

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

An Epistemic Value Theory

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For any normative domain, we can theorize about what is good *in that domain*. Such theories include utilitarianism, a view about what is good *morally*. But there are many domains other than the moral; these include the prudential, the aesthetic, and the intellectual or *epistemic*. In this last domain, it is (for instance) good to be knowledgeable and bad to ignore evidence, quite apart from the morality, prudence, and aesthetics of these things. This dissertation builds a theory that stands to the epistemic domain as utilitarianism stands to the moral domain. It builds an *epistemic value theory*.

## Preface

For any normative domain, we can theorize about what is good *in that domain*. Such theories include utilitarianism, a view about what is good *morally*. But there are many domains other than the moral; these include the prudential, the aesthetic, and the intellectual or *epistemic*. In this last domain, it is (for instance) good to be knowledgeable and bad to ignore evidence, quite apart from the morality, prudence, and aesthetics of these things. This dissertation builds a theory that stands to the epistemic domain as utilitarianism stands to the moral domain. It builds an *epistemic value theory*.

Most contemporary theorists try to base epistemic value on the aim of believing truths. **Chapter 1** lays out a problem for that approach: some truths are better than others. It is better, epistemically, to believe *significant* and deep truths about e.g. science or metaphysics, than it is to believe *trivial* truths about e.g. the number of blades of grass on one's lawn. The aim of believing truths cannot explain that fact, because trivial truths are truths nonetheless.

**Chapter 2** characterizes two extreme sorts of views about what at bottom significance amounts to. On the one hand there is the sort of view Plato had, according to which the facts about what is significant and what is trivial are thoroughly mind-independent, determined by the nature of the world itself. On the other hand there is the sort of view Hume had, according to which the facts about what is significant and what is trivial are determined by human interests, and have nothing to do with mind-independent reality. I argue that neither of these extreme views can be true. We've got to find a more moderate view, a view that appeals to human interests *and* the mind-independent world.

I build such a view by basing significance on curiosity and explanation. This moderate view of significance is, I argue, superior to alternative views on offer from Linda Zagzebski, Alvin Goldman, and Philip Kitcher.

**Chapter 3** addresses new issues. It is typically thought that, for instance, knowledge is epistemically better than mere true belief. In virtue of what do such comparisons hold? And in virtue of what are states like knowledge and true belief epistemically valuable in the first place? Most answers to these two questions follow William James' slogan that truth is the good in the way of belief. But James was wrong: *knowledge* is the good in the way of belief. I use this new slogan to characterize a set of epistemic states and induce a (partial) ranking of them. This ranking answers our two questions. It also dissolves the popular "value problem" argument against reliabilism.

Whereas chapter 3 compares states like knowledge and true belief, **chapter 4** compares states like *significant true belief* and *insignificant true belief*. It thus combines the ranking of epistemic states with the theory of the nature of significance. It develops a new approach to this combined topic. This new approach is, I argue, superior to alternatives on offer from Zagzebski, Goldman, and Isaac Levi.

**Chapter 5** applies these views to the social realm. Just as theories of social justice address *not* the prudential value of individual goods like happiness *but instead* the proper distribution of these prudential goods across people, this chapter addresses *not* the epistemic value of individual goods like knowledge *but instead* the proper distribution of these epistemic goods across people. It engages, we might say, in "distributive social epistemology". I critically evaluate Goldman's recent work in distributive social epistemology and produce an alternative approach.

*Chapter 6* applies all of the foregoing views to the topic of wisdom. For many centuries wisdom was standardly taken to be a high-end epistemic good. Recent philosophy is estranged from that tradition; this chapter tries to reunite them. I critically survey the extant views of the nature of wisdom and then defend a new one. This new view is similar to Aristotle's in allowing for two varieties of wisdom, the practical and the theoretical; but it breaks from Aristotle on several grounds. It follows from this new view, in combination with the epistemic value theory developed in the rest of the dissertation, that wisdom is a high-end epistemic good.

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to my committee members Don Fallis, Gilbert Harman, Peter Klein, and Ernest Sosa for many helpful comments both written and spoken; and to Jason Baehr, John Greco, Dan Howard-Snyder, Alex Jackson, Peter Kivy, Shieva Kleinschmidt, Karson Kovakovitch, Ned Markosian, Kelby Mason, Jacob Ross, Andrew Sepielli, Jason Turner, Timothy Williamson, and Kevin Zollman for the same thing. Thanks most of all to Alvin Goldman, my committee chair, who was enormously helpful at every step of the way.

## Dedication

To my parents, Jay and Leona

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Epistemology as value theory**

This chapter lays out the dissertation's project, surveys some relevant literature, and makes some preliminary arguments.

#### **1. The project**

##### **1.1 What the project is**

Epistemology deals with a particular sort of value, *epistemic* value. A wide variety of substantive theories issue evaluations concerning this sort of value. According to some of those theories, we have *epistemic obligations* such as the obligation to believe only what is supported by our evidence.<sup>1</sup> Other theories focus not on obligations but on *virtues*, thereby placing the discussion in a virtue-theoretic framework as opposed to a deontological one.<sup>2</sup> Others still have proceeded with various sorts of *epistemic consequentialism*, first characterizing the epistemic ends (or at least some of them) and then characterizing the means that are good for producing those ends.<sup>3</sup>

This theoretical territory is complicated by the fact that discussions of the nature of epistemic value have not always been pursued under the label 'epistemology'. Many discussions within the philosophy of science concern the conditions under which one scientific theory or practice is better - not morally or aesthetically better, but better in some purely intellectual way – than another scientific theory or practice.<sup>4</sup> A similar phenomenon occurs in the philosophy of art, where it is sometimes claimed that one

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<sup>1</sup> Clifford (1877), Feldman (1988).

<sup>2</sup> Montmarquet (1993), Zagzebski (1996), Hookway (2003), Sosa (forthcoming), Greco (manuscript).

<sup>3</sup> Levi (1984), Kitcher (1992), Goldman (1999), Fallis (2004).

<sup>4</sup> Popper (1959), Laudan (1977), Hempel (1981), Van Fraassen (1980).



artwork can be aesthetically better than another artwork on grounds that the first does a better job of producing epistemic goods such as insight and true belief.<sup>5</sup> Any attempt to build an overall theory of epistemic value, then, will need to take into account a substantial amount of literature that is not normally classified as epistemology, as well as a substantial amount of literature that is normally classified as epistemology. This complicates matters for those who want to construct overall theories of epistemic value, but not so much as to make their project so intractable that it thereby fails to be worth pursuing.

On the contrary, the project *is* worth pursuing. There are many reasons why this is so, but before discussing them it will be useful to give a first pass characterization of what epistemic value theories are supposed to do. Ideally, epistemic value theories tell us what is epistemically better than what else. To say what is better than what else along a given dimension is, at a first pass that I will refine in a moment, to produce principles that entail rankings of value bearers along that dimension. Each of the broad classes of approaches identified above – deontological, virtue theoretic, and consequentialist – can be understood as providing these sorts of principles in its own way. Why, then, is it worthwhile to try to produce these sorts of principles?

## **1.2 Why the project is worthwhile**

There are many reasons. One of them derives from the fact that we widely engage in epistemic evaluation. We remark that there is something wrong with committing the gambler's fallacy and something right with refraining from it; we criticize arguments that are unsound and praise arguments that are sound; we applaud views for being consistent and reject views that are inconsistent; we venerate inquirers who extend

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<sup>5</sup> A. H. Goldman (1995), Kivy (1997).

the bounds of human knowledge and ignore those who do not. Despite their at-least-apparent diversity, these evaluations are similar in that they are *epistemic* - that is, they are not moral or aesthetic or prudential but in some sense purely intellectual. Since these various evaluations share a unifying value, we can gain insight into them by gaining insight into that unifying value. And one way to gain the latter sort of insight is by trying to build general principles about what is epistemically better than what else. The attempt to construct theories of epistemic value, then, can provide insight into the various sorts of epistemic evaluation in which we widely engage.

Another reason derives from the fact that theories dealing with epistemic value have been simultaneously developed in distinct philosophical literatures across which there has not been enough interaction. This lack of interaction makes the issues ripe for progress. For example, there is a large literature on explanation within the philosophy of science whose connections to various aspects of the so-labeled epistemology literature have not been fully explored.

A third reason why it is worthwhile to build general principles of epistemic value is just that it is worth seeing how far we can develop the idea that epistemology is a kind of value theory. To what extent is that idea merely a suggestive metaphor, and to what extent can it be cashed out in a full-blown and literal manner? If the idea that epistemology is a kind of value theory is developed in a strong enough manner, then the development will produce epistemological analogues of general theories of moral value such as utilitarianism. Just as utilitarianism tells us what is better than what else with respect to moral value, an epistemological analogue to utilitarianism would tell us what is better than what else with respect to epistemic value. Whether or not we should expect to

achieve success in building such epistemic analogues of utilitarianism, the attempt to achieve it is useful for testing the extent to which we can make good on the idea that epistemology is a kind of value theory.

A fourth reason why it is worthwhile to construct epistemic value theories has to do with the various more applied issues with which those theories are connected. For instance, specific questions about whether public research funds ought to be spent on particular research projects arise all the time.<sup>6</sup> Epistemic value would clearly have a bearing on these questions. Moreover, the general question that those theories answer – ‘When is one thing epistemically better than another?’ is fascinating on its own.

## **2. A literature sampling**

Let me briefly sample some relevant literature. I’ll further discuss many of the ideas from this sampling, and many other ideas as well, in later parts of the dissertation. Nonetheless, it is worth getting an early glimpse of some relevant extant work.

In the *Meno*, Plato asks why knowledge is better than true belief. There is no easy answer, he argues, because for any practical goal, true belief would serve one just as well in the pursuit of that goal as would knowledge. For example, if one wants to go to a town, then knowledge of how to get there would make one no more successful in getting there than would true beliefs about how to get there. Yet there still may be important differences between knowledge and true belief:

(Socrates): True opinions are a fine thing and do all sorts of good so long as they stay in place, but they will not stay long. They run away from a man’s mind; so they are not much until you tether them by working out the reason...once they are tied down, they become knowledge, and are stable. That is why knowledge is something more valuable than right opinion.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Kitcher (2001) contains path-breaking work on these issues.

<sup>7</sup> *Meno* 97d-98a.

Here Plato seems to assert that knowledge is better than true belief because the latter is more easily lost; if one knows, one has all of the goods of true belief and a secure grip on them as well. Whether or not Plato is correct in this claim, it is worth asking whether the claim entails that knowledge is *epistemically* better than true belief. Why shouldn't we take security to make knowledge e.g. *merely prudentially* better than true belief?

Some contemporary theorists argue explicitly for the *epistemic* superiority of knowledge to true belief, and thus are less vulnerable to this sort of question. Sosa falls in this camp. He distinguishes two sorts of knowledge, reflective knowledge and animal knowledge, and argues that these two states transcend the value of true belief in different ways. His basic ideas here are that when one animal-knows something one deserves credit for the truth of one's belief in that thing, and that when one reflectively knows something one has gained perspective on that thing's place in one's doxastic corpus. Both of these properties, perspective and creditability-for-truth, are on Sosa's view epistemic goods that transcend the epistemic value of true belief. So it is in virtue of these properties that Sosa follows Plato in taking knowledge to be better than true belief, while being explicit that the value in question is epistemic.<sup>8</sup>

Sosa's reflective knowledge is often taken to be very similar to understanding. Various theorists claim that understanding is itself an epistemic good, usually while also arguing that its status as such has been unjustly neglected in recent epistemology.<sup>9</sup> Some, for instance Elgin, even argue that understanding occupies a paramount position among the epistemic goods. However, there is very little agreement on the nature of understanding, and the state is nowhere near as widely discussed as, say, knowledge.

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<sup>8</sup> Sosa (1988, 1991, 2003a, forthcoming).

<sup>9</sup> Goldman (1986), Kim (1994), Elgin (1996), Zagzebski (2001), Riggs (2003), Kvanvig (2003), Grimm (2005).

Similarly with wisdom, a state several theorists take to be an unjustly neglected epistemic good, but the nature of which has received little attention.<sup>10</sup>

A state that has been more widely discussed, and on the nature of which there is at least some non-trivial amount of agreement, is true belief. A variety of theorists think that true belief is epistemically better than false belief.<sup>11</sup> Goldman even constructs a fairly precise set of principles of *veritistic* evaluation, which evaluate states and process specifically with respect to the epistemic good of true belief; and he applies these principles to a variety of interesting domains such as law, science, and education.<sup>12</sup>

Others sometimes seem to *reject* the view that true belief is epistemically valuable. For instance, Feldman at one point writes the following:

Imagine a person who makes an unreasonable and unreliable inference that happens to lead to a true belief on a particular occasion. It might be fortunate that he's got this true belief, but I see nothing epistemologically meritorious about it. Nor can I see anything epistemologically dutiful about it.<sup>13</sup>

This passage and others from Feldman seem to suggest that he thinks it is believing on the basis of one's evidence, and not believing the truth, that is good epistemically. Suggestions in line with this sort of view can often be found in the "ethics of belief" literature. For example, W.K. Clifford argues that we are obligated to believe exactly those propositions for which we have adequate evidence. He asks us to consider a ship owner who believes, without adequate evidence, that a particular vessel is seaworthy. Clifford takes it that this ship owner to be blameworthy, because

It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Nozick (1989), Lehrer et al (1996), Zagzebski (1996), Ryan (1999).

<sup>11</sup> Levi (1984), Sosa (2003a: 179), Fallis (2004).

<sup>12</sup> Goldman (1999)

<sup>13</sup> Feldman (2002: 379). Lehrer and Smith (1996: 7) have a similar view.

<sup>14</sup> Clifford (1877: 115).

James famously disagrees with this dictum on grounds that one may violate it with impunity whenever one is faced with a “genuine option” – a forced cognitive decision on which none of the options seem crazy in which one has a significant stake.<sup>15</sup> The Clifford-James debate, though its first round played out nearly a century ago, is still active. One can thus pit contemporary Cliffordists like Feldman against neo-Jamesians like Stich, who has no quarrel at all with beliefs that do not fit one’s evidence.<sup>16</sup>

Now that I’ve sampled a little bit of relevant literature, it is time to move on to something more substantial. Ultimately I’m in the business of building an epistemic value theory. This dissertation is the first step in that project. It starts by laying out an account of what it is in general to be a value theory. Then it examines some attempts to build such a theory in the epistemic domain, or at least to lay the foundations for such a theory in the epistemic domain. In examining that literature it identifies a phenomenon that any epistemic value theory must address, and that I’ll call “epistemic significance”. Then it begins to substantively theorize about the nature of epistemic significance.

All of that happens in the first chapter. The second chapter delves much deeper into epistemic significance; it defends an account of what is more epistemically significant than what else.

Chapter 3 addresses a different set of issues. Following Plato’s discussion in the *Meno*, we can ask whether knowledge is better epistemically than true belief. But in addition to comparing those two epistemic states, we should also compare a variety of others, such as justified belief and false belief. The central project of chapter 3 is to characterize and make a variety of comparisons in this ballpark. The result is a theory of,

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<sup>15</sup> James (1911).

<sup>16</sup> Feldman (1986), Stich (1991, 1993). Stich explicitly compares his epistemological views to those of James and other classical pragmatists; Haack (1993) argues that this comparison is misleading.

we will say, “epistemic state value”. One of the upshots of this theory is a critique of the popular anti-reliabilist “value problem” argument.

Chapter 4 further develops the theory of epistemic state value so that it addresses significance as well. So, whereas chapter 2 defends a theory of what is more epistemically significant than what else, chapter 4 defends a theory about the evaluative impact of epistemic significance on epistemic states. Is it epistemically better or worse to know a significant proposition as opposed to an insignificant proposition? Is it epistemically better or worse to *falsely believe* a significant proposition as opposed to an insignificant proposition? Chapter 4 tries to give principled answers to these kinds of questions.

The theory that emerges from chapters 3 and 4 amounts to an account of what is epistemically better than what else, in what ways. That is to say, it amounts to an *epistemic value theory*.

Chapter 5 further develops that theory. It does so by applying the theory to the social domain as opposed to the individual domain. Thus, whereas the theory as developed until chapter 5 tells us when one particular belief is epistemically better than another particular belief, the theory as further developed in chapter 5 *also* tells us when a distribution of beliefs across a community is epistemically better than another distribution of beliefs across a community. By comparing community states as opposed to individual states, this part of the theory mirrors accounts of social justice. Just as accounts of social justice morally compare distributions of moral goods across people, the theory as

developed in chapter 5 epistemically compares distributions of epistemic goods across people.

Chapter 6 applies the foregoing material to wisdom, a topic that has for the last several centuries been relatively neglected by epistemologists. It first argues that epistemic value theorists should care about wisdom. Then it surveys and criticizes the main extant theories of wisdom's nature. In place of those theories, it offers a different account that is a natural extension of the ideas expressed in the earlier chapters. And, in addition to theorizing about wisdom's *nature*, it also theorizes about wisdom's *epistemic value*: about, that is, the issue of whether one does epistemically better by being wise as opposed to unwise, and why.

Before I start building the epistemic value theory just outlined, I'll say something about what it is to be a value theory. That is the purpose of the next section.

### **3. Value theories in general**

Many things are valuable in many ways. *Prima facie*, most of us would view physical coordination as good athletically, beauty as good aesthetically, happiness as good morally, and knowledge as good epistemically. When one engages in evaluative theorizing, one attempts to construct systematic and precise developments these *prima facie* ideas. In what, precisely, does this systematicity and precision consist?

We can begin to answer that question by examining paradigm cases of value theories. Consider, for example, act-utilitarianism in ethics. According to this theory, moral value is a matter of happiness: one state of affairs is morally better than another to the extent that it contains more happiness, and one act is morally better than another to



the extent that it produces morally better states of affairs. Attempting to extrapolate from this, we might conjecture the following theory of value theories:

**V1**: Value theories are specifications of rankings of value bearers.

(To specify a ranking of a set of value bearers is to say which of those value bearers are better than, equal to, and worse than which others. Some rankings also make finer-grained comparisons that, in various ways, reflect the *extent* to which these relations hold. Helpful discussions of these finer-grained comparisons include Sen 1986 and Broome 1991.)

V1 is a good start, but it glosses over important facts about relationships among rankings. In the case of act-utilitarianism, the ranking of acts *depends on* the ranking of states of affairs. Acts are good because they promote happiness; it is not the case that the goodness of happiness falls out of some independent ranking of acts. Perhaps these facts about dependence can be dealt with by the following view:

**V2**: Value theories consist in

- (a) specifications of rankings of value bearers, and
- (b) specifications of which rankings are fundamental and which are derivative.

This view is good as far as it goes, but we would do well to recognize that there are many ways in which rankings may derive from one another, and thus that we gloss over some differences when we merely talk about what is fundamental and what is derivative.

One sort of derivation relationship is the instrumental one. This is the relationship that obtains between rankings of acts and rankings of states of affairs, according to act-

utilitarians. Acts are ranked as they are because of the extent to which they cause or tend to cause the existence of states of affairs containing utility.

