

WHERE IS THE VALUE OF KNOWLEDGE?*

EM QUE RESIDE O VALOR DO CONHECIMENTO?

Mateus Henriques Patricio
mateushpatricio@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3918-1270>
Universidade Estadual de Campinas (UNICAMP),
Campinas, Brasil.

ABSTRACT *Knowledge is frequently said to be more valuable than true belief. Building upon this intuition, Zagzebski presents a challenge for definitions of knowledge. If a definition adequately captures knowledge, then it should also capture knowledge's extra value. In this paper, I argue that the extra value can be accommodated with flexibility by definitions of knowledge. In other words, I state that epistemologists are capable of meeting the demands of the problem of value by identifying the extra value of knowledge in a variety of ways, such as by pointing to a valuable property that knowledge adds to the knower. This is not the way Zagzebski conceives the demands of the problem, and for that reason, I think she is mistaken. First, I introduce Zagzebski's version of the problem and the three morals that she extracts from it. Second, I examine her argument and propose modifications based on what I believe to be a proper understanding of the background intuition. Third, I argue that Zagzebski's morals do not really follow from the problem of value. Finally, I explore the*

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consequences of being free from the three morals, namely, the possibility of locating the value of knowledge in different “places”.

Keywords: *Value of knowledge. Virtue epistemology. Virtue responsibilism.*

RESUMO *Costuma-se dizer que o conhecimento é mais valioso do que a crença verdadeira. Com base nessa intuição, Zagzebski apresenta um desafio para as definições de conhecimento. Se uma definição captura adequadamente o conhecimento, então ela também deve capturar o valor extra do conhecimento. Neste artigo, argumento que o valor extra pode ser acomodado com flexibilidade pelas definições de conhecimento. Em outras palavras, afirmo que os epistemólogos são capazes de atender às exigências do problema do valor, identificando o valor extra do conhecimento de várias maneiras, tal como indicar uma propriedade valiosa que o conhecimento agrega ao conhecedor. Essa não é a maneira como Zagzebski concebe as exigências do problema e, por essa razão, acredito que ela está errada. Em primeiro lugar, apresento a versão do problema de Zagzebski e as três morais que ela extrai dele. Em segundo lugar, examino seu argumento e proponho modificações com base no que acredito ser uma compreensão adequada da intuição de fundo. Em terceiro lugar, argumento que as morais de Zagzebski não decorrem realmente do problema do valor. Por fim, exploro as consequências de estar livre das três morais, ou seja, a possibilidade de localizar o valor do conhecimento em diferentes “lugares”.*

Palavras-chave: *Problema do valor. Epistemologia da virtude. Responsabilismo da virtude.*

The problem of value

In epistemology, the problem of value (PV) is a family of challenges related to epistemic values, most notably, the value of true belief and the value of knowledge. The reasoning behind each of its versions relies on a set of intuitions about epistemic values. For example, (i) that true belief is desirable, (ii) that true belief has practical value (i.e., value derived from how it helps us attain personal ends), and (iii) that knowledge is better than mere true belief. Proponents of the challenge select one or more intuitions in order to argue that

some kind of value or valuable relation must be accounted for by a theory of knowledge¹.

One version of this problem states that any successful definition of knowledge must meet a value condition. Relying on the intuition that knowledge is more valuable than true belief, the problem requires that the *definiens* captures and explains the distinctive value of knowledge that distinguishes it from mere true belief. In other words, for any given definition, knowledge will be defined as true belief plus some set of conditions, which we can designate as “X”. In order for the definition to be minimally adequate, X must capture the value that differentiates knowledge from mere true belief. If X does not account for this additional value, then the definition true belief + X is unsuccessful².

