knowledge as special, must itself confer some value onto the belief different from its being true. So long as one takes justification, however it is defined, to be that by which a belief is simply more likely to be true, or guaranteed to be true, then such a view is prey to this attack, and there is nothing special about knowledge that distinguishes it from mere true belief. If the independent value of the additional feature that one takes to distinguish knowledge from mere true belief cannot be established, then so much the worse for one's theory. It would seem that those who attack reliabilism via the swamping

¹⁷ Goldman and Olsson correctly notice this, *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, 6.

argument must assume two things: (1) that reliabilism is committed to truth being the sole epistemic goal, and thus, the reliability of belief-forming processes has no value of its own, and (2) that other theories, such as internalism, are not committed to truth as the sole epistemic goal, and that, therefore, the additional features that convert true belief into knowledge have independent value. Both of these assumptions remain to be argued for, but the spirit of the swamping argument is rightly motivated, for it redirects our attention back to what we think is so special about knowledge in the first place, demanding that we sort out our intuitions about what value knowledge has in our lives over mere true belief.

IV. Reliabilism Still Fails in Capturing the Extra Value of Knowledge

Goldman and Olsson offer as a solution to the swamping argument the claim that the value added by a reliable process is an increase in the conditional probability that one's future beliefs will turn out to be true.¹⁹ They claim that the presence and use of a reliable mechanism increases and enhances the objective probability that it will continue to reliably produce what it does in the future. They give the example of a reliable espresso machine producing good espresso, and that even though there is no causal connection between subsequent cups of espresso, that nonetheless, "the production of a good cup of espresso does raise or enhance the probability of a subsequent good cup of espresso."²⁰ Unfortunately, there is no explanation of how this occurs, for certainly, there are some missing premises in this argument, such as consideration of the independence between subsequent productions from the reliable process. If we consider a biased coin that reliably comes up heads when flipped, surely, however many times the coin is in fact flipped makes no difference whatsoever regarding the future probability that it will come up heads on a subsequent flip, for each flip is an entirely independent event.

¹⁹ Goldman & Olsson (forthcoming), 12.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

Coins are one thing, espresso machines are another, but I still can't make sense of the idea of each production of a good cup of espresso contributing to the machine's overall likelihood of producing subsequent good cups.

One significant premise missing is an explication of just what is referred to by "probability." Goldman and Olsson make a point of saying that whatever it is, it is objective;²¹ but this is of no help since there are theories of objective probability that define it as frequency, others as propensity, and some as a measure of objectively rational belief, i.e., objective Bayesianism. Being externalists, and since Goldman seems to vacillate between sometimes describing reliability as a frequency and sometimes as a propensity in his earlier essay, it is likely that they don't mean the last option; but it is worthy in pointing out that simply stating that probability is an objective factor doesn't rule out a belief theory. But whether probability is a frequency or a propensity doesn't clarify how the successful use of a reliable process increases its conditional probability of being successful in the future without some further explication of the process involved and further premises about the relationship between the process and the output it produces. On a frequency notion of probability, an espresso machine that produces one fantastic cup is 100% reliable; nothing could enhance its conditional reliability! Propensity is metaphysically more complicated, since it relies, at least, on counterfactuals, and perhaps some explication of *de re* modal properties of the process in question. Furthermore, that some process has a propensity for reliable output does not require that the process ever *actually* produce the output, since propensity is a metaphysical property regarding what *would* happen and not what actually does happen. Thus, the claim that the successful use of the reliable process enhances its conditional probability for future success does not fall out of either notion of probability.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

This problem is by no means impossible to overcome, but there is no guarantee that working it out would be conducive to the reliabilist's project of accounting for the added value of true belief acquired via a reliable process over true belief without such a process. There is, I think, an intuitive idea of what Goldman and Olsson are shooting for, namely, following the successful track record of a particular process and finding out that it is reliable, which would put one in a better epistemic position by using it than not. However, if the project here involves actually tracking and evaluating a process, and forming beliefs about its reliability, this sounds strikingly more internalist than Goldman's previous declarations about process reliabilism, specifically, that the justification such a process is supposed to confer on beliefs it produces has nothing to do with one's awareness or beliefs about the process itself. Tracking and evaluating a particular process as reliable, judging it to be valuable for that reason, and thereby, making a point in using it may in fact put one in a better epistemic position than previously, but precisely for the reason that one now *has good reason* for employing the process.

This is not what Goldman and Olsson suggest, for they are careful not to bring in any mention of actually tracking and evaluating the reliability of a process, but it is certainly lurking:

[T]he extent to which a knowledge state enhances the conditional probability of future true beliefs depends on a number of empirical regularities...Once you encounter a problem of a certain type, you are likely to encounter a problem of the same type at some later point...[I]f a particular method successfully solves a problem once, this method is usually available to you the next time around...[I]f you have used a given method before and the result has been unobjectionable, you are likely to use it again on a similar occasion, if it is available...[I]f a given method is reliable in one situation, it is likely to be reliable in other similar situations as well.²²

²² Goldman & Olsson (forthcoming), 13.