On the other hand, sometimes derivative rankings get their force not via causal relationships between their elements and the elements of fundamental rankings, but via combining those elements together in accordance with their relative strengths. For example, consider the following hybrid deontological-utilitarian theory of moral value: (1) any state of affairs that contains any rights violations is worse than any state of affairs that does not contain any rights violations, (2) states of affairs that contain rights violations are ranked in accordance with the amounts of utility they contain, and (3) states of affairs that do not contain rights violations are ranked similarly. This hybrid theory countenances two *kinds of* moral value and a certain way of combining them. A ranking concerning rights violations and a ranking concerning utility each *contribute* to an overall ranking that *covers* them. The covering value of rights-respecting-and-utility-maximizing is not some new normative thing over and above its contributing values of rights-respecting and utility-maximizing, though. It simply reflects their relative moral strengths. It thus derives from them in virtue of a covering relationship.<sup>17</sup>

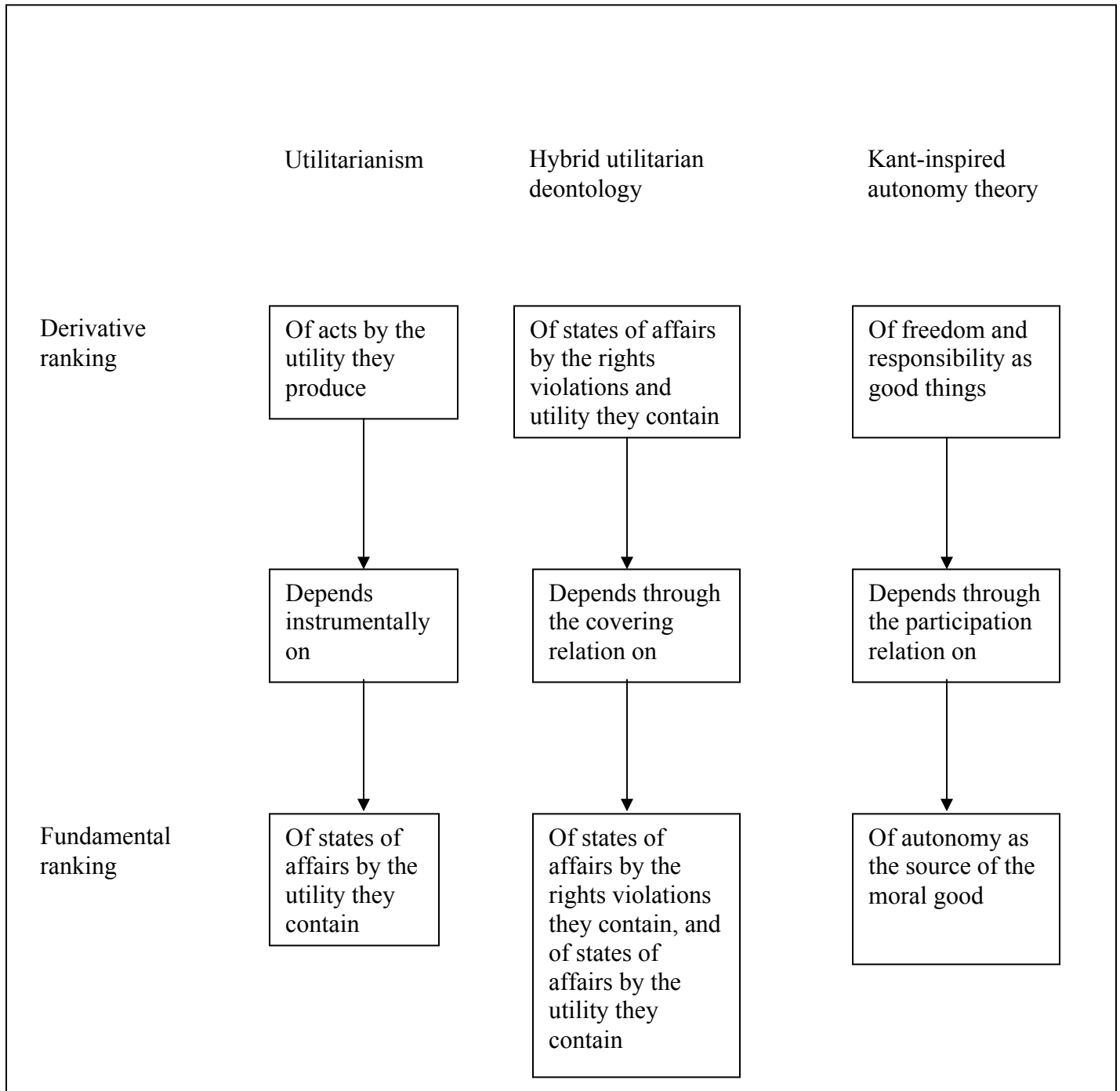
Yet another way in which some values may derive from others is by participating in them. Thus consider the following Kant-inspired view of moral goodness. The world contains ends and means, which are deeply different entities. Means are mere objects like tables and chairs; ends are autonomous agents. Only ends matter morally, and they matter because of their autonomy. Moreover, there are no such things as levels of autonomy; something is autonomous either fully or not at all. Ends are thus all ranked as equals, and this ranking is morally fundamental.

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<sup>17</sup> On “contributory” and “covering” values see e.g. Lewis (1946), Chang (1997), and Harman (2000).

Autonomy entails freedom: nothing can be a genuine agent if it has no free will. Autonomy also entails responsibility: agents who act freely are thereby responsible for their acts. Freedom and responsibility are thus aspects of autonomy. They are morally good things, because they *participate* in the *principal* moral good of autonomy. Autonomy is the principal value; freedom and responsibility are its participant values.

Like covering values, principal values are in some sense the “overall” values on the scene. But unlike covering values, principal values are fundamental. Principal values *give* normative force to the values that participate in them; covering values *get* normative force from the values that contribute to them. Thus there are at least three distinct ways in which derivative values may derive from fundamental values: by causing them (as with utilitarianism and acts that cause happiness), by combining them (as with our hybrid moral theory and rights-respecting and utility-maximizing), and by participating in them (as with our Kant-inspired theory and freedom and responsibility). These three sorts of derivation relationships among values, and the theories that illustrate them, can be represented by figure 1, as follows:

**Figure 1**

These distinctions among various kinds of derivation relations among rankings are easier to keep in mind if we work with a theory that explicitly leaves room for them, to wit:

**V3:** Value theories consist in

- (a) specifications of rankings of value bearers,
- (b) specifications of which rankings are fundamental and which are derivative, and
- (c) specifications of the natures of the relevant derivation relations.

This theory of value theories takes us some distance towards an understanding of the precision and systematicity at which we aim when we try to develop our *prima facie* evaluative ideas. We've already seen that it countenances as value theories certain simple forms of utilitarianism and deontology. It also makes sense of a variety of value theories that are not concerned with moral value *per se*. For instance, Rawls' (1971) theory of justice can be taken to combine certain contributory rankings via lexical combination principles into a covering ranking of societies that focuses on certain kinds of equality. Rival theories of justice can be understood similarly; Nozick's (1974) theory, for instance, can be taken to provide a ranking of societies the focus of which is entitlement.<sup>18</sup> We can even make sense of such unlikely candidates as Anscombe's eliminative virtue ethics. On Anscombe's view, moral evaluations should be made not with notions like *obligation* and *rightness*, but only with notions that correspond to virtues:

It would be a great improvement if, instead of "morally wrong", one always named a genus such as "untruthful", "unchaste", "unjust".<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Rawls (1971), Nozick (1974).

<sup>19</sup> Anscombe (1958).

This view just countenances a wide variety of rankings (concerning truthfulness, chastity, etc.) but no overall covering value with which they are combined, and no overall principal value in which they are participants.

This is a sort of value incomparability, and one of the virtues of our framework is that it can make sense of this and other sorts of value incomparability. Theories that countenance value incomparability can, at a first pass at least, be modeled as theories that do not specify *total* overall rankings. They may just specify partial overall rankings, or they may specify several sub-rankings but no total way of combining them.<sup>20</sup> Anscombe-style eliminative virtue ethics, then, is committed to a very strong sort of value incomparability, because it provides *no* way to combine the rankings associated with *any* of its genres of virtue.

By thinking of value theories as specifications of rankings and derivation relationships along the lines suggested in V3, we can construct a heuristic for building value theories. That heuristic goes as follows. First, identify the *value bearers* in a given domain (moral, aesthetic, epistemic, etc.). These things may include acts, agents, states of affairs, or anything else that can be a relatum of the <better than> relation (or relations) in the domain one is theorizing about. Value bearers are just the things that are capable of being better than, worse than, and equal to other things in a given domain.

Second, identify the things (properties, agents, acts, states of affairs, etc) that are *of value* in the domain. Sometimes, things are of value in a domain but their status as such is not be explained by anything. These things are *of fundamental value* in their respective domains. According to some versions of utilitarianism, happiness is of fundamental value in the moral domain. On these versions of utilitarianism, states of

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<sup>20</sup> Many theorists think of incomparability along these lines, e.g. Levi (1980, 1986).

affairs that contain happiness are thereby morally better than they would have been otherwise, and nothing explains why this is so.

In other cases, things are of value in a domain but their status as such is explicable. These things are *of derivative value* in their respective domains. According to some versions of utilitarianism, the property producing happiness is of derivative value in the moral domain. On these views, acts that produce happiness are thereby better than they would have been otherwise, and this is explained by the relationship between producing happiness and happiness itself.

Given that things can be of value in a domain either *derivatively* or *fundamentally*, there is a third thing we should do in building value theories. That third thing is to identify what is of value derivatively in the domain, what is of value fundamentally in the domain, and in what ways the things of derivative value derive their value from the things of fundamental value. Sometimes the derivation relation will be instrumental, as we just saw in the case of utilitarianism. But there are other derivation relations as well. For instance, according to our hybrid moral theory, rights respecting and utility maximizing derives its value from the values of rights respecting and utility maximizing, but not by being an instrument for producing them. Instead, it derives its value from them by combining them in accordance with their relative strengths.

Once we have our specifications of value bearers, things of value, fundamental/derivative relations in hand, we will be in a position to do the fourth thing we need to in building a value theory. This fourth thing is employ these identifications in building *a set of principles that induces a set of rankings* of what is better than what else

in the domain we are theorizing about, and in what ways. That theory will, in line with V3, constitute a value theory in our domain.

Let us then take V3 as our working theory of value theories, and proceed to apply the heuristic just described to the epistemic domain. As a first step, let us make the traditional assumption that beliefs and withholdings are epistemic value bearers. Other things too are certainly also epistemic value bearers. These other things include belief-forming processes, which are typically taken to be bearers of derivative epistemic value, and therefore to occupy places only in derivative epistemic rankings. But to simplify things I will for now (and only for now) make the assumption that beliefs and withholdings are the *only* epistemic value bearers.

Given this assumption, the next thing we should do is to identify the things that are of fundamental epistemic value. That is to say, we should identify the things such that (a) beliefs and withholdings that instantiate, constitute, or otherwise feature them are thereby epistemically valuable, and (b) nothing explains why that is so.

Once we've identified these things of fundamental epistemic value, we will be well on our way to having constructed an epistemic value theory (in accordance with the heuristic just outlined). Let us therefore get down to the task of identifying the things of fundamental epistemic value.

#### **4. Literature on epistemic goals**

Plenty of extant discussions are relevant to the issue of what is of fundamental epistemic value. Some of those discussions have played out within literature typically given the label "epistemology"; others have not. Within the so-labeled epistemology



literature, there is a body of particularly relevant discussions having to do with “the epistemic goal”. The current section examines that body of discussions.

William James’ writings are a good place to start. He claimed, famously, that we have two “first and great commandments as would-be knowers”: to know the truth and avoid error.<sup>21</sup> In claiming as much, he was ostensibly responding to the work of earlier epistemologists such as Descartes and particularly W.K. Clifford who, in James’ view, put too much of a premium on avoiding error over knowing truth. This view of James’ significantly influenced Roderick Chisholm (a student of C.I. Lewis, who was in turn a student of James himself).

In the various editions of *Theory of Knowledge*, Chisholm provided a variety of accounts of what he calls our “purely intellectual requirement”. The most widely referenced of these accounts is the one from the book’s second edition: to try one’s best to bring it about that, for every proposition P, if one considers P, then one believes P if and only if P is true.<sup>22</sup>

Chisholm’s invocation of this requirement, influenced as it is by James, seems to have significantly influenced the epistemic-goal-invoking literature of today. In a much-quoted passage from that literature, Laurence Bonjour writes that

The distinguishing characteristic of epistemic justification is thus its essential or internal relation to the cognitive goal of truth. It follows that one’s cognitive endeavors are justified only if and to the extent that they are aimed at this goal...<sup>23</sup>

Notice the focus on truth as the goal. Analytic epistemology is awash with statements that differ in detail but which substantially share that focus. In illuminating work on the topic, Marian David references such statements in writings by Moser, Foley, Lehrer,

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<sup>21</sup> James (1911: 17).

<sup>22</sup> Chisholm (1977: 14).

<sup>23</sup> Bonjour (1985: 7-8).

Goldman, Sosa, and Plantinga.<sup>24</sup> And it would not take a great scholar to find more writings in the same vein.

Why do all of these theorists think that the epistemic goal is true belief (or some combination of true belief and the avoidance of false belief)? Isn't epistemology the theory of *knowledge*? Shouldn't this lead us to say that the epistemic goal is not true belief but *knowledge* (or some combination of knowledge and the avoidance of ignorance)? At least one person *does* say that: Williamson.<sup>25</sup> Why isn't this sort of view standard?

Plausibly, the answer derives at least partly from the fact that there are at least two different projects that people have engaged under the banner of finding "the epistemic goal". The first of these projects is to identify the thing or things that are of fundamental epistemic value (Pritchard manuscript (a) and Kvanvig 2005 fairly clearly have this first project in mind). The second of these projects is to give a teleological account of the nature of justification (Bonjour 1985 and David 2001 fairly clearly have this second project in mind).

The second project has, in virtue of the way it has been traditionally been pursued, forced theorists to take "the epistemic goal" to consist in truth, when they pursue that project. As a result, most theorists have held that, in one sense or another, truth is the unique epistemic goal. Perhaps in virtue of holding this view, they've *also* held the view that truth is the unique thing of fundamental epistemic value. But to hold the latter view on the basis of holding the former view is to conflate the two separate projects that have been pursued under the banner of attempting to identify "the epistemic goal". Those two

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<sup>24</sup> David (2001: 152).

<sup>25</sup> Williamson (2000: 47, 208). Also see Zagzebski (1996: 226).

projects are distinct: the view that truth is of fundamental epistemic value *does not follow* from the view that truth is the telos of justification.

Let me try to fill out these points in a bit more detail. In virtue of the particular way in which they approached the project of theorizing about the nature of justification, 20<sup>th</sup> century epistemologists could not when engaged in that project take the epistemic goal to consist in knowledge. They took the project of theorizing about the nature of justification to require that we define knowledge in terms of justification. Then, in theorizing about the nature of justification, these epistemologists took it that justification is some sort of teleological phenomenon, the telos of which is “the epistemic goal”.

Since they theorized about knowledge in terms of justification, it would have been circular for these 20<sup>th</sup> century epistemologists to take the telos of justification to be knowledge. So, instead, they took that telos to consist in *truth*. That is why, when they were engaged in theorizing about the nature of justification, 20<sup>th</sup> century epistemologists had to take truth, as opposed to knowledge, to be “the epistemic goal”.

But it is one thing to take truth to be the telos of justification, and quite another to take truth to be of fundamental epistemic value. Thus, even if we choose to theorize about knowledge in terms of justification and about justification teleologically in terms of truth, *we nonetheless need not* take truth to be of fundamental epistemic value. For all that is required by that traditional set of approaches to knowledge and justification and truth, it might turn out that *knowledge* is the unique thing of fundamental epistemic value, and that truth plays the role of justification’s telos in virtue of its own relationship to knowledge.

In building an epistemic value theory, we need to inquire into what thing or things are of fundamental epistemic value. Thus, we would do well to pay attention to the epistemic goals literature, as that literature addresses this issue. And, when we look at that literature, we see that most of it takes “the epistemic goal” to consist in truth. However, the reason truth is given this role derives *not* from the project of identifying the thing or things of fundamental epistemic value, *but rather* from the project of identifying the telos of justification.

As we’ve just seen, even if truth is the telos of justification, it does not follow that truth is the unique thing of fundamental epistemic value, or even *one of* the things of fundamental epistemic value. So, the reasons for which people have focused on truth in the epistemic goals literature do not compel us to take truth to be the unique thing of fundamental epistemic value. This point amounts to a sort of undercutting defeater for the view that truth is the unique thing of fundamental epistemic value. It sheds doubt on that view indirectly, by undercutting a reason why people might hold it.

Over the course of this chapter and chapter 3, I’ll present a battery of *direct* (as opposed to undercutting) arguments against the view that truth is the unique thing of fundamental epistemic value.<sup>26</sup> The first of these arguments has been made by several theorists, but its clearest presentation seems to be the following passage by Michael DePaul:

...I think that deep down we do all recognize that truth is not the only thing of epistemic value. Here is an easy demonstration. Take your favorite example of a well-established empirical theory, a theory you believe that we know. Throw in all the evidence on the basis of which we accept that theory. Depending on what theory you selected, this will likely add up to a substantial number of beliefs. Now, compare this set of beliefs with an equal number of beliefs about relatively simple arithmetic sums and about assorted elements of one’s stream of consciousness. I suspect that most

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<sup>26</sup> See especially chapter 3, section 3.

of us would want to say that the first set of beliefs is better, epistemically better, than the second set. But the two sets contain the same number of true beliefs.<sup>27</sup>

This argument of DePaul's is sound. And it is anticipated in a number of earlier writings. For instance, Isaac Levi has long argued that what is of fundamental epistemic value is not believing truths and not believing falsehoods, but rather believing truths about and not being ignorant about the issues we care about, where ignorance is construed as doxastic non-commitment.<sup>28</sup> It is likely that the theory you thought of when reading DePaul's passage, and the theory DePaul was thinking of when he wrote it, do much better in relation to the values believing truths about and not being non-committed about the issues you and DePaul care about, than do humdrum sets of beliefs about arithmetic or your streams of consciousness. Levi's approach to epistemic value, countenancing not only true belief but also the relief of ignorance on issues we care about as of fundamental epistemic value, therefore makes sense of DePaul's illustration. For that reason at least, we should take Levi's sort of approach seriously.

We would not drastically depart from the history of American philosophy in doing as much. For in addition to James who inspired Chisholm, the American philosophical heritage also features Peirce, who inspired Levi. We can view Levi and Chisholm as descendents of Peirce and James respectively, with one pair of theorists focused on removing doubt and the other pair of theorists focused on matching beliefs with facts. Post-classical American philosophy has followed James to a much greater extent than it has followed Peirce. So, although it is common for recent American epistemologists to discuss the view that we must balance the goals of believing truths and

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<sup>27</sup> DePaul (2001: 173).

<sup>28</sup> Levi (1962) is his earliest statement of the basic position; but see especially Levi (1980). He actually doesn't exactly take the foregoing things to be of *fundamental* epistemic value. Rather, he tries to explain their status as things of epistemic value in terms of a Peircean account of the nature of belief. But I'll leave this aside.

not believing falsehoods, it is uncommon for those epistemologists to discuss the view that among our epistemic goals is the relief of doxastic non-commitment on issues we care about. No doubt this is partly due to the relative dominance of the work of James' descendant Chisholm over the work of Peirce's descendant Levi. That dominance is in at least one way unfortunate, because the relief of doxastic non-commitment on issues we care about is epistemically important. I'll come back to this point in the next chapter.

DePaul's argument shows that truth cannot be the unique thing of fundamental epistemic value – or at least, that truth cannot play this role in any obvious way. And as a matter of fact, it also shows something much deeper. The problem that it illustrates about truth is that some true propositions are epistemically more significant than others. But if having true beliefs in these propositions is epistemically better than having true beliefs in humdrum propositions, then it is also the case that *knowing* these propositions is epistemically better than *knowing* humdrum propositions – and similarly with other states like justified belief and rational belief. When it comes to true belief, knowledge, justified belief, rational belief, and all of the other states that epistemologists typically talk about, the facts about whether one bears these states towards a given proposition have *nothing to do* with facts about whether that proposition is significant. These states are *insensitive to subject matter*, so subject matter cannot make for evaluative differences with respect goals that are defined by them.

It therefore seems that these states cannot be the unique things of fundamental epistemic value, at least not in any obvious way. There is something else of epistemic value – namely significance – that seems too independent from any of these things for its status as epistemically valuable to be explained in any obvious way by reference to them.

This conclusion may seem rather distressing. For these subject-matter-insensitive states (like knowledge and justified belief) and properties (like truth and justification) are what epistemologists spend most of their time thinking about. If it is not among *these* things that we are supposed to find the things of fundamental epistemic value, then where *are* we supposed to find those things?

Actually, we need look no further than DePaul's argument itself to find indications of where, other than among traditional subject-matter-insensitive epistemic properties, we ought to look for the things of fundamental epistemic value. If good scientific theories are epistemically better than humdrum sets of equally true (or equally justified etc.) beliefs, then what we ought to do is look at those theories and see what it is that they have but which humdrum sets of beliefs lack. So let's do that.

## **5. Literature on scientific theories**

Philosophers of science engage in evaluative talk all the time. Many make judgments about which theories are better scientific theories than which other theories, in the sense that accepting or judging them to be true is better than accepting or judging the others to be true.<sup>29</sup> Other philosophers of science, especially those influenced by Kuhn, prefer not to talk not about theories but rather about more complicated phenomena like "paradigms" or "practices" that involve not only theories but also background assumptions, research methodologies, patterns of authority-assignment within research communities, and other such phenomena.<sup>30</sup> And among these philosophers, it is common to make judgments about which or these paradigms or practices are better paradigms or practices than which others. Normally, these judgments are not moral, aesthetic, or all-

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<sup>29</sup> See e.g. Hempel (1966).