Zagzebski (1996, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c) is the most prominent proponent of that version of PV. Building on the aforementioned argument, she argues that simple reliabilism and virtue reliabilism are not capable of meeting the demand. Simple reliabilism is the theory that defines knowledge as true belief produced by a reliable source (Cf. Goldman; Olsson, 2009). Against it, she objects that a reliable source does not increase the value of the product. For example, a reliable espresso maker does not increase the value of the espresso just by producing it (Cf. Zagzebski, 2020a, p. 141, and Zagzebski, 2020b, p. 153). Virtue reliabilism is the view that knowledge is a true belief that is an achievement through intellectual virtues, credited to the knower (Cf. Greco, 2009). Against it, Zagzebski argues that, in the first place, credit *per se* does not add value. For example, an espresso does not get any better if its making is credited to an espresso machine (Cf. Zagzebski, 2020b, p. 155). In the second place, even a source that is valuable independently of the valuable things that it produces is not guaranteed to transfer value to its products. For example, an espresso does not get any better for being produced by a valuable espresso machine (Cf. Zagzebski, 2020b, pp. 153-154). In parallel, even if intellectual virtues are valuable beyond the true beliefs they produce, this is not guaranteed to transfer value to those products.

In addition to raising objections, Zagzebski extracts three morals from the PV. First, truth together with a reliable source is insufficient to explain the additional value of knowledge (Cf. Zagzebski, 2020b, p. 153). A reliable method derives its value wholly from the goods produced by it. Therefore,

- 1 Sosa (2003), for example, identified four different intuitions about epistemic value and argued that his account of knowledge accommodates all of them.
- 2 Examining the literature on this version of the problem of value, it is not always clear where the *definiens* should contain the extra value of knowledge as its element or if its elements should be able to provide an explanation to the extra value of knowledge (Cf. Zagzebski, 1996).

a reliable path to truth is no better than the truth it leads to. Second, truth together with a valuable source whose value is independent of the value of the knowing state is insufficient to explain the additional value of knowledge (Cf. Zagzebski, 2020b, pp. 153-154). The state of knowing can then be understood as what Zagzebski calls ‘the machine-product model of knowledge’. This happens when we view it as a product distinct from the elements that compose it. For example, simple reliabilism adopts the machine-product model, since knowledge is a true belief produced by a reliable method, but the true belief is not a part of the method, only a product of it. Crucially, the second moral communicates that PV is only answered if we identify extra value within the believing state itself that amounts to knowledge, and not something distinct from it, such as its external cause. Lastly, the third moral draws attention to the way the emotional state of the agent relates to action. Two things should be noted: (a) an agent’s emotions are part of the action (they sustain action in a way that we do not separate the two), and (b) an agent’s emotions can add value to action (for instance, a courageous behavior can have its value increased if done out of courage). The sharp distinction between the machine-product model and the way an agent’s emotions relate to action leads to the third moral: knowing is like an action to an agent (Cf. Zagzebski, 2020b, p. 155).

Zagzebski believes that her definition of knowledge as an act of intellectual virtue (more about that later) is probably one of the only candidates to meet the standards imposed by the version of PV in question. Both reliabilism and virtue reliabilism, two of the preferred theories of knowledge in recent times, but also Plantinga’s (1993) proper function theory and Bonjour’s (1985) internalism, violate at least one of the identified morals (Cf. Zagzebski, 2020a, pp. 145-146 and Zagzebski 2020b, p. 156). In the next three sections, my aim is to show that the version of PV examined does not give rise to any of the three morals. Actually, when properly understood, that version of PV is much less demanding than Zagzebski makes it seem. All that can be established from it is that a definition of knowledge must capture something that is generally valuable in the state of knowing or in its surroundings.

Examining Zagzebski’s problem of value

I propose we understand the varieties of the problem of value according to the following argumentative model. Any PV is an argument composed of (i) a premise that expresses an intuition about value, (ii) a conditional premise that connects the intuition to a demand for the theory of knowledge, and (iii) a conclusion that expresses the demand for the theory of knowledge. According

to the proposed model, the version of PV that Zagzebski addresses is something like:

Zagzebski's Problem of Value (here called 'ZPV'):

- (1) Knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief (the intuition here expressed will be called 'K>TB');
- (2) If knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief, then its definition must capture (account for) the extra value;
- (3) Therefore, the definition of knowledge must capture (account for) its extra value.

Before examining the morals that Zagzebski extracts from ZPV together with subsidiary considerations, I turn now to consider ZPV per se. The argument is valid, since the conclusion follows by *modus ponens*. Premise (2) is grounded in considerations about definition that are largely unproblematic. Thus, the real question resides in premise (1): should we accept it? Setting aside problems about the methodological role of intuitions in philosophy, we could make things easier for Zagzebski and say that, since (1) expresses a philosophical intuition, it is better to accommodate it than to reject it. But that does not settle the case for premise (1), because we should ask if (1) really captures the intuition it purports to express.