What they do claim results of this picture is that each time some particular process (or method) is used in producing a successfully true belief, the success contributes to one's overall state such that, given the satisfaction of the above conditions, one will be more likely to use the process again. With each further successful use of the process, one's overall state gets better and better with regard to future employment of the process. This suggests, I think, a fairly straightforward model of a sort of learning machine.²³ The thrust of this model is that having such reliable processes, even without any awareness of them, puts one in a better, and thus, more valuable overall epistemic position than not having them. As for the added value of knowledge, they claim that reliable processes are attributed with increasing amounts of instrumental value over time, so that eventually such value turns into an "independent, or autonomous, value status."²⁴ There is a sense in which this picture seems intuitively plausible; however, it still fails to genuinely capture what is special about knowledge.

It is curious that Goldman and Olsson never consider Laurence Bonjour's Norman case,²⁵ the perfectly reliable clairvoyant regarding the location of the President at any time, nor do they seem to consider any similar case. There is no straightforward way in which Norman violates the regularities laid out above; in fact, the clairvoyance process may be attributed with increasing value over time that makes clairvoyance an independently valuable source of belief. The case of Norman is meant to demonstrate that there is something clearly misguided about the reliabilist picture as one that is intended to capture what constitutes knowledge. As an externalist theory, it requires that one need not ever be aware of the processes by which one acquires one's reliable beliefs, let alone that they are in fact reliable, which is to say that one never need be aware of that

²³ I think they would have benefited greatly if they had attempted to model their probabilistic theory on non-monotonic reasoning, since this notion is specifically intended to capture the idea of learning and altering one's probability measurements over time by conditionalizing on acquired information.

²⁴ Goldman & Olsson (forthcoming), 17.

²⁵ Bonjour, Laurence. (1985). *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP.

by which one is justified in one's beliefs. But such lack of awareness seems to remove precisely what we intuitively feel is special about knowledge that puts one in a position for asserting something he takes himself to know. Specifically, he takes himself to be in possession of good reasons that bear some relationship to the belief he takes himself to know, such that it is reasonable and rational for him to assert such a belief *on the basis* of those reasons. In other words, reliabilism seems to leave us in the dark about whether or not we have knowledge at all, and of that which justifies what we do know, which seems entirely counterintuitive to what we take possessing knowledge to be like. It seems crucial that when one is in possession of knowledge, one is in a position to assert what he knows, but doing so would require some reason by which he takes himself to be in such a position for assertion to begin with.

The value that Goldman and Olsson end up attributing to reliable processes is nothing like the value of taking oneself to be in a position to assert what one knows based on reasons that appeal to our notion of rationality. In fact, it seems that their original project took a turn in a direction that brought them to a different result from the one they set out to find. Their initial goal in overcoming the attack of the swamping argument was to establish some special value in what reliabilism takes to be knowledge that is above and beyond mere true belief.²⁶ What they in fact end up concluding possesses the value they sought to discover are composite *states* of a knower: “[t]he solution contends that, other things being equal, the former composite state [of possessing a reliable navigation system] has a valuable property that the latter composite state [without such a navigation system] lacks.”²⁷ It is claimed that knowledge derives its value by being produced by such valuable states. This appears backwards from how we would normally

²⁶ Goldman & Olsson (forthcoming), 11: “The central problem on the table is whether reliabilism can account for the extra value of knowledge as compared with true belief

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

consider reliable processes to gain their value, namely, via successful outputs; in other words, it would seem that the value we attach to reliability could only derive from the token successes produced by the process at hand. But, they claim,

Although the ascribed value of reliable processes is initially derivative from the ascribed value of the true beliefs they cause, reliable processes ultimately acquire autonomous value—value that isn't dependent, on a case-by-case basis, on the value of resultant true beliefs...[T]he value imputed to a token process is inherited from the value imputed to its type, a possibility that seems to be ignored by the swamping argument.²⁸

What is ultimately confusing about this view is not the odd growth and transfers of value, but rather, how this particular conception of the supposed value of knowledge remains externalist, instead of relying entirely on internalist reasons for taking some process to be reliable and, thereby, valuable. If this view is to remain externalist, then the attribution of value cannot result from the individual who is exercising these reliable processes, for presumably, he need not ever be aware of them. Then again, if he is not aware of them, who is? It is a well-known criticism of externalism by internalists that externalist theories can only provide a third person evaluation of beliefs and knowledge. However, as I argued in the second section above against Goldman's main theory of reliabilism, this leaves us unable to genuinely assess anyone's belief-formation processes, since we can never come to be aware of whether *our own beliefs* of those assessments were produced by reliable processes themselves, which leaves us entirely without any justification to believe in those assessments. Essentially, reliabilism claims that we can have lots of knowledge, but it manages to leaves us without any reason to assertively believe in those very propositions that apparently comprise the content our own knowledge. And surely such a conclusion is as absurd as we can get.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

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