<sup>30</sup> Kuhn (1962), Laudan (1977), Hempel (1981), Kitcher (1993).

things-considered evaluations. Rather, they are in some sense purely intellectual, at least in the normal case.

There are, of course, exceptions to this norm. For instance, Kitcher and Longino have for quite some time now been theorizing about which scientific practices are all things considered better than which other scientific practices.<sup>31</sup> And lots of other theorizing in this vein can be found outside of philosophy proper.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, a fairly radical departure from the norm of evaluating scientific theories (and practices, etc) solely intellectually can be found in Steve Stich's work. According to Stich, we shouldn't (or perhaps even *can't*) make specifically intellectual evaluations of *anything at all*:

...there are no special cognitive or epistemological values. There are just values. Reasoning, inquiry and cognition are viewed as tools that we use in an effort to achieve what we value.<sup>33</sup>

Again, these are exceptions. The majority by far of evaluative work in the philosophy of science presupposes that its dimension of evaluation is somehow specifically intellectual. Surely there is some insight to be gained from this intellectually evaluative philosophy of science literature, on the part of those of us who are interested in more general questions of intellectual evaluation. If we can get a grip on what it is that philosophers of science have said in terms of intellectual evaluation, and why they have said it, then we will be in a position to apply their insights to the more general epistemological case. We may, that is, be able to extract some general epistemological riches from the mines of the philosophy of science.

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<sup>31</sup> Longino (1990, 2002), Kitcher (2001, 2002, 2004)

<sup>32</sup> Stokes (1997).

<sup>33</sup> Stich (1993: 8).



We might even be able to make some progress on the current issue, namely the issue of what things are of fundamental epistemic value. I'm briefly going to try to do that in the remainder of this section. To keep things as simple as possible, I'll articulate these details in terms of theories as opposed to paradigms or practices or the like. The pertinent questions from which I'll try to mine epistemological riches are these: what have philosophers of science said about what makes the acceptance of one scientific theory intellectually better than the acceptance of another scientific theory? And on what grounds have they said it?

Many think that explanatory power has something to do with scientific intellectual goodness. Others say that this goodness is a matter of the extent to which a given theory captures the "whole truth" about the world. Others still have based their theoretical evaluations on empirical adequacy, fruitfulness, simplicity, or any number or combination of other theoretical virtues.<sup>34</sup> Often too, there is talk of theories being better for acceptance if they are "well-confirmed" or if they "solve problems".

And there is substantial disagreement *within* each of these camps. Those who like explanatory power rarely agree about what explanatory power *is*.<sup>35</sup> Attempts to say what it is for one theory to capture more of the whole truth than another theory are fraught with difficulties that strike many as constituting a technical morass not worth its payoff.<sup>36</sup> The theoretical virtues are often poorly defined (as with simplicity and problem solving

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<sup>34</sup> Quine and Ullian (1970), Hempel (1981). For discussions within mainstream epistemology of theoretical virtues, see Lycan (1988, 2002) David (2001: 167), and Goldman (2002b: 60-61).

<sup>35</sup> Pitt (1988), Salmon (1989).

<sup>36</sup> Popper (1963), Miller (1974), Kitcher (1993: 120-122), Niiniluoto (1998). For a not-uncommon reaction to this literature, see Devitt's (1991: 125) assertion that he stopped reading it in 1978.

ability) or of contentious evaluative importance (as with empirical adequacy).<sup>37</sup> Confirmation is the subject of an enormous literature, which does feature *some* degree of agreement about the relevance of probability theory to confirmation, but features substantial disagreement about the details.<sup>38</sup>

These facts aren't surprising. After all, pervasive disagreement about important details is rampant in every branch of philosophy. But they *are* a bit daunting, because the detailed disagreements in the theoretically evaluative philosophy of science literature are many and complicated, and sometimes quite technical. Where in this vast literature are we to even begin?

Let's begin close to home: with truth. Consider the *simple truth view*: all completely true theories are equally good, and all theories containing any falsehoods are equally bad, and the all-true theories are all better than the at-least-partly false theories. This view is clearly silly. Where then does it go wrong?

One problem is that it entails that unremarkable theories, like the theory that Moore had hands, are not epistemically better than highly remarkable theories, like the theory that life on earth evolved via random mutation and natural selection. If we can legitimately take anything as a datum in discussions about what makes for intellectual goodness in scientific theories, then we can take it as a datum that the central tenets of contemporary Darwinism constitute an intellectually better scientific theory than does the proposition that Moore had hands. So given contemporary Darwinism and the theory that Moore had hands, we should ask: what makes the one theory better than the other, given

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<sup>37</sup> On empirical adequacy see Van Fraassen (1980), Hawthorne (1994), and Kitcher (2001b). On simplicity see Goodman (1954) and Harman (1999). On problem-solving see Laudan (1977) and Goldman (1986: 125-131).

<sup>38</sup> See e.g. Hempel (1945), Goodman (1955), Carnap (1962), Glymour (1980), Howson and Urbach (1993), Maher (1996), Williamson (2000).

that they both contain only truths? Well, here is one answer: the central tenets of contemporary Darwinism constitute an intellectually better scientific theory because they constitute a better resource for providing us with practical goods. Darwinism is used in, for instance, various forms of genetic engineering that produce better food for human consumption. But this view is too crass: it recognizes a difference between the theories, but it cashes that difference out in completely non-intellectual terms.

There is, of course, nothing wrong with extra-intellectual goods. Indeed, inquiring into the issue of which scientific theories are all things considered better than which others is a worthwhile endeavor that ought to be and is being undertaken. But it is not the endeavor with which we are currently interested. We want to understand the various views about what makes (the acceptance of) one scientific theory *intellectually* better than (the acceptance of) another. And it would be nice if, in this endeavor, we could find some less crass grounds for ranking the central tenets of contemporary Darwinism above the theory that Moore had hands.

Many such grounds are available. Indeed, almost all the standard positions within philosophy of science concern purely intellectual sorts of values. Most philosophers of science have, to use Kitcher's terminology, held that "epistemic significance has nothing to do with us and our ephemeral practical concerns, and everything to do with the structure of the world."<sup>39</sup> It is just this sort of idea that underlies the main positions outlined above, namely those positions that countenance as centrally important for intellectual evaluation of (the acceptance of) scientific theories their explanatory power, the extent to which they tell us the whole truth about the world, and the extent to which they exemplify various so-called theoretical virtues.

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<sup>39</sup> Kitcher (2001: 66).

For instance, consider explanatory power. Theories with explanatory power are theories that tell us *why* certain things are the case. Though knowledge of facts concerning why certain things are the case may help us fulfill our practical interests, that is not the only thing it is good for. Additionally, it is epistemically good, because it constitutes understanding. When we can explain why something is the case, we understand why it is the case. For instance, when we can explain why the flagpole's shadow is ten feet long by referring to the flagpole's height and the position of the sun, we understand why the flagpole's shadow is ten feet long. And again, when we understand domains, for instance when we understand physics, we know the principles that serve to explain what goes on in those domains. For example, to understand classical mechanics is to know Newton's laws of motion, or some qualified and true versions thereof, and thereby be able to use those laws in explaining the motions of various objects in various scenarios.<sup>40</sup>

These sorts of understanding are an intellectual good over and above true belief – and over and above knowledge, justified belief, and rational belief as well. To be sure, they are subject-matter-insensitive in the same sense in which these former states are subject-matter-insensitive. One can ask of *any* proposition why it is true, and one can for any domain try to find propositions the knowledge of which constitutes understanding of that domain. But there are interesting senses, which I will explore later, in which understanding-constitutive knowledge *is* sensitive to subject matter.<sup>41</sup> Understanding therefore helps us see something about what is compelling about DePaul's argument, and

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<sup>40</sup> See Zagzebski (1996: 43-50) for an important challenge to this claim; also see Grimm (2005).

<sup>41</sup> Chapter 2, section 3.

something about what is fundamentally epistemically valuable. That is the view that I want to mine from the philosophy of science literature, for now.

## **6. The significance of epistemic significance**

We should pause and take stock of the chapter so far. After a brief introductory foray into epistemic value theory, I asked what value theories are in general. In trying to answer that question, I came to the view that we should understand value theories as systems of principles that induce systems of rankings of value bearers. Here I assumed (but only for the moment) that beliefs are the only epistemic value bearers.

Then I inquired into what might be *of fundamental epistemic value*, i.e. into what things are such that their status as things of epistemic value might explain of everything *else* that is of epistemic value, why it is of epistemic value. In the attempt to carry out this inquiry I examined two literatures, one on epistemic goals, and the other on scientific theories.

Both of these examinations gave rise to reasons for thinking that there is no obvious way in which truth can play the role of the unique thing of fundamental epistemic value, and indeed no obvious way in which *any* of the any things traditionally taken to be epistemically valuable can play that role. The reason for this was that all of those traditional things amount to states and properties apply indiscriminately to all subject matters whatsoever. Given their subject-matter insensitivity, it is quite unclear how any of these things could explain why significance is an epistemic good. Nonetheless, significance *is* an epistemic good.

The current section makes some further arguments for the conclusion that significance is an epistemic good. The first of these arguments consists in pointing out

several general theoretical problems which seem to require us to countenance significance as a thing of epistemic value (though perhaps not fundamental epistemic value). I'll point out four such problems.

The first of them is the problem of trivial truths. Consider the propositions (a) that the first phone number on p. 328 of the Wichita Kansas telephone book is 675-241-8513, and (b) that life on earth evolved via random mutation and natural selection.<sup>42</sup> Most of us do not care at all about the first of these, but care quite a bit about the second. Furthermore, it is hard to think that we would do as well epistemically by having a true belief (or justified belief, or rational belief, or knowledge) in the first, as we would by having a true belief (or justified belief, or rational belief, or knowledge) in the second. It would seem then that there is some sort of epistemically normative deficiency in believing what is trivial. The problem of trivial truths is, then, the problem of saying what this deficiency-inducing property *triviality* amounts to.

This problem sometimes motivates discussions in the epistemic goals literature.<sup>43</sup> For instance, consider Chisholm's "purely intellectual requirement" that we try our best to believe the truth about all the propositions *that we consider*. If trivial propositions just amount to propositions one *does not consider*, then we do not violate Chisholm's requirement by not trying to believe the truth about them. Chisholm's clause about considering, then, suggests that we can solve the problem of trivial truths by identifying trivialities with propositions one does not consider.

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<sup>42</sup> Goldman (1999: 88-89) and Sosa (2001) discuss similar examples.

<sup>43</sup> For instance, see David (2001: 159)

Unfortunately, however, Chisholm's clause about considering brings a new problem of its own: it entails that we can fulfill our intellectual requirement by refusing to consider any propositions.<sup>44</sup>

There has got to be something epistemically wrong with a person who refuses to consider anything, especially one who does so with the express intent of meeting Chisholm's purely intellectual requirement. So, at the very least, the fact that such people can perfectly meet that requirement shows that there is more to epistemic value than that requirement can capture. And it is not too much of a stretch to say that the extra things include facts about the epistemic value of significance. To be significant is, after all, to be non-trivial.

Nevertheless, philosophers sometimes find it strange or misguided to claim that epistemic value can have something to do with the significance of the propositions at which one's beliefs are aimed. Chisholm himself characterized the fundamental problem that his work in epistemology addressed, as the problem of answering the question

As a rational being, what can I do to correct and to improve my present set of beliefs and to replace them with a more reasonable set of beliefs *about the same subject matter*?<sup>45</sup>

By relegating the improvements sought to improvements in one's beliefs about the same subject matter, Chisholm builds an independence of epistemic value to subject matter right into his fundamental question.

Feldman does something similar. In responding to an assertion of Plantinga's that something about the relative significance of various propositions ought to be added to Chisholm's epistemological system, Feldman argues that such assertions fail to respect the subject-matter-insensitivity of the issues about which Chisholm was theorizing. To

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<sup>44</sup> As Plantinga (1993: 33) points out.

<sup>45</sup> Chisholm (1997: 288); emphasis added.

really see what sorts of issues Chisholm had in mind, he argues, we must ask ourselves questions like

Given that I am in the situation that I am in, and given that I am considering the proposition *p*, what should I do – believe it, disbelieve it, or suspend judgment about it?

If normative epistemological theories just answer *these* sorts of questions, then clearly nothing about the relative significance of some propositions over others can have anything to do with epistemic value. And Feldman thinks that these sorts of questions are central to not only Chisholm's work, but to epistemic value in general, because by answering them we build theories of our "epistemic obligations". Feldman's view here is qualified, though, because he thinks that there is a broader, extended sort of epistemic value which outstrips our epistemic obligations, and with respect to which significance *is* significant. This extended sort of epistemic value is, he tells us, concerned not with "the central notion of epistemic obligation", but with "being good epistemic agents".<sup>46</sup>

Feldman is not alone in advocating such a theoretical dichotomy within epistemology. Sosa is committed to a similar view, according to which epistemology is divided into two parts, one of which is the theory of knowledge and associated phenomena like justification, and the other of which is the theory of intellectual ethics more generally.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps Sosa would, like Feldman, recognize a place for epistemic significance within the more general project but not within the more specific one.

If so, then both of them would recognize the problem of trivial truths as a genuine problem for epistemologists, at least when those epistemologists are engaged in the broader versions of the discipline. Claims about the relative significance for epistemic evaluation of some propositions over others should seem much less strange and

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<sup>46</sup> Feldman (1988: 249), Plantinga (1993: 33).

<sup>47</sup> Sosa (forthcoming)



misguided in this broader context, than they do in narrower contexts devoted to such subject-matter-independent issues as the nature of knowledge and justification. And they should seem even less strange still in light of a broad review of the relevant literature. For, as a matter of fact, epistemic significance is discussed not just in Goldman and Sosa's writings on telephone-book style examples, and not just in Plantinga's critique of Chisholm's purely intellectual requirement, but very widely across recent evaluative literature in both epistemology and the philosophy of science.

Let me briefly run through some examples of these discussions. Alston, in a paper on justification, raises (but does not answer) the question of whether "it is more important, epistemically, to form beliefs on some matters than others". Nozick, in a discussion of epistemic rationality, is quick to remark that some facts are worth knowing but others are not. Harman, in a book about reasoning, claims that one should form new beliefs only in propositions that one has a reason to be, or actually is, "interested in". Elgin, in pushing for the epistemic value of understanding, claims that truths that do not enhance understanding are "epistemically inert", and that we have "no reason to credit" them. Kvanvig, also pushing for understanding, argues that it is epistemically valuable, in a way that knowledge is not, because it "tracks what is important in a body of information". Kitcher, in breaking from a tradition that typically countenances as the epistemic aim of science knowledge of laws, explanatory generalizations, or causal structure, argues that that aim is instead knowledge of truths that answer to human

curiosity. More such examples can be found in recent work by Haack, Riggs, Audi, Ryan, Bishop and Trout, Roberts and Wood, and others.<sup>48</sup>

So the view that some truths are more epistemically significant than others is not some strange outlandish position recently imported from left field. On the contrary, it is knitted right into the tapestry of contemporary literature. Nor is it merely a trendy new offshoot of a discipline whose tradition is wholly devoted to phenomena that are subject-matter-independent. Its presence extends nearly all the way across the history of epistemology: it is advocated by Hume and even Plato. I'll address their work on the topic later in this chapter, after exploring some more problems the solutions of which seem to require us to respect the relative epistemic significance of some propositions over others.

The second such problem I'll dub the problem of belief body comparisons. Let me work through an application of it to a specific proposal within normative epistemology, and then try to characterize it more generally.

Sosa has long distinguished two different epistemic states, reflective knowledge and animal knowledge. Animal knowledge, to put it roughly, is had when one believes truly through intellectual virtue, so that the truth of one's belief is creditable to one. Reflective knowledge, again to put it roughly, requires not only animal knowledge of a given proposition, but also an appreciation of the grounds on which one has that animal knowledge.<sup>49</sup> Throughout Sosa's writings we find commitments to the view that

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<sup>48</sup> Alston (1985: 59), Nozick (1993: 67-68), Harman (1986: 55), Elgin (1996: 124), Kvanvig (2003: 203), Kitcher (2001: 65-82), Haack (1993: 199-203), Riggs (2003: 350), Audi (2004: 15), Ryan (1999: 122), Bishop and Trout (2004: ch. 6), Roberts and Wood (2007).

<sup>49</sup> See Sosa (1991: 138-145, 240, 286-287; 1997b: 426-427; 2004: 290-292, 312-315).

reflective knowledge is epistemically better than animal knowledge. For instance, in “Reflective Knowledge in the Best Circles” he writes

...beyond animal knowledge there is a better knowledge. This knowledge does require broad coherence...<sup>50</sup>

What precisely does this mean, this statement that reflective knowledge is better than animal knowledge? To say that something is better than something else is to say that some *thing* is better than some other *thing*. So let's consider some candidate things in the neighborhood. For any person S, proposition P, and time *t*, there are the possible token states S's animal knowing at t that p and S's reflectively knowing at t that p. One level of abstraction up, there are the states, for any person S and proposition P, that S may instantiate towards P at different times: S's animal knowing that p and S's reflectively knowing that p. Another level up again, there are the states for every proposition P that different people may instantiate towards P at different times, animal knowing that p and reflectively knowing that p. And even more abstractly, there are the general states that different people at different times may instantiate towards different propositions, animal knowing and reflectively knowing.

Which among these many things are said to be better than which others, when Sosa says that reflective knowledge is better than animal knowledge? It is hard to see how the relative values of the states at any level of abstraction other than the lowest, token level could matter to us as normative theorists, except insofar as they might subsume evaluations at the token level. Why should we *care* whether the general thing reflective knowledge is better than the general thing animal knowledge, except for the purposes of evaluating its actual and possible tokens? An interest in the general over and

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<sup>50</sup> Sosa (1997b: 196)

above its implications for the particular in this context would be as misguided as an interest in the part of a hedonist in the general state pleasure, over and above its implications for the particular pleasures of particular persons at particular times.

When hedonists say things like “pleasure is better than pain”, they are on the surface talking about general states that different people can instantiate at different times. But it is only particular people at particular times about which hedonists ultimately care. Their claim that pleasure is better than pain, then, ought to be taken as shorthand for something like “for any person and time, that person’s having pleasure at that time is better than that person’s having pain at that time”. Sosa’s commitment to the epistemic superiority of reflective knowledge over animal knowledge ought to be taken in a similar way.

On the surface that claim is about the general states reflective knowledge and animal knowledge. But since we shouldn’t care about the relative epistemic values of these general states except insofar as they explain the relative epistemic values of their tokens, we should take Sosa’s evaluative claim to be shorthand for something like “For any person, proposition, and time, it is epistemically better that the person reflectively knows that proposition at that time, than that the person animal-knows that proposition at that time”.

Notice that this is *not* the claim that for any person and time, it is epistemically better that the person reflectively knows *any* proposition at that time, than that the person animal-knows *any other* proposition at that time. That is to say, we should not take Sosa to be committed, via the superiority of reflective knowledge to animal knowledge, to the view that anyone does epistemically better by reflectively knowing *anything*, than by

animal-knowing *anything else*. Nor should we adopt the stronger, cross-proposition superiority thesis; for instance, it is certainly not epistemically better to reflectively know that there is a lamp on one's desk, than to animal-know the conjunction of that same truth with all of the true propositions of chemistry.

In his most careful writings Sosa is quite attentive to these niceties. In those writings he makes a point of indexing the superiority of reflective knowledge over animal knowledge to particular persons, proposition, and times. Thus we can glean from his paper "Two False Dichotomies" a very precise version of the superiority claim:

*RK>AK*: If in a single specious present one has reflective knowledge rather than animal knowledge towards some proposition P, then one is in a better epistemic position with respect to P than one would be if one merely had animal knowledge towards P.

This, I submit, is how we should ultimately understand Sosa's superiority claim. Very interestingly, the *RK>AK* principle does not rule out

*Localization*: It is not the case that: if in a single specious present one has reflective knowledge rather than animal knowledge towards some proposition P then one is in a better overall epistemic position than one would be if one merely had animal knowledge towards P.