Fricker (2009) and Baehr (2009) offer a revealing exploration of the intuition that knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief. Both argue that K>TB does not possess absolute generality (Cf. Fricker, 2009, pp. 132-134 and Baehr, 2009, pp. 48-49). That is to say, when we examine the phenomenology of the intuition, it is revealed that it is not conceived of as a necessary truth (such as "2+2=4"), but as a claim with limited or indeterminate generality. An indication of this is that the thought that trivial knowledge (e.g., knowledge of how many blades of grass are in a garden) is not valuable does not strike us as necessarily false. Fricker also favors the idea that K>TB should not be understood in a synchronic way, i.e. as if the extra value of K must be present at the moment the agent acquired the belief (Cf. Fricker, 2009, p. 127). The requirement of synchronicity would be mistaken, because K>TB is completely compatible with the extra value of a particular piece of knowledge unfolding over time. I am in complete agreement with both contributions.

A point of tension between Fricker's (2009) and Baehr's (2009) analyses concerns the presumably formal aspect of K>TB (Cf. Fricker, 2009, pp. 135-136 and Baehr, 2009, pp. 51-54). The intuition would be formal if it did not "provide any indication of why or that in virtue of which knowledge is more valuable than true belief." (Baehr, 2009, p. 46). Baehr believes that, in order for K>TB to establish requirements for the definition of knowledge, the intuition

should not be merely formal, while Fricker disagrees. In general, Baehr supports his position by *reductio* reasonings³. He fears that, if the intuition were formal, it would not be a way of capturing or disagreeing about the extra value of knowledge. Since $K > TB$ would not express indications of how knowledge is more valuable, there would be no way of assessing where or how the extra value is present, much less accurately capturing it (Cf. Baehr, 2009, pp. 51-54).

Baehr (2009) is right about how impactful the formality of $K > TB$ is for the discussion of PV. Nevertheless, I believe he draws the wrong conclusions. From the fact that there is no clear indication of what the extra value of knowledge looks like (or where it is to be found), it does not follow that there is nothing to be captured in the intuition. Firstly, it is still possible that there is something very precise to be captured, although it is not clear to us right now. From this perspective, the intuition is not formal, and more work related to the phenomenology of $K > TB$ needs to be done. Alternatively, the intuition can still be seen as formal, since even if there is nothing precise to be captured, $K > TB$ has a broad content that can serve as a requirement for the definition of knowledge. Thus, we do not have to give up our rational effort to discuss the extra value of knowledge along the lines proposed by ZPV, if $K > TB$ is formal.

More importantly, the presence of a general content is not only a possibility, but in fact recognized by the literature. Hence, I see no reason not to admit, at a minimum, that $K > TB$ has a broad content that can function as a liberal criterion on definitions of knowledge: they should account for the extra value of knowledge regardless of how they interpret where the value is and what it looks like. Indeed, this is a more economical approach than to suppose that the intuition is not purely formal and needs clarification, since the latter presupposes the former. For these reasons, I propose we proceed by taking $K > TB$ as having a formal, i.e. non-specific content that can be used to establish liberal constraints for definitions of knowledge. Curiously, I am in complete agreement with Baehr regarding the consequence of the formality of $K > TB$, even though he treats it as a *reductio*.

3 Only one out of the four arguments used to support the non-formality of $K > TB$ is not a *reductio*. Baehr argues that in a skeptical world where persons could not acquire a higher knowledge than mere animal knowledge, $K > TB$ would be less firm, i.e. it would be at least minimally reasonable to deny that knowledge is better than mere true belief. If so, the truth of $K > TB$ is shown to be relative to epistemic context. Against this argument: (i) even if the intuition's presence is relative to context, when it is present, it can still be conceived as imposing a formal constraint; and (ii) it is questionable whether knowledge would be only as valuable as mere true belief in the skeptical context, since even animal knowledge (according to many epistemic theories) adds something valuable to an epistemic performance.