And *localization* is true. A nice way to illustrate its truth is by reflecting on the fact that some epistemic agents, human beings among them, have extremely limited cognitive capabilities.<sup>51</sup> Suppose that Joe the human works so hard at learning, for such a long time, that all of his epistemic capacities (such as his memory capacity) are taxed to their limits. Joe happens to have mere animal knowledge towards the proposition that Visine gets the red out (V). If Joe gains an appreciation of the grounds on which he has this animal knowledge and thereby transforms it into reflective knowledge, this change will tax his scarce resources. Indeed, since all of Joe's mental capacities are already used up, his attainment of this reflective knowledge can come only at the price of losing

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<sup>51</sup> On these limitations see e.g. Cherniak (1986), Goldman (1986), Harman (1986), Levi (1991), and Gigerenzer et. al. (1999), and Bishop and Trout (2004).

something else – perhaps some *other* bit of reflective or animal knowledge. And the epistemic value of whatever Joe loses when he gains reflective knowledge that (V) may well be greater than the value of the reflective knowledge gained.

Thus Joe's change in attitude from animal knowledge to reflective knowledge towards (V) may actually *decrease* the value of his overall epistemic position, despite increasing the value of his epistemic position with respect to (V). Such an overall decrease will obtain if and only if the value of whatever is lost via the change outweighs the value of whatever is gained by it. And it may turn out that the thing lost will be reflective knowledge in some proposition other than (V). For instance, by moving from animal knowledge to reflective knowledge with respect to V, Joe may come to also move from reflective knowledge to animal knowledge with respect to the proposition (C) that his car insurance needs to be paid. (In motivating this possibility we need not appeal to the fact that Joe's cognitive resources are limited. Even if his resources were unlimited, we would still want to say whether he is epistemically better off before or after the switch between the two global states. So while the ubiquity of human constraints is useful for motivating the problem of belief body comparisons, it is not strictly necessary for the task.)

Is this case, where Joe changes from animal to reflective knowledge with respect to V, but only by also changing from reflective to animal knowledge with respect to C, a case where Joe's overall epistemic state has improved, worsened, or stayed the same? Sosa's  $RK > AK$  thesis does not on its own give us an answer. We also need a theory that tells us which propositions are epistemically more significant than which other propositions, if we are going to compare these two global states.

The need for such a theory of significance is quite general: it applies to (among others) anyone willing to epistemically compare *bodies of belief*, i.e. belief states that take as their objects multiple propositions. To put it roughly, the reason for this is that anyone willing to make belief body comparisons is going to have to compare belief bodies that, like the one concerning Joe and the propositions V and C, are identical but for switches in the propositions at which their various constituent beliefs are aimed.

Belief bodies are (I suspect) most profitably understood as not beliefs or withholdings, but instead sets of these things. In taking it that we should epistemically compare these sets, I am leaving behind the view that beliefs and withholdings are the only bearers of epistemic value. And I'm not just leaving that view behind in the familiar and benign way, which is by taking as epistemic value bearers things like belief-forming processes that are epistemically valuable *as means*, while continuing to countenance only beliefs and withholdings as the bearers of epistemic value *as ends*. I'm taking it that we should evaluate sets of beliefs and withholdings epistemically *as ends*. This is a somewhat radical break from epistemological tradition.

This break might meet some resistance from traditionalists, who might refuse to make belief body comparisons. But I do not think such resistance is warranted. Such resistance should be supported with good reasons for refusing to make belief body comparisons; that something is traditional is not alone grounds for continuing to do it. As far as I can tell, there *are no* good reasons for refusing to make belief body comparisons. And, what is more, there *are* reasons for *making* those comparisons.

One such reason is that it would be nice to make our epistemically evaluative theories as rich in content as possible, and theories issuing comparisons of belief bodies as well as beliefs (and withholdings) are richer in content than theories issuing comparisons of beliefs (and withholdings) only. Another reason to make belief body comparisons is rooted in our third problem, the problem of scarce resource distribution.

Every day, people make decisions about which intellectual problems they are going to inquire into. Philosophers decide whether to think about metaphysics or ethics, biologists decide which new experiments to run, and historians decide which connections to chase down and which to leave alone. Nor are these decisions relegated to professional inquirers. Ordinary people make decisions about what sorts of news to pay attention to, what sorts of nonfiction to read, and a host of other topics.

Which among these projects are the most deserving of the limited amounts of time, energy, and (in some cases) money required for their engagement? Similar questions must be answered by people who design educational curricula, and by people who decide what sorts of information will be stored in libraries. All of these questions call on us to appeal to views about which issues are such that the learning about them is better than the learning about which other issues. Of course, the “betterness” here is not only of an intellectual variety. Values of many varieties are, and ought to be, in play when people make decisions about what ought to be inquired into, taught, and stored in libraries. But certainly among these values ought to be intellectual ones. And if we are to say something about the various intellectual values of the various options that people face in these decisions, we are going to have to say something about the various intellectual values of states that take multiple propositions as their objects - that is, belief



bodies. Moreover, we are going have to do that in a way that respects epistemic significance.<sup>52</sup>

So far we've seen three problems that call for us to recognize significance as a thing of epistemic value (though perhaps not fundamental epistemic value). The first of these was the problem of trivial truths, i.e. the problem of saying what makes trivial truths trivial. The second was the problem of belief body comparisons, i.e. the problem of epistemically comparing *bodies* of beliefs and withholdings. The third was the problem of scarce resource distribution, i.e. the problem of distributing scare resources across intellectual endeavors such as inquiries.

Now let us turn to a fourth problem whose solution calls for the recognition of significance as a thing of epistemic value: the problem of understanding. There is a currently burgeoning movement in favor of the epistemic value of understanding, where understanding is construed not as knowledge but as some other cognitive state that is better or at least different.<sup>53</sup> Now, it is not very clear what understanding is. The problem of understanding, then, is the problem of shining light on this relatively dark issue. As it turns out, there is an enlightening literature in the philosophy of science that may help us solve this problem, and may do so partly through invoking epistemic significance.

It is plausible, at least at a first pass, to view understanding as explanatory knowledge. On this account of understanding, the view that understanding is epistemically valuable amounts to the view that some propositions are epistemically more

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<sup>52</sup> On the distribution of scientific research funding, see Stokes (1997), Goldman (1999, 244-271), Kitcher (2001a), and Longino (2002). On curriculum decisions see Norman (1996), Goldman (1999: 349-373), and Sternberg (2001a, 2001b). On library decisions see Fallis (2000).

<sup>53</sup> Goldman (1986), Kim (1994), Elgin (1996), Sosa (1997b), Zagzebski (2001), Riggs (2003), Kvanvig (2003), Grimm (2005).

significant than others because those propositions are explanatorily powerful. The contemporary movement in favor of understanding, then, can be viewed as a movement in favor of epistemic significance, flying under a different banner. Thus the problem of understanding, as well as the problems of trivial truths, belief body comparisons, and scarce resource distribution, calls out for us to recognize significance as something of epistemic value.

This case for the significance of epistemic significance is sometimes met with skepticism. The position that epistemic value is in some central way independent of the subject matter of one's beliefs, expressed perhaps most explicitly in Feldman's claim that the relative importance of various propositions matters to epistemic value in at most a non-central sense, is for many people very hard to deny.

Perhaps this is partly because of the way epistemologists tend to ask their questions. Quite often, the central questions around which epistemological research is oriented take the form "What are the conditions under which, for any person S and any proposition P, S  $\Phi$ 's that P?". The " $\Phi$ " is replaced by an epistemic state term like "knows" or "has a justified belief". When the theorizing gets done, the practice at least is to presuppose that the extensions of these terms amount to states (or properties etc) that anyone can have towards *any* proposition. In that sense, those states and properties are expected to be subject-matter-insensitive.<sup>54</sup>

If it is among subject-matter-insensitive properties that we are going to find the *epistemically goodmaking* properties, then it is going to turn out that all of the epistemically goodmaking properties are subject-matter-insensitive. This, in turn, leaves

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<sup>54</sup> I simplify. Suppose that "true propositions of the form *I do not know that p*" are a subject matter. Standard practice does not demand that propositions in that subject matter can be known.

us no room for thinking that some propositions are significant whereas others are trivial. Standard practice thus crowds out significance by demanding that we theorize only about subject-matter-insensitive states and properties.

Of course, not *all* epistemological discussions crowd out significance in the foregoing manner. Indeed, I've made a point of the fact that many of them *don't* do that. But a great deal of them do, and in so doing they presuppose epistemic-significance-nihilism.

It can be strange to recognize one's presuppositions, let alone reject them. But clearly this is the sort of thing we ought to be open to. Identifying presuppositions is a way to gain control over them rather than vice versa. Even if the view that epistemic value can vary with subject matter seems strange and misguided, then, it should nonetheless be given a hearing, if only because the hearing would give some traditional presuppositions a healthy shake.

I don't expect these arguments to have convinced everyone to drop, or even question, the view that epistemic value is subject-matter-insensitive. Additional therapy for the unconvinced can be found in the writings of some historically influential philosophers who *didn't hold that view*: Plato and Hume.

Within contemporary epistemology, most references to Plato concern his accounts in the *Theaetetus* and the *Meno* of the conditions under which a person knows something and the value of knowledge. But there is a set of epistemological views in Plato's writings, the relationships of which to the *Theaetetus* and the *Meno* are none too obvious, that get much less contemporary epistemological press. These views are articulated in the *Republic* and focus on the relationships between epistemic states (like belief or

knowledge) and the subject matters that those states can be about (like ordinary objects or forms).<sup>55</sup>

Roughly, these views have it that the epistemic value of any token propositional attitude depends on that attitude's subject matter. There are, according to these views, several different levels of reality; and token attitudes are better to the extent that their content is further up the hierarchy.

At the lowest reality level are mere appearances such as shadows; directly above it are sensible objects like tables and chairs. It is not very clear what the objects directly above sensibles are, but they seem to be some sort of abstracta of lesser status than the forms; we can call them 'figures'. The highest level of reality, directly above the figures, is that of the forms, which are as real as anything could be.

Now, most if not all contemporary theorists take epistemic states (like knowledge and justified belief) to apply indiscriminately to any sorts of objects whatsoever. They take it, that is, that it is in principle possible to have knowledge of any sort of object, justified beliefs about any sort of object, and so on.

But Plato, or at least the Plato of the *Republic*, rejects this indiscriminacy thesis. He thinks that for each level of reality there is a proprietary epistemic state that by its nature can be about only things at that level of reality. States whose contents concern mere observables amount to imagination (*eikasia*), states whose contents concern sensible objects amount to belief (*pistis*), states whose contents concern figures amount to thought (*dianoia*), and states whose contents are the forms amount to understanding (*noesis*). Sometimes these terms of Plato's are translated to make the differences even

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<sup>55</sup> I know of only two discussions of the *Republic* epistemology in the recent epistemology literature: Armstrong (1973: 139-141) and Zagzebski (1996: 281). It would probably take several pages to list out the recent epistemological writings that discuss the *Meno* and the *Theaetetus*.

more apparent in English; for instance, Reeve translates them as ‘perceptual-thought’, ‘folk-wisdom’, ‘scientific-thought’, and ‘dialectical-thought’.<sup>56</sup>

However the translations go, each of the states is for Plato epistemically better than the state below it, just as its content is more real than the content of the state below it. The whole structure is to be thought of as a line divided into four parts, each part holding metaphysical goods and associated epistemic goods, with both sorts of goods better the higher on the line they reside.

Plato thus builds a theory epistemic significance right into his account of the nature of his various epistemic states: to the extent that the subject matter of one token is metaphysically higher than the subject of another token, the first token is by its nature both different and epistemically better than the second. Epistemic significance is therefore deeply mind-independent. This view not only countenances the existence of epistemic significance, but has an extremely realist take on its nature.

To be sure, there are scholarly debates about the interpretation of the relevant passages. Those passages come from *Republic V-VII*, and are most forcefully expressed in the famous line and cave allegories. Some interpreters, for instance Moravcsik and Hintikka, glean from those passages roughly the view I’ve just outlined; others, for instance Annas and Fine, do not.<sup>57</sup> But the existence of this disagreement should not give us pause, because my central point that Plato subscribes to an extremely realist view about epistemic significance holds on all sides of the interpretive debate (or at least on all the sides of which I am aware). On Moravcsik-Hintikka style views, the point holds for the straightforward reasons I’ve described. On Annas-Fine style views, Plato takes it that

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<sup>56</sup> Reeve (1988: 52-58).

<sup>57</sup> Hintikka (1973), Moravcsik (1978), Annas (1981: 190-215, 249-252), Fine (2003: 66-116).

one may have the best sort of epistemic state while directing that state to any sort of object whatsoever, but that one can do this only via the use of one's epistemic states that concern the forms. Knowledge (or what have you) of the forms is, on these versions of Plato's views, some sort of explanatory resource required for grounding knowledge (or what have you) of lesser objects. Even on interpretations on which the quality of one's token epistemic state is not constrained by that state's subject matter, then, Plato takes thoroughly mind-independent facts to make some topics epistemically more significant than others.

Hume's view is very different. In a chapter of the *Treatise* titled "Of curiosity, or the love of truth" he writes that

...the satisfaction, which we sometimes receive from the discovery of truth, proceeds not from it, merely as such, but only as endowed with certain qualities. The first and most considerable circumstance requisite to render truth agreeable, is the genius and capacity, which is employed in its invention and discovery. What is easy and obvious is never valued; and even what is *in itself* difficult, if we come to knowledge of it without difficulty, and without stretch of thought or judgment, is but little regarded. We love to trace the demonstrations of mathematicians, but should receive small entertainment from a person, who should barely inform us of the proportions of lines and angles, though we reposed the utmost confidence in both his judgment and veracity.<sup>58</sup>

Hume is saying that one truth is epistemically more significant than another to the extent that the learning of it brings more entertainment! Epistemic significance is thus thoroughly rooted in human interests and concerns, and determined by nothing like the mind-independent considerations at work in Plato's hierarchies.

It is tempting to think that even Hume wouldn't have *that* crass a view. Didn't he see *anything* beyond entertainment value that makes some truths epistemically more significant than others? Well, sort of. Right after the above passage he makes the following remark:

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<sup>58</sup> Hume (1740: 287 = *Treatise* 2.3.10.)

But though the exercise of genius be the principal source of that satisfaction we receive from the sciences, yet I doubt, if it be alone sufficient to give us any considerable enjoyment. The truth we discover must also be one of some importance. 'Tis easy to multiply algebraical problems to infinity, nor is there any end in the discovery of proportions of conic sections; though few mathematicians take any pleasure in these researches, but turn their thoughts to what is more useful and important. Now the question is, after what manner this utility and importance operate upon us?<sup>59</sup>

It might at first seem that this passage drops the view that entertainment value is the determiner of epistemic significance. But no sooner does Hume pose the question of “what manner this utility and importance operate upon us”, than does he answer it by saying that people just simply come via whatever else they care about to care about certain intellectual problems. And he sees these etiological facts as explanatorily useful *only insofar as* they help explain why people become fixated on some issues instead of others:

...here I return to what I have already remarked, that the pleasure of study consists chiefly in the action of the mind, and of the exercise of the genius and understanding in the discovery or comprehension of any truth. If the importance of the truth be requisite to compleat the pleasure, 'tis not on account of any considerable addition, which of itself it brings our enjoyment, but only because 'tis, in some measure, requisite to fix our attention.<sup>60</sup>

So for Hume what matters is the extent to which given topics command our attention, and usefulness or other properties of those topics matter only to the extent that they help in commanding our attention, whereas for Plato what matters is a topic's mind-independent metaphysical depth, and nothing so ephemeral as our fleeting dispositions for fixation.

Plato's hyper-realism is hard to take seriously. How could the structure of reality itself determine which topics one does better epistemically by knowing about? Hume's hyper-antirealism isn't much of an improvement. How could relative amounts of

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<sup>59</sup> Hume (1740: 287).

<sup>60</sup> Hume (1740: 288).

significance depend on nothing more than the extent to which various topics fix our attention? We've got to find an adequate middle ground.



## **Chapter 2**

### **The nature of epistemic significance**

Chapter 1 argued for, among other things, the significance of epistemic significance. Now in chapter 2, I'll pick up where those arguments left off by substantively theorizing about the nature of epistemic significance.

First I'll lay down some structure for classifying theories of epistemic significance. Then I'll conjecture and defend a substantive account of epistemic significance – an account of what is epistemically significant for whom. This account will not render significance a thing of *fundamental* epistemic value. Rather, it will attempt to *explain why* significance is a thing of epistemic value. There is quite a bit of work to do before we are in a position to appreciate that explanation, which will not appear explicitly until the last section.

#### **1. Classifying theories of epistemic significance**

It is illuminating to classify theories of epistemic significance according to what they entail about the way in which significance depends or does not depend on human interests and other merely contingent facts about human minds. The more a theory takes epistemic significance to be independent of human minds, the more that theory takes epistemic significance to be a genuine real phenomenon. The more a theory takes epistemic significance to be *dependent* on human minds, the more that theory takes epistemic significance to be some sort of construct we've collectively invented. Let me make these ideas a bit clearer by characterizing two extreme kinds of views about the mind-dependence, or lack thereof, of epistemic significance.

I'll call views on which contingent facts about human minds cannot, alone, make any difference to distributions of significance, full-blown significance-externalisms. These views have it that differences in distributions of desires (and beliefs, concerns, interests, and so on) cannot alone make differences to distributions of significance. Plato is a paradigm full-blown significance-externalist. His view has it that significance is determined by the hierarchical structure of reality; and surely differences in peoples' beliefs and desires can make no difference to *that*.

Whereas full-blown significance-externalism has it that no change in significance can come from *only* changes to contingent facts about human minds, full-blown significance-internalism has it that no change in significance can come *without some* change to contingent facts about human minds. Whatever sets of changes can make for changes to the distribution of epistemic significance, each of those sets includes changes to humans' beliefs or desires or other contingently held mental states. Hume is a paradigm full-blown significance-internalist, because on his view significance is a matter of entertainment value; and the facts about who disposed to be entertained by what are contingent facts about our mental states. (Note that neither sort of full-blown view strictly rules out the other sort.)

Is any version of either of the full-blown views *true*? Let's start with the externalist side of the debate. Why would anyone be attracted to full-blown significance-externalism? One possible driving intuition is that epistemic success is in some sense a matter of getting to the bottom of things, and that facts about what lies at the bottom of things are independent of whatever we happen to believe and desire. This sort of position can be found in some of Kitcher's early work on epistemic values in science, where he

argues that epistemic scientific success consists in finding out those mind-independently deep facts about nature in virtue of which other facts hold. For example, in summarizing a long discussion in *The Advancement of Science*, he writes that

Scientists find out things about a world that is independent of human cognition; they advance true statements, use concepts that conform to natural divisions, and develop schemata that capture objective dependencies.<sup>1</sup>

The view of epistemic significance presupposed here is in a sense similar to Plato's, but couched in contemporary terminology that is much more palatable. There are special, mind-independent, fundamental facts on which all other facts objectively depend; if we learn these deep facts we get to the bottom of things and thereby see the shallow facts as the metaphysical afterimages that they are; that is why the deep facts are more epistemically significant than the shallow ones. Stated in terms of forms and hierarchies the view seems antiquated at best. But stated in terms of natural divisions and objective dependencies it seems like a genuine contender, indeed almost like a commonsensical form of scientific realism.

No matter how the view is stated, it isn't true. For it can't explain the significance of non-deep facts that we care about, such as facts about phonebook numbers that we actually want to know.

(There may well be something to the idea that *one* source of epistemic significance is "getting to the bottom of things". In fact, I'll advocate a version of that idea later. But getting to the bottom of things cannot be the *only* source of epistemic significance - because there is significance in shallow facts that do not get to the bottom of things, but that we happen to want to know.)

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<sup>1</sup> Kitcher (1993: 127).

Full-blown significance-internalism isn't true either. For it is possible to alter distributions of significance while holding fixed all of the contingent facts about human minds. One way to do this is by changing the laws of nature. Changing the laws of nature changes the facts about what explains what. And this changes the facts about what does and does not make for understanding. And understanding-constitutive knowledge is epistemically good, in a way that knowledge that does not constitute understanding is not epistemically good. Therefore, by changing the laws of nature we can change the distribution of significance while holding fixed all contingent facts about human minds. This entails that full-blown significance-internalism is false.

The upshot is that we need to find a middle ground between Plato and Hume not only because each of their theories is on its face hard to take seriously, but also because there are good arguments that no theory as extreme as either of theirs, in either of their directions, adequately describes the nature of epistemic significance.

## **2. The theory of significance**

This section tries to build and defend a substantive account of epistemic significance – an account of what is epistemically significant for whom – that constitutes a middle ground between full-blown significance-internalism and full-blown significance externalism.

### **2.1 General advantages of the curiosity approach**

The theory I'm going to build is part of a contemporary tradition that bases epistemic significance on curiosity. According to this tradition, the epistemic significance of some propositions as opposed to others is determined by the relationships between those propositions and our curiosities. A simple example of such a view is this:

*P* is significant for one iff *P* answers a question one is curious about. Actual views within the curiosity tradition are, for the most part, more complicated versions of the same basic idea. Two general advantages of these sorts of views are worth pointing out right away.

We can sensibly ask why curiosity-answering makes a proposition epistemically significant for one. With a nod to G.E. Moore, we can call this an “open question” question.<sup>2</sup> Curiosity-based views are well-positioned to answer it; that is their first general advantage. Let me explain.

Suppose that you stop being curious about a question by coming to believe, without justification, a false answer to it. Just as pills that remove hunger by manipulating the nervous system remove hunger without satisfying it, your belief has removed your curiosity without satisfying it. Hunger satisfaction requires nutritive fulfillment. Similarly, curiosity satisfaction requires at least justification or truth. It may require more as well; here I will not pursue the matter, except to claim that all the plausible competitors for what it takes to satisfy curiosity – true belief, justified belief, justified true belief, and knowledge – are epistemic goods. Each of these competitors would make curiosity a particularly *epistemic* sort of desire. (More on this later in the chapter).

Given that curiosity is an *epistemic* desire, we can view knowledge that plays no role in satisfying curiosity as the epistemic analogue of prudential outcomes that play no role in satisfying one’s desires generally. Other things being equal, it is *prudentially* better to satisfy one’s desires than to not satisfy those desires. Similarly, it is (other things being equal) *epistemically* better to know things that satisfy one’s curiosities, than

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<sup>2</sup> See Moore (1903).

to know things that do not satisfy one's curiosities. Given that curiosity is an epistemic sort of desire, it can play the same role epistemically that desires generally play prudentially.

Or at least, curiosity views of significance are well positioned to say as much. They are therefore well positioned to answer our “open question” question. Why are *curiosity-answering* propositions the significant ones? Answer: because knowledge of them plays the role in the epistemic domain that desire-satisfying outcomes play in the prudential domain.

In addition to being well-positioned to answer our “open question” question, curiosity views are also well-positioned to sanction *amounts* of significance. It is sometimes the case that the degree to which one is more curious about question A than question B is greater than the degree to which one is more curious about question C than question D. These differences in degree help give us what we need to sanction not just significance, but amounts of significance. They are the sort of thing that might make it true not only that some propositions are significant whereas others are not, and not only that some propositions are more significant than others, but furthermore that there are cases in which the degree to which A is more significant than B is greater than the degree to which C is more significant than D.<sup>3</sup>

These two general advantages of curiosity views (namely, being well positioned to answer our “open question” question and sanction amounts of significance) warrant a close look at some particular examples of those views.

## **2.2 Extant curiosity-based theories**

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<sup>3</sup> Sen (1986) and Broome (1991) feature helpful discussions of the measurability issues alluded to here.

Recall our simple example of a curiosity-based theory: *P is significant for one iff P answers a question one is curious about*. You and I aren't curious about grass blade numbers; so this simple curiosity view has some appeal in explaining why propositions about grass blades are insignificant for the two of us.

There are several *prima facie* problems with the simple curiosity view. One of them can be illustrated by the case of the informative book, which goes as follows. Bill is curious about whether acid turns litmus paper pink. His book says that it does. But he is not curious about any questions of the form "Does the book say that P?".

The simple curiosity view entails that propositions of the form "The book says that P" are insignificant for Bill. But that seems wrong. It seems that there would be *something* intellectually superior in his learning that the book says that acid turns litmus paper pink, as opposed to learning about e.g. grass blade numbers. How can we sanction that superiority within the curiosity tradition?

One answer comes from Goldman's recent work. He sanctions three kinds of curiosity: *occurrent* (where one is attending to a question), *dispositional* (where one would be occurrently curious were one to attend to a question), and *extended* (where there are facts such that, if one were to learn them, one would be dispositionally curious about a question). A proposition is significant for one, then, iff it answers a question one is curious about in any of these ways.<sup>4</sup>

If Bill were to learn that the book contains the answer to his question about acid, he would (supposedly) come to be curious about what the book says. So Goldman's view makes sense of the inherited significance for Bill of propositions about what the book says.

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<sup>4</sup> Goldman (1999: 95, 350).

But consider *tenacious believers*, for whom *no* knowledge would bring curiosity about certain questions. There are e.g. religious people for whom no knowledge would bring curiosity about whether God exists. But the proposition that God exists is still more significant for them than, say, propositions about grass blades. Goldman's view does not sanction that surplus significance.

A hopeful alternative view can be found in Zagzebski's recent work. There she attempts to explain all of epistemic value in terms of "what we care about". She writes:

There is no epistemic value that is unhinged from what we care about...Epistemic values always arise from something we care about.<sup>5</sup>

Zagzebski's basic idea here is that caring about a domain obliges one to be conscientious about that domain, and that to be conscientious is to be intellectually virtuous, and that all of epistemic value is explicable via this caring-rooted intellectual virtuousness. This approach can deal with our tenacious believers, who surely *care* whether God exists, despite not being *curious* about it.

One might care about acid but not about what the book says, so we can't simply say that P is significant for one iff it is in a domain one cares about. Zagzebski recognizes this and addresses it with a view that is, I think, best interpreted as sanctioning two kinds of significance: direct and inherited. P is directly significant for one iff it is part of a domain one cares about (or we care about collectively); P has inherited significance for one iff conscientious thought about what one *does* care about (or we care about collectively) would make one care about P.<sup>6</sup>

Conscientious thought about what he cares about would, supposedly, make Bill care about what the book says; so propositions about what the book says have inherited

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<sup>5</sup> Zagzebski (2004: 368).

<sup>6</sup> Zagzebski (2004: 364-365).



significance for him. So Zagzebski's view has some appeal in illuminating the case of the informative book.

But suppose you are a *Watson*, working for a Holmes. You are a dim bulb; you never see the evidential relevance of the information you manage to find. Fortunately, Holmes does see that relevance; and you relay all of your information to him.

Some propositions are so subtly relevant to the question of who committed the murder that conscientious thought about what you care about would never bring you to see their relevance. But in some sense at least, there is more value intellectually in your learning those subtly relevant propositions, than in your learning completely random propositions. Zagzebski's view does not sanction that surplus value. Just as tenacious believers are a problem for Goldman's view, then, Watsons are a problem for Zagzebski's.

Those two problems serve to illustrate a general point: significance is not a matter of what one would do in a given scenario. What one would do in a given scenario (say, learning or thinking conscientiously) depends on facts about one's character that may not track significance.

The obvious response of adding perfect rationality to the relevant scenarios leaves this general point untouched. To illustrate this, suppose we refine Goldman's view by redefining "dispositional curiosity" so that one has it towards a question just if one would be occurrently curious about that question if one were to attend to it *and* be perfectly rational (and similarly with "extended curiosity"). Now suppose Bill is so constituted that if he were to be perfectly rational, he would thereby have an existential crisis and jump off a bridge. Our refined version of Goldman's view cannot sanction propositions

about what the book says as significant for Bill. Side effects of the scenario in the analysans render that analysans noncoextensional with its analysandum. This problem - the “conditional fallacy” - is typical for conditional analyses.<sup>7</sup>

As an illustration of that fallacy, consider the following theory of right action: *It is right for S to  $\Phi$  iff, if S were wise, S would  $\Phi$ .* Suppose that S is in fact a fool, and that someone asks him for advice. If he were wise, he would give that advice. (And it would be good advice too: advice from a wise person.) Our theory entails that S *should* give that advice. But in fact he *should not* give that advice. For in fact he is a fool, and fools shouldn’t give advice. The wisdom featured in our analysans has side effects that render that analysans noncoextensional with its analysandum. Our theory of right action, then, commits the conditional fallacy in a particularly obvious way.

Zagzebski’s view of epistemic significance commits it too, even if we add perfect rationality to the conscientious thought that its analysans already features. Some people are so constituted that conscientiousness combined with perfect rationality would have side effects that wreak havoc on their carings. What is significant for these people is not what they would care about if conscientious and perfectly rational.

The foregoing “conditional fallacy” argument also refutes the account of epistemic significance that can be culled from Philip Kitcher’s recent writings.<sup>8</sup> In those writings, Kitcher articulates a view according to which the epistemic significance of a given proposition for a given person is a function of that person’s *idealized* curiosities. Roughly, the view is that a proposition is significant for one just if it answers a question about which one has an idealized curiosity. And one has an *idealized* curiosity about a

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<sup>7</sup> See Shope (1978).

<sup>8</sup> Kitcher (2001, 2004).

question just in case one *would* be curious about that question, if one *were* in an idealized situation in which one were especially rational and informed of the relevant facts.<sup>9</sup>

When one is informed of a fact, and one recognizes the proper connections of that fact to one's questions, one stops being curious about questions that are answered by that fact. So, it follows from Kitcher's account of epistemic significance that so long as one recognizes the proper connections, the "relevant facts" about which one would be informed in the idealized situation *cannot be epistemically significant for one*.

And whatever these "relevant facts" are, they are surely epistemically significant at least some of the time, for at least some of the people who recognize proper evidential connections. Kitcher's theory of epistemic significance therefore joins the theories of epistemic significance we can cull from recent work by Goldman and Zagzebski: all of those theories commit the conditional fallacy.

Now that I've pointed out some advantages of the curiosity-based approach and criticized some main extant versions of that approach, I'll try to build a new curiosity-based theory that is better off.

### **2.3 The explanatory curiosity theory: first pass**

We want that theory to avoid the conditional fallacy. That theory should also find a middle ground between Plato and Hume. And it should do so by identifying a property that is somehow purely intellectual, and that comes in degrees, to allow for *amounts* of significance. Along with all of that, it should fruitfully address the problems of trivial truths, belief-body comparisons and scarce resource distribution. Building such a theory is the main point of this chapter; and now we are in a position to get on to it.

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<sup>9</sup> Compare e.g. Rawls' (1971: 408) reliance on the desires one would have "with full awareness of the relevant facts and after careful consideration of the consequences".

Due to the advantages pointed out above, I think the curiosity tradition is on the track towards giving us what we want. The task is to develop its details. In trying to complete this task we can't simply say that significant propositions are those that answer to one's curiosities. As the case of the informative book shows, some things merely *inherit* significance from those propositions. Curiosity-based theories should sanction this inherited significance. But how exactly are P and R related when R inherits significance from P? How does inheritance work?

It can't be viewed as a matter of what one would do in some scenario such as being rational. Those views commit the conditional fallacy. One potential way to replace them is by appealing to *instrumental relevance* as the determiner of inheritance. Learning that the book says that acid turns litmus paper pink would help Bill come to answer his question of whether acid *does* turn litmus paper pink. So the view that significance inheritance is an *instrumental* relation shines some light on the case of the informative book.

It shines some light on Watsons as well. Plausibly, it is *because* they can share subtly relevant propositions with brighter bulbs like Holmes, that Watsons are intellectually better off learning those propositions than learning random propositions. To illustrate this point, suppose you are a Watson *without* a Holmes, trying to solve a case on your own. You learn that the snake was speckled – knowledge that when shared with Holmes would solve the mystery, but for you alone will bring no progress at all.

Is this knowledge any better for you from an intellectual point of view, than is random knowledge about e.g. grass blade numbers? It is hard to see how it could be. By stipulation, you will never recognize its relevance to your driving question of who

committed the murder. Given this stipulation, your knowledge does not seem particularly significant after all. And there is a plausible account of why that is so, to wit: the important relationship between knowledge that is evidentially relevant to what answers your questions, and knowledge that answers your questions, is *causal*. The former knowledge valuable *as a means to* the latter knowledge – or at least, its surplus value over random knowledge amounts to value as-a-means. That is why subtly relevant propositions are significant for Watsons when they can share those propositions with a Holmes, but not otherwise.

The view that significance inheritance is an instrumental relation thus shines light on both Watsons and the case of the informative book. Filling that view in, we might conjecture that a proposition is significant for one just if it either answers a question one is curious about, or is valuable as a means (for one) to learning such an answer. Call this the “instrumental curiosity theory”. It says that significance starts with propositions that answer one’s questions, and is inherited through *instrumental* connections by other propositions as well.

This view steers clear of the conditional fallacy, and it has the virtue of being relatively simple. Alas, it does not get to the heart of the matter. Sometimes there is a *non-instrumental* surplus value in knowing propositions of merely inherited significance over knowing random propositions.

Here is a pair of cases is designed to convince you of as much. In both of them, you are curious about the length of your flagpole’s shadow. In the first case, you learn that the shadow is 25 feet long, and also learn some random facts about grass blades. In a

second case, you learn that the shadow is 25 feet long, *and* that this is so *because* the flagpole is 25 feet tall and the sun is 45° from the horizon.

In the second of these cases your knowledge goes *deeper* than the shallow fact that the shadow is 25 feet: you know why that fact obtains. You've *gotten to the bottom of* what you were curious about. This outcome - not just knowing the answers to one's questions but getting to the bottom of the matter - is epistemic success *par excellence*.

The (deep) extra knowledge in the second case has a surplus value over the (random) extra knowledge in the first case *regardless of what it causes*. Hence that surplus value is not merely instrumental. Hence the instrumental curiosity theory is false: it does not sanction the epistemic superiority *as ends* of deep to shallow answers to one's questions.

We need a theory that *does* sanction that superiority. Thus consider the following view: a proposition is significant for one just if it either answers a question one is curious about, or plays some role in explaining the truth of an answer to a question one is curious about. Call this the "explanatory curiosity theory". It says that significance starts with propositions that answer one's questions, and is inherited through *explanatory* connections by other propositions as well.

I think something in the ballpark of this view is probably right. Let me outline some of the view's virtues, and then try to make it more precise.

First of all, it constitutes a middle ground between Plato and Hume. Curiosity is a mental state, so it might at first seem that any curiosity-based view is fully internalist, giving mind-independent facts no role whatsoever in fixing significance. However, the facts about what explains what *are mind-independent*. Explanatory relevance to the

answers to our questions thus brings us some distance towards sanctioning externalist inclinations like Plato's, while keeping curiosity in the driver's seat. Let me illustrate this with an example.

The laws of thermodynamics explain the truth of the true answers to our questions about whether it will rain on a given day of the week. Indeed, similar connections to deeply explanatory truths are likely to belong to the answers to very many of the questions we are curious about. As it turns out, then, we tend to get curious about questions the answers to which are explained by the sorts of explanatory truths that Plato (and his contemporary externalist cohorts) would take to bear mind-independent significance.<sup>10</sup> The explanatory curiosity theory sanctions those explanatory truths as significant for us. By appeal to what *explains* the truth of what answers to one's curiosities, then, the theory builds an externalist superstructure atop its internalist foundations.

The foundations do push off the superstructure, when push comes to shove. Consider deviants such as Rawls' famous grass-blade counter, who is curious about how many grass blades are on his lawn, but has no other curiosities at all. (It is worth pointing out that not having *any* other curiosities would make this grass-blade counter *very* strange. He would not, for instance, get curious about where some food is, when he needed to eat. He would thus be poorly positioned to find out how many grass blades there are. But let us leave that to the side.)

It is plausible to assume that the grass-blade counter's only curiosities (namely, curiosities about the number of grass blades on his lawn) are completely unconnected to

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<sup>10</sup> Contemporary significance-externalists include Kitcher (1993), as pointed out above. They also include Roberts and Wood (2007).

mind-independently deep or explanatory truths. Given that assumption, the explanatory curiosity theory entails that mind-independently deep truths are not epistemically significant for him. So given our assumption, the explanatory theory is quite non-externalist when it comes to the case of the grass-blade counter.

Of course, our assumption might be false. For it might be impossible to be curious about things that are completely unconnected to mind-independently deep or explanatory truths. That might be so, because it might be the case that *every* truth is either mind-independently deep or explained by something that is.

Regardless, there are possible knowers who don't have any curiosities. Full-blown externalists like Plato would sanction mind-independently deep truths as significant for those incurious knowers, but the explanatory curiosity theory does not. The theory is thus a genuine compromise between the extremes of full-blown externalism and full-blown internalism. It satisfies some demands from each side, but does so by denying others. That it finds this middle ground is the theory's first virtue.

Its second virtue is that it helps us make belief-body comparisons. There is a set of epistemically goodmaking properties that, unlike significance, have nothing to do with the particular contents of the propositions one believes. These properties include justification, truth, and others. Let us call them the *epistemic state goodmakers*, since they are the goodmaking properties for epistemic states like justified belief and true belief.<sup>11</sup>

Now suppose there is a bijection between two belief bodies such that for each belief in each body, its corresponding belief is equally justified, and equally true, and in fact equally instantiates *all* of the epistemic state goodmakers. Employing the

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<sup>11</sup> Chapter 3 discusses epistemic states at length.



explanatory curiosity theory, we can see how these two belief bodies might differ in epistemic value, despite not differing in “epistemic state value”. One of them might take as its objects propositions that are more significant because more well-connected explanatorily to the curiosities of its believer. That body would then be the better one epistemically, despite its identical epistemic states.<sup>12</sup>

The third virtue of the theory is that it helps us solve the problem of scarce resource distribution. What are the intellectual grounds for inquiring into some matters rather than others? Well, some matters are irrelevant to what we are curious about. Resources should be directed away from those matters. Thus it is appropriate for me to direct resources away from questions about grass blade numbers, which I am not curious about, and the answers of which play no role in explaining the truth of any answer to any question I am curious about. Other grounds also matter to distributing scarce intellectual resources, for instance one’s chances of success in a given inquiry. The point is just that *one* of the grounds that matter is significance as defined by the explanatory curiosity theory.

Here are a few further virtues to boot, beyond those first three. The theory does not commit the conditional fallacy; it does not appeal to any conditionals. And (at first glance at least) it has the advantages of curiosity views in general, namely being well-positioned to answer the “open question” question of why curiosity gives rise to significance, and to make significance come in degrees. It can sanction what is right about the instrumental curiosity theory too, since it can sanction instrumentally valuable knowledge as just that. Moreover, it can (like many other theories of significance) solve the problem of trivial truths by saying why those truths are trivial. To wit: triviality

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<sup>12</sup> For a more extended discussion of these issues, see chapter 4.

amounts to nonsignificance, where the latter applies to a truth for one just if the explanatory curiosity theory does not rule that truth to be significant for one.

To summarize: I've come out in favor of the curiosity tradition and explored some attempts to develop it. The first of those attempts, the instrumental curiosity theory, did not get to the heart of the matter because it did not sanction the epistemic superiority as ends of deep to shallow answers to one's questions. The next attempt, the explanatory curiosity theory, did a bit better. I pointed out several virtues of that theory: (a) it avoids the conditional fallacy, (b) it helps solve the problems of trivial truths, belief body comparisons, and scarce resource distribution, and (c) it finds a middle ground between Plato and Hume. It can capture what is right about the instrumental theory too, while also being well-positioned to answer our "open question" question and sanction *amounts* of significance.

Despite all of these virtues, the explanatory curiosity theory has not yet been articulated in a very precise or detailed way. Better to get a fix on the big picture and then develop the details, though, than to go straight to those details without providing their theoretical context. With that context now provided, the details can be properly explored.

The remainder of the chapter engages in that exploration. I'll start by giving a more precise statement of the theory and identifying some pressing problems for continued work. Then I'll go through an extended discussion of the nature of curiosity. I'll also make some remarks about the connections of these ideas to Peirce.

#### **2.4 The explanatory curiosity theory: details**

First I should own up to some issues I've been abstracting away from. Those issues concern the satiation of curiosity by knowledge over time.

If one's mind is functioning properly, then if one is curious about a question, and later comes to know the answer to that question, one stops being curious about that question. Surely in such cases the resulting knowledge is better epistemically than random knowledge, despite the fact that one merely *was* and no longer *is* curious about a question it answers. Similarly, sleep following tiredness is better than sleep at a random time, despite that fact that during it one merely *was* and no longer *is* tired.