If the value problem is rooted in a purely formal intuition to the effect that knowledge is more valuable than true belief, then there are in fact any number of possible ‘solutions’ to this problem: any number of ‘right answers’ to the question of what makes knowledge more valuable than true belief. (Baehr, 2009, p. 53)

Let’s recapitulate what has been argued so far. First, Zagzebski’s version of the problem of value can be modeled as a valid argument with a premise (1) that expresses our intuition that knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief. Second, premise (1) is implausible if understood as Zagzebski assumed (i.e. as an absolute, synchronic, and substantive claim). Upon analysis, we propose to understand the $K > TB$ intuition itself as not completely general, not synchronic, and formal. It follows that ZPV should be understood in the following modified manner:

The real Zagzebski’s Problem of Value (here also called ‘ZPV*’):

- (4) Usually, knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief;
- (5) If, usually, knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief, then its definition must explain this customary extra value;
- (6) Therefore, the definition of knowledge must explain its customary extra value.

The argument remains valid, although its premises have changed. Premise (4) expresses with more precision our intuition about the extra value of knowledge compared to mere true belief. Premise (5) reflects that change and connects it to understandable considerations about definitions. For instance, if our definition of X is to be of any help, it should capture the features of X that explain its behaviour in ordinary circumstances. That being said, we have shown that there is a noteworthy version of Zagzebski’s problem of PV that needs to be answered.

The three morals

Before examining them, let’s recapitulate what the three morals say. According to the first moral, truth together with a reliable source is insufficient to explain the proper value of knowledge. According to the second moral, truth together with a valuable source whose value is independent of the value of the knowing state is insufficient to explain the additional value of knowledge. As an extension of the second moral, the third moral states that it is fruitless to search for the value of knowledge in a machine-product model. Instead, we should look for a model that resembles the way actions gain value due to the agent’s internal states, such as her emotions. Given that ZPV is flawed, is it

possible to extract Zagzebski's three morals from ZPV* (with some reasonable assumptions)? I don't think so. In this section, I aim to show why.

In order to establish the first moral, Zagzebski advances what was called 'the swapping argument' (Cf. Goldman; Olsson, 2009). The main premise of this argument is that a true belief is not any better for having been produced by a reliable process. Two reasons are given in support of that. First, if the value of A is wholly derived from the value of B, then A+B is not any better than B alone. In addition, the value of the method is wholly derived from the value of truth. Therefore, truth produced by a reliable method cannot be more valuable than truth alone. Second, the analogy of the espresso machine comes into play: truth, just like an espresso, does not get better if we find out that it originated from a reliable source⁴.

The first problem with using such reasoning to justify the first moral is that it presupposes that the only place the extra value of knowledge could be found is in the state of knowledge acquired in the instance evaluated. Even if reliability is not capable of transferring the extra value of knowledge to the true belief, maybe it can transfer to other things, such as the agent. As we saw, this stems from a misunderstanding of $K > TB$, which is formal and does not specify where the value is located. The second problem with it is that the principle "if the value of A is wholly derived from the value of B, then A+B is not any better than B alone" has counterexamples (Cf. Goldman, Olsson, 2009, p. 26). For instance, we can consider a case where a person has 1 million dollars and a winning ticket for 1 million dollars. The value of the ticket is wholly derived from the value of a 1-million-dollar prize, but its value is not derived from the 1 million dollars that she already possesses. Hence, the addition of the ticket does make the overall situation better, even if it does not add value to the \$1 million that person already possesses⁵.

The second and third morals are two sides of the same coin. The second moral states that the extra value of knowledge must be found in the knowing state, while the third moral points to a parallel case where value is transferred from something that is part of the evaluated state. In support of these morals, Zagzebski argues that there must be an internal connection between the origin of the belief and the knowing state (Cf. Zagzebski, 2020b, pp. 153-154). She

4 In this passage, the two reasons are found combined: "The good of the product makes the reliability of the source that produces it good, but the reliability of the source does not then give the product an additional boost of value. The liquid in this cup is not improved by the fact that it comes from a reliable espresso maker." (Zagzebski, 2020b, pp. 152-151).

5 Carrasqueira (in private conversation) argued that the counterexample is flawed, because it fails to take into account the expected utility of the ticket.

draws attention to the supposedly more fundamental fact that cause and effect must be internally connected in order for the cause to transfer its value to the effect. Nevertheless, in addition to the specific difficulties of this principle, in arguing thus, she ignores that the $K > TB$ intuition leaves open the possibility that the extra value of knowledge can be located in places other than the knowing state at the moment of belief formation. It is not a problem if a good quality in the agent cannot transfer its value to the belief formed, so long as the extra value of knowledge is located somewhere.