In both of these cases what really matters to a person at a time is not just what that person desires at that time, but also what that person desired in the past. Significance thus depends not only on what one *is* curious about, but also what one *was* curious about. Every curiosity theory – the explanatory theory among them – needs to clearly sanction that fact.

But it's tricky. If past curiosities matter, then *which* past curiosities matter? Is it only the curiosities from one's *immediate* past, or do others matter as well? And if others matter, and at different times in one's past one was curious about different things, and to different degrees about the same things, then how are these various levels of curiosity at times aggregated? How exactly do they determine what is significant to what degree for a given person at a given time?

Analogues of these problems have been addressed by moral philosophers in discussions of desire-satisfaction views of well-being.<sup>13</sup> But they have been completely ignored by the tradition in epistemology that takes curiosity to determine significance. I submit that we should try to resolve them by comparing curiosity to “conditional” desires

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<sup>13</sup> See Parfit (1984) and Griffin (1986).

like hunger and thirst, as opposed to “unconditional” desires like the desires to do your dishes or to do the right thing.<sup>14</sup>

Conditional desires make a difference to prudential value only if they are in one’s present or *immediate* past: yesterday’s thirst makes no difference to the prudential value of today’s drinking. Similarly, curiosities make a difference to epistemic value only if they are in one’s present or immediate past: yesterday’s curiosity makes no difference to the epistemic value of today’s knowledge. Reflecting this comparison, we can finally state the theory as follows:

**Explanatory Curiosity Theory of Epistemic Significance**

1. Proposition P is epistemically significant for one iff either
  - (a) P answers some question one is or immediately was curious about, or
  - (b) P plays some role in explaining the truth of some proposition that answers some question one is or immediately was curious about.
2. The more one is or immediately was curious about a question, the more its answers are significant for one.
3. The stronger the explanatory connections a proposition bears to other propositions that answer questions one is or immediately was curious about, the more significant is that proposition for one.

This official statement begins to resolve our issues about the satiation of curiosity over time; it entails e.g. that immediately past curiosities matter to significance, but curiosities from one’s extended past do not. There is more to say here, but I’ll leave it aside in order to point out two issues that both seem more pressing. The first is the nature of the explanatory relations to which the theory appeals; the second is the relative weights the theory’s two determiners of significance – answering one’s questions and explaining the answers to one’s questions.

I don’t have a whole lot to say about the explanatory relations to which the theory appeals. But at a first pass at least, explanatory relations are *dependence* relations:

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<sup>14</sup> See Parfit (1984) and Nagel (1986).

explananda are explained by what they depend on. There are many kinds of dependence, including the causal dependence of effects on their causes, the nomic dependence of law-governed phenomena on the laws that govern them, and the mereological dependence of wholes on their parts. I suspect that all of these relations (and perhaps others as well) can play a role in helping one “get to the bottom of” what one is curious about, and therefore that the explanatory curiosity theory should appeal to all of them.<sup>15</sup> Developing this suspicion is, clearly, a pressing problem for continued work.

Now to the relative weights of answering one’s questions and explaining the answers to one’s questions. I don’t have anything substantive to say about these relative weights. Nonetheless, the issue is important enough to highlight. We can highlight it by considering particular decisions about inquiry. Suppose you are on an NSF or NEH funding board, or even a local university research funding board, and you have to distribute finite grant money across a set of proposals. Some of those proposals focus on questions that are particularly hot in terms of the current interest in them, but do not seem to run very deep. Other proposals are on less-hot topics but seem to do a better job of addressing questions that will bring fundamentally explanatory knowledge in their respective domains. Which proposals do you fund, the ones that promise to bring the more deeply explanatory knowledge, or the ones that better reflect the interests of the researchers?

The decision requires you to assign relative weights to what answers one’s questions, and explanations of what answers one’s questions. That relative weighting is, in turn, a pressing problem for continued work on the explanatory curiosity theory.

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<sup>15</sup> Compare the views of Jaegwon Kim (1994: 67- 68), who sanctions a plurality of explanation-grounding dependence relations including the causal, the nomological, and the mereological.

### **3. Summary of the chapter thus far**

The chapter started out by arguing that we need to find a middle ground between Plato and Hume, and then proceeded to look for one. Three contemporary views – curiosity-based views of Kitcher’s and Goldman’s, and a caring-based view of Zagzebski’s – hold out the promise to give us that middle ground. However, those views are unsatisfactory; they commit the conditional fallacy.

For a variety of reasons, the curiosity-based approach seems to be on the right track. In trying to develop that approach, we need to sanction *merely inherited* significance: the significance of propositions that do not answer questions one is curious about, but “inherit” significance from propositions that do. We might try to say that this inheritance relationship is *causal*, so that a proposition is significant for one just if it either answers a question one is curious about, or learning it is instrumentally valuable (for one) for learning an answer to a question one is curious about. This instrumental curiosity theory will not work, though, because sometimes the merely inherited significance of a proposition adds to the value *as an end* of knowing that proposition.

A better theory appeals not to causation, but to *explanation*. On this theory, a proposition is significant for one just if it either answers a question one is curious about, or plays some role in explaining the truth of an answer to a question one is curious about. This theory allows us to sanction the surplus epistemic value *as an end* of knowing propositions of merely inherited significance, over knowing random propositions. For, plausibly, it is better as an end to *get to the bottom of* one’s questions than to merely get their answers; and explanatory knowledge gets one to the bottom of one’s questions. The explanatory theory thus lacks the flaw that led us to reject the instrumental theory. It can

also sanction what is right about the instrumental curiosity theory, because it can sanction the instrumental value of some knowledge over other knowledge as just that. It has several other virtues too, among them charting the kind of course we are after: a middle course between Plato and Hume.

One of the advantages of the curiosity-based approach is that it is well-positioned to answer certain “open question” questions by appealing to the view that curiosity is a particularly *epistemic* sort of desire. Or at least I claimed as much. In the next section I’ll elaborate and defend that claim via a theory of the nature of curiosity.

#### **4. The theory of curiosity**

To my knowledge there is very little literature on the nature of curiosity, and most of that literature deals with the issue only in passing. Zagzebski says in passing that curiosity is a desire, and that it is a blend of thought and feeling, and that it is neither pleasant nor painful. But she does not say what it is a desire for, or what sorts of thoughts and feelings it is a blend of.<sup>16</sup> Foley makes some remarks that are a bit more detailed. He entertains the thought that some people don’t have epistemic goals, and quickly rejects that thought on grounds that “the vast majority of us are intrinsically curious about the world; we intrinsically want to have true beliefs”.<sup>17</sup> This statement presupposes that curiosity is a desire for true belief; so Foley seems committed to a true belief theory of curiosity.

Goldman also seems committed to such a theory, but a more complicated one. This is because he argues that one’s performance with respect to a question of interest is maximally veritistically successful if one fully believes the true answer to that question,

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<sup>16</sup> Zagzebski (1996: 134-135, 144, 148).

<sup>17</sup> Foley (1987: 11)

and that for a question to be of interest is for one be curious about it in any of one of the three specific senses we've already discussed.<sup>18</sup> Since he takes success when one is curious to consist in coming to believe a true answer to the question about which one is curious, then, Goldman seems in some sense committed to the view that curiosity is a desire for true belief. The true belief accounts of curiosity we thus find in Foley and Goldman's work are to be contrasted with a different account that we find in Williamson's work. In one of several arguments that knowledge is important, Williamson says that curiosity is a desire to *know*.<sup>19</sup>

So these writers disagree about the nature of curiosity. Unfortunately, though, none of them give any *arguments* on the matter, as far as I can tell. The only extant arguments that I know of about the nature of curiosity are due to Kvanvig. Let's briefly explore those arguments.

One of them appeals to the possibility of certain sorts of conceptual deficiency: it is possible to be curious without possessing the concept *knows*; similarly with the concept *truly believes*. Kvanvig concludes from this that curiosity is neither a desire for knowledge nor a desire for true belief. Instead, he says, it is a desire that we should jointly describe in two separate ways: from the inside and from the outside. From the inside, he says that we should characterize curiosity as a desire, for any proposition *p*, "to ascertain whether *p* or not-*p*".<sup>20</sup> In some discussions of these issues, though, he replaces "ascertain" with "determine" and "find out".<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Goldman (1999: 95, 350)

<sup>19</sup> Williamson (2000: 31)

<sup>20</sup> Kvanvig (2003: 146).

<sup>21</sup> Kvanvig (2003: 9, 2005)



What is it to determine, or ascertain, or find out, whether  $p$  or not- $p$ ? Is to come to know  $p$ , if  $p$ , and to know not- $p$ , if not  $p$ ? Or is it to come to believe  $p$ , if  $p$ , and to believe not- $p$ , if not- $p$ ? Or is it something else? As far as I can tell, Kvanvig doesn't say. Furthermore, it would seem that if the conceptual deficiency argument against knowledge and true-belief accounts of curiosity is sound, then so too is a similar argument against Kvanvig's alternative theory. If one can be curious while lacking the concepts *knows* and *truly believes*, can't one also be curious while lacking e.g. the concept *ascertains*?

So much for the inside-descriptions of curiosity. What about the outside-descriptions? From the outside, Kvanvig says, curiosity should be described as a desire to "find that which is perceived to be true regarding the subject matter in question".<sup>22</sup> His stated reasons for holding this view are (a) that the sating of curiosity "occurs when a perception or conviction of truth arises, and such conviction sometimes will constitute knowledge and sometimes will not", and relatedly (b) that any mature science of human inquiry would describe the sating of curiosity in terms of the perception or conviction of truth.<sup>23</sup>

But even if that claim about mature sciences of human inquiry is right, it does not follow that *we normative epistemologists* should not describe curiosity in terms of knowledge or true belief. We normative epistemologists are interested in the intellectual goods of the world. If some way of shining light on those goods employs terminology that no mature science of human inquiry would employ, then what of it? The real issue is whether we can illuminate curiosity in terms of knowledge or true belief; and this issue is quite independent of whether mature sciences would do so.

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<sup>22</sup> Kvanvig (2003: 146).

<sup>23</sup> Kvanvig (2003: 146-147).

Moreover, it is far from clear that mature sciences of human inquiry would – as Kvanvig claims – describe the sating of curiosity in terms of the perception or conviction of truth. It isn't even clear that mere perceptions or convictions genuinely "sate" curiosity in the first place.

To see why, consider hunger. Would every mature science of human eating describe hunger in terms of the perception or conviction of being full? Is one's hunger sated whenever one has a perception or conviction of being full? The answer to both of these questions is *no*. If one takes a pill that removes one's hunger by manipulating one's nervous system, one has not sated that hunger but instead merely removed it. And mature sciences of human eating would recognize that fact, drawing a distinction between nutritive fulfillment and the feeling of being nutritively fulfilled.

Now compare curiosity. Just as there is a difference between the satisfaction of hunger and the mere appearance of that satisfaction, can't there be a difference between the satisfaction of curiosity and the mere appearance of that satisfaction? And just as mature sciences of human eating would recognize the distinction between the satisfaction and apparent satisfaction of hunger, couldn't mature sciences of human inquiry recognize the difference between the satisfaction and apparent satisfaction of curiosity? The answer, in both cases, is *yes*. But these answers amount to a rejection of Kvanvig's stated reasons for describing curiosity "from the outside" as a desire to find "that which is perceived to be true". Just like the arguments for the inside-descriptions, the arguments for the outside-descriptions are unconvincing.

In addition to making the foregoing main arguments about curiosity, Kvanvig also makes a side argument about the phenomenon. That side argument consists in an attempt

to undercut knowledge theories of curiosity by diffusing one of their attractions. That attraction is as follows. There is a certain sort of inquiry closure associated with the gaining of knowledge, as is evidenced by the fact that it is infelicitous to say “I know P but I’d better go get some more evidence on the matter”. This infelicity might be explained by the view that knowledge that P makes it illegitimate to be curious about whether P; an explanation which in turn constitutes evidence that curiosity is a desire for knowledge. Knowledge theories of curiosity therefore have the attractive feature of explaining the inquiry closure that comes with knowledge.

Kvanvig attempts to diffuse this attraction of knowledge theories of curiosity by saying that subjective justification brings the same sort of closure as does knowledge. In a sense he is right: when one has subjective justification one is no longer curious. But in another sense he is wrong: it is not the case that subjective justification leaves one’s curiosity satisfied.

If one is curious about whether it is raining outside, and comes on the basis of a weather report to falsely conclude that it is, and thereby comes to be subjectively justified in believing that it is raining outside, one is indeed no longer curious about whether it is raining outside. But one has not satisfied one’s curiosity, any more than the person who takes a hunger-eliminating drug has satisfied his hunger. The appearance from the inside of curiosity satisfaction is not sufficient for curiosity satisfaction, any more than the appearance from the inside of hunger satisfaction is sufficient for hunger satisfaction. Appearance is one thing, reality another.

If curiosity satisfaction does not amount to a mere appearance, then what *does* it amount to? Well, hunger is a desire for nutritive fulfillment, not the mere feeling of

being nutritively fulfilled. That is why hunger-eliminating drugs remove hunger without satisfying it. Similarly, curiosity is a desire for knowledge, not the mere appearance from the inside of knowledge. That is why subjective justification removes curiosity without satisfying it. Curiosity is a desire for knowledge in the sense that one's curiosity is satisfied iff one knows, just as hunger is a desire for nutritive fulfillment in the sense that one's hunger is satisfied iff one is nutritively fulfilled.

Now let me try to develop these thoughts about curiosity into a respectable theory.

First of all, let's take a step back and look at what is right in Kvanvig's arguments. His conceptual deficiency argument is on to something, namely that it is possible to be curious without having the concepts *knows* or *truly believes*. Thus, if curiosity is a desire, it cannot be a desire that one have knowledge as such, or that one have a true belief as such. Perhaps it is even the case that for any concept whatsoever it is possible to be curious without having that concept; if so, then for *any* concept of *any* epistemic that state, it is not the case that curiosity is a desire that one be in that state as such.

But the proper response to these observations is not to view curiosity from the inside as a desire that one be in some unexplained state like "ascertaining", and from the outside as a desire for the perception or conviction or truth. A better response is to stop viewing curiosity as a desire *that* one be in some epistemic state as such, and start viewing it as a desire *of* some epistemic state that one be in it. For, while desiring *that* one be in a state as such requires that one conceive of that state as such, desiring *of* a state that one be in it does not require that one conceive of that state as such. When Aristotle was thirsty he desired of H<sub>2</sub>O that he drink it; this despite the fact that he did conceive of

H<sub>2</sub>O as such. Similarly, babies get hungry before they gain the concept *nutritive fulfillment*; nonetheless, hunger is a desire for nutritive fulfillment.

If curiosity sometimes takes the form of a *de re* desire like these, then the conceptual deficiency argument does not show anything about what curiosity is a desire for. For all the conceptual deficiency argument shows, curiosity may be a *de re* desire, of knowledge of true answers to one's questions, that one has it. I do not think that this *de re* theory of curiosity is exactly right. It is, however, an important theory to consider on our way to articulating something better.

In considering it, the first thing we should make note of is a certain typical view about the relationship between *de re* and *de dicto* desires: to wit that in order to have *de re* desires one must also have corresponding *de dicto* desires. Let me briefly explore this view and discuss its relevance to curiosity.

Presumably, Aristotle had to conceive of water *somehow* in order to be thirsty. He conceived of it as water, not as H<sub>2</sub>O; thus when he was thirsty he desired that he drink water as such, but did not desire that he drink H<sub>2</sub>O as such. Presumably it is also the case that in order to be hungry babies must somehow conceive of nutritive fulfillment, though not necessarily as nutritive fulfillment. For each of these *de re* desires – the desire for H<sub>2</sub>O and the desire for nutritive fulfillment – it is thus the case that in order to have them one must *somehow* conceive of what they are desires for, whether or not one conceives of those things as such.

When Aristotle was thirsty he desired that he get water; when babies are hungry they desire, perhaps, that they get food. So for each of these *de re* desires, whenever one

has them, one also has some corresponding *de dicto* desire aimed at a proposition containing *some* concept of the thing that the *de re* desire is a desire for.

Is curiosity similar? That is, is curiosity a desire for some thing (e.g. knowledge or true belief) such that in order to be curious one must somehow conceive of that thing? If so, then whenever one is curious one desires some proposition of the form

<I  $\Phi$  the answer to whether Q>

where  $\Phi$  is some concept of whatever curiosity is a desire for.

I submit that curiosity is *not* like this, that it is *not* a desire one can have only if one has some concept of the thing that satisfies it. There *is no* form <I  $\Phi$  the answer to whether Q> such that curiosity amounts to a desire aimed at propositions of that form.

How could there not be any such form? Answer: because curiosity is aimed not at propositions, but at questions. I have, after all, been talking like this all along, saying that we are curious about *questions*. And in fact, this is the normal way to talk.

We don't say "I'm curious that P". Rather, we say things like "I'm curious about Q". Since this is the way we normally talk, we should take it at face value, and theorize as if it were literally true, until we are given some good reasons to theorize in some other way.

And as far as I can tell, there are no good reasons to theorize in any other way. Therefore, we should take it as literally true that when we are curious, we are curious *about questions*. But questions are not propositions: a "what is asked" is not a "what is said". So, we should not take it that curiosity aims at propositions in the way that belief aims at propositions. Rather, we should take curiosity to stand to *questions* as belief

stands to propositions. We believe *what is said* – a proposition, but we are curious about *what is asked* – a question.

(Actually, I suspect that in addition to being curious about questions, we can also be curious about domains, such as the mental. But the discussion is complicated enough without this wrinkle, so I'll leave it aside for now. Another wrinkle worth pointing out is that there are *de re* forms of curiosity just as there are *de re* forms of attitudes that aim at propositions. For instance, one may be curious of the gin in a glass whether it is water, without possessing the concept *gin*. This wrinkle too can, I hope, be ignored here. I will, then, proceed with the idealizing assumption that the only objects of curiosity are questions).

Given the point that curiosity stands to questions as belief stands to propositions, there is no reason for holding the view that in order to be curious one must somehow conceive of what curiosity is a desire for. That view takes it that the objects of curiosity are propositions: propositions of the form  $\langle I \Phi \text{ the answer to whether } Q \rangle$ . And the objects of curiosity aren't propositions; they are questions.

Since the objects of curiosity are questions, the conceptual requirements on being curious only require that one conceive of all the things that the question at which one's curiosity aims is a question about. Those requirements do *not* have it that one must conceive of the thing that curiosity *is a desire for*, in order to be curious.

And yet I have said that curiosity is a desire for knowledge. How can curiosity be a *desire*, if it does not take propositions as its objects? The answer is that curiosity is a desire for knowledge not in any standard "semantic" sense, but rather in a *normative* sense. Curiosity is a desire for knowledge, *not* in the sense that it takes as semantic

objects propositions that feature some concept of knowledge (or as Russellians would have it, knowledge itself) - *but rather* in the normative sense that one's curiosity has been genuinely, fully satisfied iff one knows the answer to the question one was curious about.

To summarize all of this, the view about curiosity that seems to me correct is as follows.

**The knowledge theory of curiosity**

1. It is *questions* as opposed to propositions that we are curious about. That is to say, curiosity stands to questions as belief stands to propositions. In this sense, curiosity is an attitude aimed at questions as opposed to propositions.
2. Curiosity is genuinely satisfied just if one comes to know the answer to the question at which that curiosity aims. In this sense, the relationship between curiosity and knowledge is analogous to the relationship between hunger and nutritive fulfillment.

In slogan form: curiosity is a desire at questions for knowledge. I have not yet laid out the full case for this theory; I have only responded to some arguments against it and constructed a positive argument for its first clause.

Here is a positive argument for its second clause, the clause that says curiosity is genuinely, fully satisfied by knowledge and only knowledge. Premise 1: it is worse epistemically to stop inquiry before knowledge is obtained, than it is to stop inquiry when knowledge is obtained. Premise 2: it is worse epistemically to continue inquiry after knowledge has been obtained, than it is to stop inquiry when knowledge is obtained. Conclusion: knowledge is the epistemic threshold, the proper place to settle belief, the proper end of inquiry. This is to say that curiosity is genuinely satisfied by knowledge and only knowledge, i.e. that curiosity is a desire for knowledge in the sense I have delineated.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> On the issue of when it is proper to stop inquiry, see William James' remarks in *The Principles of Psychology*, quoted and discussed in Zagzebski (1996: 153-154).