In conclusion, I do not think that the reasons examined lead to Zagzebski's three morals. The morals have been shown to be in need of further support and in tension with the intuition that actually grounds ZPV*. In general, it is incorrect to object to an explanation of the extra value of knowledge based on the fact that the value in question is not located in the knowing state. I hope by now it is clear that, if we adopt my proposal of understanding $K > TB$ as a formal requirement, a proper answer to ZPV* can locate the extra value of K in a more flexible and creative way.

Four ways to locate the value of knowledge

In this section, I substantiate the conclusion previously drawn. In other words, I will illustrate how three different theories of knowledge can meet the demands of ZPV*, accommodating the value of knowledge in different "places". First, I will briefly present some definitions of knowledge. Next, I will examine their different answers to the problem of value. Finally, I will argue that none of them violate the constraints imposed by $K > TB$.

Knowledge is a reliably produced true belief (Goldman; Olsson, 2009, pp. 22-23)

Knowledge is a success due to intellectual virtue (Greco, 2009, pp. 22-23).

Knowledge is an act of intellectual virtue (Zagzebski, 2020c, p. 184).
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According to simple reliabilism, knowledge is the product of a reliable method, i.e. a belief forming mechanism that has a high enough ratio of true to false beliefs. There is an enormous diversity of methods: from believing trustworthy sources to checking the clock, these are ways of forming beliefs with a high degree of reliability.

Alternatively, Greco views knowledge as a type of success that results from the enduring qualities of the agent. Those qualities, which he calls 'intellectual

virtues', include reliable faculties like memory, perception, and deductive reasoning. Knowledge occurs when the achievement of a true belief is credited to an agent's use of an intellectual virtue. Greco distances himself from simple reliabilism in requiring that the true belief be acquired and sustained due to the agent's virtues, a move made in order to escape Gettier cases.

Zagzebski (1996) holds a different view of the nature of intellectual virtues. On her understanding, virtues are not faculties, but dispositions composed of both an emotional aspect (what she calls 'motivational component of virtue') and a behavioural aspect (what she calls 'reliability component of virtue'). To be virtuous is to respond emotionally and behaviorally in an admirable way. She incorporated the emotional aspect of epistemology in her definition of knowledge by proposing that knowledge is an act of intellectual virtue, i.e. an intellectual act whereby the agent gets to the truth because she is motivated and behaves like a virtuous person would behave in those specific circumstances.

Goldman and Olsson (2009) provided an explanation of the value of knowledge from simple reliabilism. The so-called 'conditional probability solution' states that knowing is more valuable than merely truly believing because the acquisition of truth through the use of a reliable method changes something in the agent for the better. More precisely, states of knowing make the agent more likely to acquire true beliefs (of a similar kind) in the future, since when the use of a reliable method is successful, the knower tends to use the same method in similar situations, leading to more true beliefs. In their words:

What is this extra valuable property that distinguishes knowledge from true belief? It is the property of making it likely that one's future beliefs of a similar kind will also be true. More precisely, under reliabilism, the probability of having more true belief (of a similar kind) in the future is greater conditional on S's knowing that p than conditional on S's merely truly believing that p. (Goldman; Olsson, 2009, p. 28)

The quality identified can be hidden or latent at first glance. Sometimes, it might not be formed at all. The authors demonstrate awareness of these facts and are not troubled by them, since they do not think knowledge is always valuable.

Greco offers two reasons why knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief within his theory of knowledge (Cf. Greco, 2009, p. 319). In the first place, he draws attention to the fact that virtuous achievements are more valuable (actually, intrinsically valuable) when compared to achievements through luck. For example, winning due to a referee's mistake or due to a lucky shot is worse than winning due to the exercise of one's own virtue. Therefore, knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief, since knowledge, and not mere true belief, is success through virtue. In the second place, virtuous actions are a component of *eudaimonia*. Thus, if knowledge is a virtuous achievement,

then it contributes to *eudaimonia*. That makes knowledge good, to the extent that it constitutes a good life. In conclusion, knowledge is good because it is a more valuable type of achievement and because it promotes a valuable connection to the most valuable of all things: happiness⁶.