Why should we buy the premises of the foregoing argument? One reason is the phenomenon of inquiry closure that we have already discussed. Another reason can be found in the following two (actual!) cases.

The first case has to do with my alarm clock. I sometimes check that alarm clock five or more times before going to sleep at night, to make sure that it is properly working. This behavior is epistemically neurotic, because I know far before the fifth check that the alarm clock works, but I nonetheless continue to inquire into the matter, seeking a certainty beyond what is needed. The second case has to do with the hours at which the grocery store is open. I sometimes believe at late hours of the night that the grocery store is open, without checking any sort of schedule. In these cases I do not know that the store is open, and in some of them my beliefs even turn out to be false. In believing at late hours of the night that the store is open, but not checking any schedule, I'm being epistemically arrogant. I'm settling inquiry without knowledge, before I've reached the epistemic threshold.

These two cases constitute an argument for the conclusion that curiosity is genuinely fulfilled by knowledge and only knowledge. A different argument for the same conclusion appeals to scientific practices. Sometimes scientists say things like "we believe that  $p$  but we don't know, so more research is needed". Why shouldn't we take them at their word, which implies that knowledge is the proper end of inquiry? If knowledge is the proper end of inquiry, then curiosity is genuinely fulfilled by knowledge and only knowledge – which is what I'm trying to establish.

Some philosophers would deny that scientists mean it when they say that more research is needed because they do not yet know. For instance, Mark Kaplan and John

Earman have both argued that any state beyond justified true belief is irrelevant to the epistemology of science.<sup>25</sup> So these two philosophers would probably say that the utterances of “know” that we are considering ought to be taken mean something like “justified true belief” or “justified belief”. It is fairly easy to get into the swing of this sort of idea. For wouldn’t scientists respond with incredulous stares if we challenged their theories on grounds that they might be the Gettierized? Wouldn’t they be flummoxed by assertions that the data reports that they read may have been correct yet taken from stacks of reports most of which were mistaken? Or that there may be misleading testimony that they do not possess because it was uttered by lab assistants just out of earshot? And wouldn’t these reactions show that it is not knowledge that scientists are interested in, but rather something like justified true belief?

Most scientists probably *would* respond with these weird scenarios with incredulity. But this would not show that those scientists do not set the bar for ending inquiry at knowledge. It would just show that the scenarios are weird.

Furthermore, there are additional practices, over and above the practice of uttering things like “we believe that  $p$  but we don’t know, so more research is needed”, that are best explained by the conjecture that scientists set the bar for ending inquiry at knowledge. Consider the practices of demanding multiple repeated outcomes of the same experiments conducted in different places by different people, and of attributing especially high confirmatory power to multiple and varied kinds of evidence that support the same theory. The cross-context evidential support demanded by these practices tends to *crowd out accidentality* from the truth and justification of scientists’ beliefs.

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<sup>25</sup> Kaplan (1985), Earman (1993).

To be sure, cross-context evidential support does not *necessarily* do this; even the best scientific practices would not squelch evil demons bent on Gettierization. This is of no surprise; when people fight evil demons, the demons win. Luckily for us, though, it turns out that there are no evil demons. In our environment, cross-context evidential support *does* crowd out accidentality from the truth and justification of our beliefs.

This crowding-out point can be illustrated by the fact that multiple independent evidential tests on the propositions believed in Gettier cases would reveal to the victims of those cases that they ought to unsettle their beliefs. For instance, multiple independent examinations of fake barn country would reveal to fake barn tourists that there are fake barns in the vicinity; and on these grounds the tourists would properly unsettle their beliefs in the existence of barns in front of them. And eventually, multiple independent evidential tests would also show that the particular things that those tourists are looking at are actual barns and not the mere facades with which most of the area is populated. At this point inquiry would properly end with the resettling of the original beliefs, since the tourists would know that indeed there are barns in front of them.<sup>26</sup>

So scientific practice tends to eliminate Gettierization by replacing justified true belief with knowledge, given the environment in which we live. So, *pace* Kaplan and Earman, those aspects of knowledge that outstrip justified true belief are relevant to the epistemology of science.

The upshot of the foregoing remarks about inquiry closure, scientific practice, alarm clocks, and grocery stores is a set of arguments for the view that knowledge is the proper end of inquiry, i.e. that curiosity is a desire for knowledge in the normative sense I've delineated. That view explains why there is a certain sort of inquiry closure

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<sup>26</sup> Compare Foley (1996, 2004). I do not mean here to subscribe to his account of knowledge.

associated with knowledge. It also explains why my continuing to check my alarm clock is bad epistemically, and why my believing that the grocery store is open is also bad epistemically. And again, it explains three aspects of scientific practice: (a) saying that more inquiry is needed because we do not yet know, (b) demanding multiple repeated outcomes of the same experiments conducted in different places by different people, and (c) attributing especially high confirmatory power to multiple and varied kinds of evidence that support the same theory. There is, then, a battery of explanatory arguments for the view that curiosity is genuinely satisfied by knowledge and only knowledge.

Now that we've laid out all of the foregoing arguments for (both clauses of) the knowledge theory of curiosity, we should ask: how is that theory related to the explanatory curiosity theory of epistemic significance?

The answer is that the knowledge theory of curiosity *defends* the explanatory curiosity theory of epistemic significance. It does so by explaining why curiosities make things epistemically significant. And the explanation is just that when we view curiosity the right way, namely as a desire at questions for knowledge, it becomes clear that curiosity is a particularly epistemic sort of desire. It is a desire genuinely fulfilled by and only by *knowledge*. Curiosity therefore plays the same role in the epistemic domain that desires generally play in the prudential domain. Just as there is prudential value in satisfying desires generally, there is epistemic value in satisfying curiosities.

### **5. A note on the Peircean tradition**

One final remark worth making about the knowledge theory of curiosity, and the explanatory curiosity theory of epistemic significance, is that these two views bear

theoretical connections to the Peircean tradition. Let me briefly discuss some ideas from Peirce, and his intellectual descendant Levi, and their connections to these theories.

For both of Peirce and Levi, something like curiosity plays a special normative role. In Peirce's system, doubt, which for him is something like curiosity, is the impetus for inquiry. Moreover, methods of inquiry are a primary object of theoretical scrutiny, and they are evaluated according to their ability to eradicate Peirce's special sort of doubt.<sup>27</sup> In Levi's system, one must be forced from the outside, in the way that Peirce thinks doubt comes upon us from the outside, to decide among possible expansions and contractions of one's belief corpus; and it is only in the context of these forced decisions that the system issues epistemic evaluations. Moreover, in deciding which expansions or contractions to make, one's desiderata for making the decision consist only in avoiding falsehood and answering the *informational demands* with which one is faced. Here again, we have a special role for something like curiosity.<sup>28</sup>

The explanatory curiosity theory of epistemic significance, in conjunction with the knowledge theory of curiosity, explains why this tradition is right in giving (something like) curiosity a special epistemically normative role. And it leaves open the door for expanding upon the part of that tradition that most needs expansion: its apparent lack of connection with knowledge and similar epistemic states including, in Peirce's own case, genuinely true belief. Peirce-true beliefs are whatever beliefs would be held in the limit of overall human inquiry; clearly these things are not coextensional with the genuinely true beliefs. Levi allows genuine truth into the picture, but does not in any

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<sup>27</sup> Peirce (1877).

<sup>28</sup> Levi (1980, 1984).

obvious way leave space in which we can make sense of the surplus value of knowledge and justified true belief over merely true belief.

The lack of attention to these subject-matter-insensitive issues concerning truth (and justification, and knowledge, and so on) is an acute deficiency of the Peircean tradition. Any epistemic value theory that has a foot in that tradition – as does the theory I’ve started to develop in this chapter with an account of epistemic significance – had better say something to address these issues.

I’ll try to do as much not by appeal to a theory of epistemic significance, but by appeal to a theory of what I’ll call “epistemic state value”. Constructing such a theory is the task of the next chapter. In the chapter after *that*, I’ll combine the theory of epistemic state value with the theory of epistemic significance, attempting to produce an overall epistemic value theory.

## **6. Chapter summary and a look ahead**

This chapter has articulated and defended the explanatory curiosity theory of epistemic significance. That theory is, I have argued, superior to alternatives on offer from Goldman, Kitcher, and Zagzebski. Moreover, it finds a middle ground between full-blown significance-internalism and full-blown significance-externalism. Such a middle ground is, I argued in the chapter’s first section, the only ground firm enough for us build on.

Of course, theories of epistemic significance that appeal to curiosity need to be supported by stories about why curiosity makes things *epistemically* significant, as opposed to e.g. prudentially significant. I’ve tried to do that with a theory according to which there is a normative sense in which curiosity is a desire for knowledge. On this

theory, one's curiosity is genuinely satisfied if and only if one knows the answer to the question at which one's curiosity aims. Since curiosity bears this special normative relation to knowledge, then, curiosity is rightly thought of as properly *epistemic* sort of desire. And since it is a properly epistemic sort of desire, curiosity can be rightly thought to make things *epistemically* significant, as opposed to e.g. prudentially significant.

We thus have an explanation of why significance is of epistemic value. That explanation starts by theorizing about the nature of significance in terms of curiosity, and then identifies a normative connection between curiosity and knowledge. Knowledge is uncontroversially epistemically valuable. It is through its relation to knowledge via curiosity, then, that we can explain why significance is epistemically valuable. Epistemic significance is of derivative epistemic value, and its status as a thing of epistemic value derives from its relationship to knowledge.

This explanation of why significance is epistemically valuable is non-obvious to be sure. As I argued in chapter 1, *any* explanation of the epistemic value of significance in terms of a subject-matter-insensitive state or property would be non-obvious. Nonetheless, the explanation seems right.

The knowledge theory of curiosity has struck some readers as strange and perhaps unmotivated. It may well be strange. But it is *not* unmotivated. First of all, it is motivated by the arguments I've given in its favor. Secondly, and in a different sense of "motivated", it is motivated by the need for curiosity-centered theories of epistemic significance to say something about what is *epistemically* special about curiosity. Why does curiosity give rise to *epistemic* significance as opposed to significance of some other variety? To those to whom my own attempt to answer this question seems strange, I

extend the invitation to construct a different answer that does not seem strange (and that can be unified with a defensible overall epistemic value theory in the same way that, as we will see in the next two chapters, my own answer can).

After laying out an account of the nature of epistemic significance and the related phenomenon of curiosity, I pointed out some connections between these views and the Peircean tradition. That tradition gives something like curiosity a special epistemically normative role, as do the ideas in this chapter. It might therefore be thought that a certain acute problem with the Peircean tradition – namely, its lack of attention to subject-matter-insensitive epistemic states like knowledge and true belief – is an acute problem for the ideas of this chapter as well. That thought will be shown to be mistaken, I said, by some additional ideas that will be developed in the next chapter.

So much for summary; now to a look ahead. Recall our first quote from Hume:

...the satisfaction, which we sometimes receive from the discovery of truth, proceeds not from it, merely as such, but only as endowed with certain qualities. The first and most considerable circumstance requisite to render truth agreeable, is the genius and capacity, which is employed in its invention and discovery. What is easy and obvious is never valued; and even what is *in itself* difficult, if we come to knowledge of it without difficulty, and without stretch of thought or judgment, is but little regarded. We love to trace the demonstrations of mathematicians, but should receive small entertainment from a person, who should barely inform us of the proportions of lines and angles, though we reposed the utmost confidence in both his judgment and veracity.<sup>29</sup>

There does seem to be something right in this passage. In particular, it seems right in holding that it is better achievement epistemically to learn a proposition through toiling inquiry, than it is to learn that proposition through simple testimony. In some sense, there is more credit or desert in learning through toiling inquiry, than there is in learning through simple testimony.

The explanatory curiosity account of epistemic significance does not attribute any more significance to propositions that one learns in a creditable or deserving way, than it

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<sup>29</sup> *Treatise* 2.3.10.



attributes to propositions that one learns through simple testimony. Therefore, the explanatory curiosity account does not appear to be able to explain the truth of what is right in our passage from Hume.

This might seem to be a problem for the explanatory curiosity account. And indeed, it would *be* a problem for that account, if that account were supposed to stand alone as an epistemic value theory. Fortunately, though, the explanatory curiosity account of epistemic significance is not intended to stand alone as an epistemic value theory. Rather, it is just a part of an epistemic value theory. The rest of that theory will be developed in the rest of the dissertation. And a part of that whole theory – a part of in the next chapter – will address this objection from what seems right in our passage from Hume.

## **Chapter 3**

### **The epistemic value of epistemic states**

A central point of the first chapter was that any adequate epistemic value theory – that is, and adequate theory of what is epistemically better than what else in what ways – must take significance to be of epistemic value. Clearly, though, significance is not the *only* thing of epistemic value. This chapter tries to identify the extra things, and to build the first part of the epistemic value theory that addresses them.

First, though, will come an argument that significance alone cannot explain all of the statuses as derivatively epistemically valuable of everything that is in fact derivatively epistemically valuable: an argument, that is, that significance cannot be both (a) of fundamental epistemic value, and (b) the only thing of fundamental epistemic value. We need to find a middle ground between Plato and Hume to be sure, but that middle ground alone is not enough for us to stand on.

#### **1. Why significance is not enough**

One standard position in metaethics has it that reasons for action must be desire-like in the sense that they can motivate people to act. This sort of view, sometimes called “motivational internalism”, is sometimes associated with the rejection of the claim that moral value is objective. For, the reasoning seems to go, desires are not the sorts of things that are objectively adjudicable: there are no such things as the objectively right desires for a person to have. There are just the desires that a person *does* have. Part and parcel with this outlook goes the view that whenever good things are desired, they are

good because desired and not vice versa. For a provocative statement of something in the ballpark of this position, we can once again turn to Hume:

Take any action allow'd to be vicious: Wilful murder, for instance. Examine it in all lights, and see if you can find that matter of fact, or real existence, which you call vice ... You can never find it, till you turn your reflexion into your own breast, and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises in you, toward this action. Here is a matter of fact; but 'tis the object of feeling, not reason.<sup>1</sup>

One could imagine similar views about reasons *to believe*. Since reasons to believe must have the power to motivate, the views would go, one can have reasons to believe things only if one has the appropriate sort of desires (desires to believe truths and not believe falsehoods, perhaps).

As a matter of fact, epistemologists sometimes seem to commit themselves to this very kind of view. For instance, Kitcher writes that prescriptions for human thought

...must be grounded in facts about how systems like us could attain our epistemic goals in a world like ours.<sup>2</sup>

In a similar vein, Kornblith writes that

Epistemic evaluation finds its natural ground in our desires in a way that makes truth something we should care about whatever else we may value.<sup>3</sup>

Surely there is something right about these passages. Yet there are passable ways of interpreting them, on which they are obviously false. For, it is passable to understand them as entailing that one can have a reason to believe a proposition only if one has some sort of desire. The desire in question may have to be of some particularly epistemic variety, as with Kitcher, or it may be allowed to be any sort of desire at all, as with Kornblith. Either way, the passages can be read as entailing having reasons to believe requires having certain desires.

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<sup>1</sup> Hume (1740: 301 = *Treatise* 3.1.1). Much of contemporary metaethics addresses the following aporia: (a) moral reasons can motivate, (b) only desires can motivate, (c) desires aren't objectively adjudicable, and (d) moral reasons are objectively adjudicable. See Nagel (1970), Mackie (1977), Williams (1980), and Smith (1994).

<sup>2</sup> Kitcher (1992: 63).

<sup>3</sup> Kornblith (1993: 373).

And it is just obvious that if one has a preponderance of evidence for a proposition then one has a reason to believe that proposition, *no matter what one wants*, and indeed no matter whether one wants anything at all. Therefore, motivational internalism about reasons to believe is mistaken, and so are the views expressed in these passages from Kitcher and Kornblith, if they are supposed to entail it.<sup>4</sup>

Now, suppose that some epistemic value theory identifies significance, and indeed some sort of significance of a full-blown internalist variety, as the unique thing of fundamental epistemic value. Presumably, any such theory would identify what is significant for one with what one is in some sense interested in or curious about or desirous to know. But then, all of these theories would attempt to explain everything of epistemic value in terms of what are broadly speaking one's desires. These theories would therefore require that one can have a reason to believe a proposition only if one has some appropriate sort of desire. That is to say, theories that identify full-blown internalist significance as the unique thing of fundamental epistemic value entail motivational internalism about reasons to believe. As I just argued, motivational internalism about reasons to believe is false. Therefore, full-blown internalist significance cannot be the unique thing of fundamental epistemic value.

Some recent work by Zagzebski challenges this argument by defending what appears to be a version of epistemic motivational internalism. Let me briefly respond to that work. Recall Zagzebski's claim that all of epistemic value derives from "what we care about":

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<sup>4</sup> Compare David (2001: 159), Sosa (2001: 61), and especially Kelly (2003).

There is no epistemic value that is unhinged from what we care about...Epistemic values always arise from something we care about, and ...only from something we care about.<sup>5</sup>

The basic ideas behind these remarks are, again, that caring about a given domain brings with it an obligation to be conscientious about that domain, and that to be conscientious is to try to be intellectually virtuous, and that all of epistemic value can be explained in terms of this caring-rooted intellectual virtuousness.

But what about domains that no one cares about, and that aren't even related to anything anyone cares about? Can't we have epistemically valuable states like justified belief, and epistemically disvaluable states like unjustified belief, in propositions belonging to these domains? And isn't this the very fact we just saw to refute epistemic motivational internalism, now stated in terms of justification as opposed to reasons for belief?

Zagzebski is on to these worries, and she has an answer to them. That answer constitutes a response to the argument against epistemic motivational internalism. Here is how it goes. First, it concedes that we can indeed have epistemically unjustified beliefs in topics that no one cares about. Then, it adds the claim that this concession does not amount to a retraction of the view that epistemic value arises only from what we care about. Why not? Answer: because unjustified beliefs in topics no one cares about *are not wrong in any sense, including any epistemic sense*. She writes:

If a belief does not concern any domain I care about, ...or something we care about collectively, then I am violating no obligation if the belief is unjustified...I have done no wrong in any sense...<sup>6</sup>

This just seems incredible. It entails that there is nothing epistemically wrong with unjustified beliefs, if those beliefs concern domains no one cares about! Doesn't this

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<sup>5</sup> Zagzebski (2004: 368, 376).

<sup>6</sup> Zagzebski (2004: 372-373).

amount to a denial of the truism that “epistemically unjustified” is a term of epistemic evaluation?

Suppose we set that worry aside and provisionally accept the position, in order to see what follows from it. One of the things that follow from it is the claim that justified beliefs about topics no one cares about are *not epistemically better than* unjustified beliefs about those same topics. Even if Zagzebski’s position on its own does not fly in the face of the truism that “epistemically justified” is a term of epistemic evaluation, this result of it does. (In chapter 4 we will see that Goldman’s treatment of insignificant propositions has a similar result.)

I conclude that the epistemic motivational internalism articulated in Zagzebski’s recent writings is not defensible. As a result, those writings do not shed doubt on the view that full-blown internalist significance cannot be the unique thing of fundamental epistemic value.

Moreover, the problem that applies to views that take full-blown internalist significance to be the unique thing of fundamental epistemic value *also applies* to views that take full-blown externalist significance to be the unique thing of fundamental epistemic value.

How could the mind-independent importance of a proposition make any difference to whether justified beliefs in it are epistemically better than unjustified beliefs in it? It could not. Hence, full-blown externalist significance cannot explain the epistemic value of justification. Full-blown externalist significance is therefore in the same boat as full-blown internalist significance: neither can be the unique thing of fundamental epistemic value.

Nor do these problems disappear when we try to build epistemic value theories that refer only to importance of some hybrid internalist/externalist variety. *Whatever* significance is, it is not the only thing of fundamental epistemic value. (And on the theory sketched in the last chapter, of course, significance is not even *a* thing of fundamental epistemic value.)

## **2. Stage-setting for a theory epistemic state value**

Now, having argued that it cannot be the case that significance is both of fundamental epistemic value and uniquely so, I'm going to get back to the project of building a positive theory that identifies what the things of fundamental epistemic value actually are. In doing so, I'll try to build a theory that explains not only why justified belief is better epistemically than unjustified belief even when it concerns completely insignificant propositions, but also why a variety of related comparative facts also hold.