Knowledge is a kind of success through virtue, and in general success through virtue is both intrinsically valuable and constitutive of human flourishing, which is also intrinsically valuable. Therefore, knowledge has value over and above the practical value of true belief. (Greco, 2009, p. 319)

Throughout her career, Zagzebski addressed the problem of value in slightly different forms. In one of her later statements (Zagzebski, 2020b), the extra value of knowledge was explained by tying the motivation for knowledge, proper to intellectual virtues, with the motivation for well-being, proper to moral virtues. First, she notes that moral motivation, like emotions characteristic of courage and compassion, is recognized to be capable of transferring value to actions. For instance, a donation made out of compassion is more valuable than one made out of indifference.

Second, Zagzebski (2020b) notes that moral motives cannot be realized without leading to epistemic motives. For example, the desire to help people in need cannot be realized without the desire to understand what is helpful in the situation. More than that, epistemic motives reveal themselves to be conditions of moral motives. In parallel, epistemic credit and praiseworthiness are conditions for moral praiseworthiness: no one will be given moral credit or praised for an action done from ignorance.

In light of this close relationship, Zagzebski (2020b) suggests that value is transferred from moral motives to epistemic motives, which, in turn, transfer that value to the state of knowledge. Additionally, it is important to notice that epistemic motives (just like moral motives) do not only cause, but are also a part of the acts themselves. Thus, epistemic motives, at the same time, (i) bear the extra value of knowledge transferred from moral motives and (ii) compose the knowing state.

The praiseworthiness of love of truth is a condition for moral praiseworthiness. There is, therefore, a moral motive to have knowledge. The value that converts true believing into knowing is a condition for the moral value of acts that depend upon the belief. (Zagzebski, 2020b, p. 159)

6 Since intellectual virtuous acts can be seen primarily as constitutive of *eudaimonia* (and not as a means), they can be interpreted not as a valuable relation, but as a valuable performance or action. Either way, my point remains the same: the extra value of knowledge can be located outside the knowing state.

All things considered, we are in a position to ask: do the above selected definitions of knowledge explain the extra value of knowledge? If the value problem is understood under the influence of Zagzebski's three morals, only hers do. Nevertheless, I have tried to show that Zagzebski draws these restrictions motivated by a misguided version of the problem of value (that is, ZPV), one which does not adequately capture $K > TB$. When analysed from the right angle (that is, having ZPV* in mind), the situation changes. There is nothing wrong in principle with the way any definition examined explains the value of knowledge. Sure, they can all be flawed for being false or having weak justification. Nevertheless, they do not violate the restrictions imposed by the intuition $K > TB$ *per se*, because there is no restriction about where the extra value of knowledge should be located. Simple reliabilism allocates the value of knowledge in the subject, treating it as a quality of the person. Greco allocates the value of knowledge both in the performance, as a quality of the event, but also as a valuable relation. Finally, Zagzebski allocates the value of knowledge in the knowing state itself, as a valuable component of it.

Conclusion

Zagzebski's three morals impose restrictions on where the value of knowledge can be located, that is, limiting it to the knowing state itself. Such a move was motivated by a version of the problem of value represented by ZPV. I argued against the soundness of ZPV by presenting how premise (1) fails to capture the intuition that knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief ($K > TB$). Next, drawing on the work of Fricker (2009) and Baehr (2009), I proposed an understanding of $K > TB$ as diachronic, having relative generality, and encapsulating only general content (that is, a formal content). This led me to reformulate ZPV, resulting in the problem of value represented by ZPV*. At that point, it was time to evaluate whether Zagzebski's morals really follow from the justified version of the problem of value, ZPV*. All three morals are focused on how reliability or merely valuable aspects of the agent cannot transfer value to the knowing state. Nevertheless, in doing so, they ignore that the generality of $K > TB$ does not restrict the extra value of knowledge to the knowing state itself. Therefore, the morals do not follow from ZPV*, since they prematurely declare answers to the problem to be failures. Finally, I illustrated how simple reliabilism, Greco's theory, and Zagzebski's own theory allocate the value of knowledge in different places, but, at the same time, in accordance with $K > TB$.

Disponibilidade de dados:

Todo o conjunto de dados que dá suporte aos resultados deste estudo foi publicado no próprio artigo.

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