A good deal of work in recent epistemology takes it, on a surface reading at least, that general epistemic states like knowledge and justified belief, which can in principle apply to any subject matter whatsoever, are what is epistemically valuable. Clearly this branch of theorizing is on to something.

One of the things that we need to do in building an epistemic value theory, then, is to say what it is that makes subject-matter-insensitive states like knowledge and justified belief epistemically valuable. Why those states, but not *shooting bull's-eyes*, or *respecting peoples' privacy*?<sup>7</sup> That is the first question we need to answer in building an epistemic value theory that respects subject-matter-insensitive aspects of epistemic value.

The second question is one of comparison: among these subject-matter-insensitive epistemic states, what makes some of them epistemically better than others?

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<sup>7</sup> On the former example see Sosa's writings; the on latter see Goldman (2002a: 218-220, 2004b: 202-204).

It is widely thought, for instance, that knowledge is epistemically better than true belief. In virtue of what does this comparison hold?

Comparative questions like this one loom large in the background of a currently popular topic in epistemic value theory that I'll call the "swamping argument".<sup>8</sup> That argument, or at least a rough version of it, goes as follows:

One espresso cannot be better than another equally tasty espresso simply in virtue of having been produced by a more reliable machine. This fact seems to be underwritten by a general principle, to wit that good ends cannot be made better simply by reliable production. Now, true belief is a good end epistemically. But then if knowledge is reliably produced true belief, our general principle entails that knowledge is no better epistemically than true belief. Yet knowledge *is* better epistemically than true belief. Hence, knowledge is not reliably produced true belief.

This argument is a good starting point in our attempt to build a theory that answers our two questions. The remainder of this chapter is an attempt to build such a theory.

### **3. Against true belief monism (about epistemic state value)**

The swamping argument (or at least the version of it stated above) addresses only the relative epistemic standings of knowledge and true belief. But we should also pay attention to a variety of other subject-matter-insensitive epistemic states, including justified belief and false belief. Epistemic value theories should explain the relative epistemic standings of *all* such states, not just the relative epistemic standings of knowledge and true belief. I'm going to develop a theory that does as much – a theory, that is, of *epistemic state value*. But first, I'm going to address the theory of epistemic state value that seems the most prevalent: true belief monism.

Some new terminology is in order. Things that are *valuable as means* are thereby valuable in virtue of what they cause or tend to cause; things that are *valuable as ends* are

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<sup>8</sup> See Sosa (1988: 174, 2003a, forthcoming), Zagzebski (1996: 300-304, 1999, 2003), Jones (1997), Riggs (2002), Kvanvig (1998, 2003: 44-58, 81-99), Greco (2003: 133-134), Percival (2003), Baehr (forthcoming), Brogaard (forthcoming) Goldman and Olsson (forthcoming), and Pritchard (manuscript b). This argument is often called the "value problem argument", and said to constitute "the value problem". This is unfortunate terminology, because its use of the definite article suggests that the argument picks out the *only* problem having to do with epistemic value.



thereby valuable independently of what they cause or tend to cause. (As before, things are *fundamentally valuable* in a domain just if they are valuable in that domain but their status as such is not explained by anything; and things are *derivatively valuable* in a domain just if they are non-fundamentally valuable in that domain.)

*True belief monism* is the view that there is exactly one thing of fundamental epistemic value: true belief. The statuses of other things (like justification and knowledge) as epistemically valuable are, according to true belief monism, explained via the relationship of these things to true belief.

True belief monism in the unmitigated form just defined is clearly false, because it does not have the resources to explain why significance is epistemically valuable. However, there is a restricted version of true belief monism – call it *true belief monism about epistemic state value* – that does not run aground on significance. According to this restricted form of true belief monism, all of the epistemically evaluative facts about states like knowledge, justified belief, false belief, and so on are ultimately explained by the status of true belief as an epistemic good, which itself admits of no further explanation. As far as true belief monism *about epistemic state value* is concerned, there may still be other facts beyond these about epistemic value. These other facts may include facts having to do with significance; but the view is silent on that matter.

In the remainder of the current chapter, I’m just going to talk about true belief monism about epistemic state value, when I talk about any form of true belief monism at all. For brevity I won’t usually add the “about epistemic state value” to the label; I’ll just call the view “true belief monism”. The reader should take the extra clause to be implicitly at work, in the remainder of the current chapter.

Despite the fact that it is rarely explicitly defended, true belief monism seems to underwrite most work in contemporary epistemology.<sup>9</sup> It is worth noting that this has not always been the case: although it would be accurate to say that true belief monism is the dominant contemporary approach to epistemic value, it *would not* be accurate to say that true belief monism is the *traditional* approach to epistemic value.

Neither Plato nor Aristotle were true belief monists: they both recognized epistemic states higher than that of true belief – states like “noesis” and “sophia” that can be roughly translated as “deep understanding” and “theoretical wisdom”. Aquinas and many other medievals followed Aristotle in taking theoretical wisdom to be a higher epistemic achievement than true belief.<sup>10</sup> And the moderns followed them in turn.

Descartes, that figure who true belief monists sometimes wrongly take as an exemplar of someone who took the only things of epistemic value to be true belief and the avoidance of false belief, rejected true belief monism. He too took some sort of deep understanding or wisdom to be a higher epistemic achievement than mere true belief. Thus he writes in a letter to the French translator of *The Principles of Philosophy*, Abbé Picot, that

It is really only God alone who has perfect wisdom, that is to say, who has a complete knowledge of the truth of all things; but it may be said that men have more wisdom or less according as they have more or less knowledge of the most important truths.<sup>11</sup>

In the same letter, Descartes also writes that

The brute beasts who have only their bodies to preserve, devote their constant attention to the search for the sources of their nourishment; but men, in whom the principal part is the mind, ought to make their principle care the search after wisdom, which is its true source of nourishment...this sovereign good, considered by the natural reason without the light of faith, is none other than the knowledge of the truth through its first causes, i.e. the wisdom whose study is philosophy.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Goldman (2001) defends true belief monism, or something near enough. For a long list of contemporary writings that seem to presuppose the view, see David (2001: 152).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Collins (1962).

<sup>11</sup> Haldane and Ross (1931: vol. I, 204). Collins (1962) discusses Descartes on wisdom.

<sup>12</sup> Haldane and Ross (1931: vol. I, 205).

These passages indicate that for Descartes, the best epistemic state, and the epistemic state at with philosophical theorizing aims, is not *true belief* but instead *knowledge through first causes*. Descartes thus joins Plato, Aristotle, and their medieval followers in not subscribing to true belief monism. So, to repeat, true belief monism is not the traditional approach to epistemic value.

Nonetheless, it dominates the contemporary scene. Since the view plays such a dominant role on the contemporary scene, we should spend some time trying to evaluate it. Thus we should look at the ways in which its details have been explicitly developed. I'm aware of three views that explicitly develop these details.

The first such view, call it “consequentialist veritism”, explains the status as epistemically valuable of justification in terms of the instrumental value of justification as a means to true belief. This view is advocated by many people, and perhaps most explicitly by Alvin Goldman.<sup>13</sup>

The second view, call it “accessibilist veritism”, has it that justification is epistemically valuable not in virtue of its causal relationship to true belief, but because it is a more easily accessible proxy for true belief. Justification is, accessibilist veritism has it, good epistemically because we can more easily directly tell whether our beliefs have it, than we can directly tell whether those beliefs are true. This sort of view is suggested in some of Kvanvig's writings, and in Jones' influential paper on the swamping argument.<sup>14</sup>

The third view that develops the details of true belief monism, call it “aretaic veritism”, appeals to general principles about virtue in attempting to use the status as

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<sup>13</sup> Goldman (2001).

<sup>14</sup> Kvanvig (2003: 63-75), Jones (1997).

epistemically good of true belief to explain the statuses as epistemically good of other things. On this sort of view, the status of knowledge as epistemically good is explained by the claims that (a) goods obtained virtuously are better than goods merely obtained, (b) true belief is an epistemic good, and (c) knowledge is true belief virtuously obtained. Aretaic veritists include Sosa and Greco.<sup>15</sup> Like the other two views, this third sort of view takes true belief to be the unique thing of fundamental epistemic value, and explains the status as such of other things of epistemic value via their relationship to true belief.<sup>16</sup>

I'll now argue that each of these three views is in some way unsatisfactory. Since it is hard to see how true belief monism could be developed in any way *other* than the ways illustrated by these three views, it will follow that we should abandon true belief monism.

### **3.1. Against consequentialist veritism.**

Let us start with consequentialist veritism. According to this the version of true belief monism, justification is epistemically valuable as, *and only as*, a means to true belief. This consequentialist veritist account of epistemic value of justification is false; or so I'll now argue.

If something is valuable merely as a means, then it adds no value when its end does not obtain. More carefully: if  $\Psi$  is valuable merely as a means to  $\Phi X$ , then  $(\Psi \& \neg \Phi)X$  is no better than  $(\neg \Psi \& \neg \Phi)X$ . So, for instance, if sugariness is valuable merely as a means to tasty food, then sugary non-tasty food is no better than non-sugary non-tasty food. But then, if justification is epistemically valuable merely as a means to

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<sup>15</sup> See Sosa (1988, 2003, forthcoming) and Greco (2003, manuscript).

<sup>16</sup> Sosa (forthcoming) says he takes true-belief-virtuously-attained to be no less “fundamentally” epistemically valuable than true belief. But I think that is a suboptimal way to describe Sosa’s theory, so I’ll leave it aside.

true belief, then justified false belief is no better epistemically than *un*justified false belief. Yet justified false belief *is* better epistemically than unjustified false belief. Hence, justification is not epistemically valuable merely as a means to true belief.

Furthermore, if something is valuable merely as a means, then it adds no value when its end already obtains anyway. More carefully: if  $\Psi$  is valuable merely as a means to  $\Phi X$ , then  $(\Psi \& \Phi)X$  is no better than  $(\neg \Psi \& \Phi)X$ . So, for instance, if sugariness is valuable merely as a means to tasty food, then sugary tasty food is no better than non-sugary tasty food. But then, if justification is epistemically valuable merely as a means to true belief, then justified true belief is no better epistemically than unjustified true belief. Yet justified true belief *is* better epistemically than unjustified true belief. Again, this shows that justification is not epistemically valuable merely as a means to true belief.

We've just seen that the view that justification is epistemically valuable merely as a means to true belief is inconsistent with both (a) the epistemic superiority of justified false belief to unjustified false belief, and (b) the epistemic superiority of justified true belief to unjustified true belief.

It is also inconsistent with the epistemic superiority of knowledge to true belief. For, if justification is valuable merely as a means to true belief, then it is hard to see how any *other* property of knowledge that is not a property of true belief could be valuable epistemically - except as a means to true belief. But then, none of those other properties can add epistemic value to beliefs that are already true anyway: whenever  $\Psi$  is valuable merely as a means to  $\Phi X$ ,  $(\Psi \& \Phi)X$  is no better than  $(\neg \Psi \& \Phi)X$ . And if none of the extra properties of knowledge over and above properties of true belief add epistemic value to

beliefs that are already true anyway, then knowledge is not epistemically better than true belief.

That, of course, is just the swamping argument, drawn out a bit more explicitly and applied to consequentialist veritism as opposed to reliabilism. That consequentialist veritism is false is, therefore, one of that argument's lessons. Whether that argument *also* shows that *reliabilism* is false is an issue that we won't be in a position to address until the last section of the chapter.

### **3.2 Against aretaic veritism**

Aretaic veritism is a standard reply to the swamping problem from the true belief monist perspective. Defenders of this view typically motivate it with examples of the following sort.

A skilled archer shoots blindfolded, hitting her target though luck. She then shoots again unblindfolded. Her arrow flies perfectly, then is diverted by a gust of wind, and then by another gust is diverted back on to its path. This shot is successful in that it hits its target, and virtuous in that it is executed skillfully. But despite coming *with* virtue, that success does not come *through* virtue: it is due not to virtue but to the luck of fortuitous wind. The archer shoots yet again, now in the absence of the wind, and hits her target. This time her success now comes not through any sort of luck, but through her virtue as an archer.

Aretaic veritism is centered on the following account of knowledge: knowledge is belief that is true through one's virtue as a believer, in the same sense in which the archer's final shot hits its target through her virtue as an archer, and indeed the same sense in which in *any domain whatsoever* one may obtain not just success, but success-

through-virtue. In the epistemic domain the target is true belief, and to know is to hit that target through one's virtue as a believer. Knowledge is the epistemic species of success through virtue as opposed to mere success.

This aretaic account of knowledge seems to constitute a particularly appealing reaction to the swamping argument. For it claims that to know is to not just hit the epistemic target of true belief, but to hit that target *through virtue*. And it seems like a quite general fact that, while hitting targets is good, hitting targets *through virtue* is even better. Aretaic veritism thus appears to give us an explanation by subsumption of the epistemic superiority of knowledge to true belief: subsumption of that particular superiority under the general superiority of virtuous success to success.<sup>17</sup>

But despite its appearance to the contrary, aretaic veritism does not adequately explain why knowledge is epistemically superior to true belief. For consider the following two cases.

Hoodlums at the shooting range put weights in most of the arrows' tips. Champion archers go to shoot, and due to the weights they miss. I too go to shoot, and by luck I get the one quiver of unweighted arrows. Through skills that almost always bring target-hits, I make those hits. My shots are successful and, moreover, they are successful *through virtue*.

Hoodlums also work at the newspaper, and just before the presses start they replace one of the paper's truths *p* with the falsehood not-*p*. When the printing is almost

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<sup>17</sup> Sosa (2003) and Greco (2003) advocate versions of this explanation of the epistemic superiority of knowledge to true belief. Riggs (2002) and Zagzebski (1996, 1999, 2003) also advocate versions of it, although they do not subscribe to true belief monism.

done the editors catch the mistake, and they print a few corrected copies. By luck I read a corrected copy. In reading it I come to believe that *p*; but I don't come to know that *p*.<sup>18</sup>

These two cases are analogues, so whatever sense in which virtue is at work in the first of them is a sense in which it is also at work in the second. Since in the second case I do not know, then, true belief is not through virtue turned into knowledge, at least not in the sense of virtue by which success in other domains is turned into success-through-virtue in those domains.

Thus the relationship between knowledge and true belief is not a determinate of the determinable relationship between success-through-virtue and success. This renders inadequate the aretaic explanation of the epistemic superiority of knowledge to true belief. For that explanation is supposed to work by subsuming that particular superiority under the general superiority of success-through-virtue to success. But our cases show that the former is not a species of the latter, and is therefore not adequately explained by subsumption under it. We therefore need a new explanation of why knowledge is epistemically superior to true belief – an explanation other than the one on offer from aretaic veritism.

### **3.3 Against accessibilist veritism**

Let us now examine the third view that develops the details of true belief monism, namely accessibilist veritism. This view can be motivated by considering one of the ways in which things can be valuable derivatively but not as a means.

Consider the state *one's gas gauge indicating that one's car has enough gas*. Presumably, this state is valuable in virtue of its relationship to *one's car's having enough gas*. Thus, it is valuable derivatively. However, it is not valuable as a means to

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<sup>18</sup> This newspaper case comes from Harman (1973).



one's car's having enough gas. It can't be valuable in that way, because it is not a means to that end: the indications of one's gas gauge do not cause one's car to have enough gas.

Instead of being valuable as a means to one's car's having enough gas, one's gas gauge indicating that one's car has enough gas is valuable *as a proxy* for one's car's having enough gas.

To directly determine whether one's car has enough gas, one must stop the car, get out, disassemble the car, and look in the tank. To directly determine whether *one's gas gauge indicates that one's car has enough gas*, one need only glance in the proper direction. So, one's gas gauge indicating that one's car has enough gas is *more easily directly accessible* than one's car's having enough gas. Furthermore, one's gas gauge indicating that one's car has enough gas co-varies with one's car's having enough gas. Thus, in addition to being more easily directly accessible than the latter state, the former state is also *a proxy* for the latter state.

By being a more easily directly accessible proxy for the state *one's car's having enough gas*, the state *one's gas gauge indicating that one's car has enough gas* is valuable in a way that is explained by its relation to *one's car's having enough gas*. This sort of value – “proxy value” – is a non-instrumental species of derivative value. (Proxy value has been discussed in the value theory literature, sometimes under the label “indicative value” and notably by Gilbert Harman under the label “evidential value”.<sup>19</sup>)

According to accessibilist veritism, justification derives its epistemic value from true belief in the same way that *one's gas gauge indicating that one's car has enough gas* derives its value from *one's car's having enough gas*. Thus, the accessibilist veritist says the following about the epistemic value of justification:

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<sup>19</sup> See Harman (2000: 107-109, 143-146).

Just as the gas gauge is a more easily directly accessible proxy for the full tank, justification is a more easily directly accessible proxy for true belief. It is much easier to directly tell whether our beliefs are justified than it is to directly tell whether those beliefs are true. Justification is valuable not *as a means* to true belief, but *as a proxy* for true belief.

This accessibilist veritist account of the epistemic value of justification is false; or so I'll now argue.

First of all, it is not obvious that justification is more easily directly accessible than truth. If justification is a matter of coherence, then it is hard to directly tell whether one's beliefs are justified, because it is hard to directly tell whether those beliefs cohere with each other.<sup>20</sup> If justification is a matter of reliable production, then again it is hard to directly tell whether one's beliefs are justified, because it is hard to directly tell what processes formed them, and whether those processes are reliable. If justification is a matter of being based on good evidence, then yet again it is hard to directly tell whether one's beliefs are justified, because it is hard to directly tell not only what their basis is, but also whether that basis constitutes good evidence for them.

On the other hand, it is often very easy to directly tell whether a belief is true. Consider simple visual beliefs. So long as you are in a good environment that has good light and lacks evil demons and so on, you can directly tell whether your simple visual beliefs are true *by just looking*. For instance, if your environment is good, and you believe that there is a table in front of you, then all you have to do to directly tell whether that belief is true is: look and see whether there is a table in front of you.

These considerations show that the assumption that justification is more easily directly accessible than truth is not obvious. But let us leave this point aside, and assume

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<sup>20</sup> See Cherniak (1986).

for the sake of argument that justification is indeed more easily directly accessible than truth.

Even given that assumption, it can still be shown that justification is not epistemically valuable merely as a proxy for true belief. To show as much, we need only show that for some paradigm case of something X that is valuable merely as a proxy for something else Y, the (relevant) relationship between X and Y is not identical to the (relevant) relationship between justification and true belief.

I'll now attempt to do that. Consider the following two cases about gas gauges:

Wrong Gas Gauge: You go driving but you do not pay any attention to your gas gauge. As it turns out, the gauge indicates that you *do not* have enough gas. In fact, you do have enough gas.

Right Gas Gauge: You go driving but you do not pay any attention your gas gauge. As it turns out, the gauge indicates that you *do* have enough gas. In fact, you do have enough gas.

Suppose that you are given a choice between living two whole lives such that the only difference between them is in one of their constituent events, and those two constituent events are as similar as they could possibly be, save that one of them is Wrong Gas Gauge whereas the other is Right Gas Gauge.

Since these two whole lives are otherwise as identical as possible, you should not take the mishap of the gas gauge in the one case to indicate that that same gas gauge might instantiate further mishaps at other points in the relevant life (that do not correspond to other mishaps in the other life). By stipulation, all of the other events in the two lives are as similar as they could possibly be.

Would it be rational to prefer one of these two lives to the other? No. Rationally, one should be indifferent between them. But now consider an analogous pair of epistemic cases:

Wrong Justification: You believe that there is a meeting tomorrow but you do not pay any attention to whether that belief is justified. As it turns out, that belief *is not* justified. But in fact, it is true.

Right Justification: You believe that there is a meeting tomorrow but you do not pay any attention to whether that belief is justified. As it turns out, that belief *is* justified. And in fact, it is true.

Suppose that you are given a choice between living two whole lives such that the only difference between them is in one of their constituent events, and those two constituent events are as similar as they could possibly be, save that one of them is Wrong Justification whereas the other is Right Justification.

Since these two whole lives are otherwise as identical as possible, you should not take the unjustified belief in the one of them to indicate that you would have *additional* unjustified beliefs in that one of them, that you would not have in the other. By stipulation, all of the epistemic properties of all of your other beliefs in the two lives are as similar as they could possibly be.

Would it on solely epistemic grounds be rational to prefer one of these two lives to the other? Yes, of course it would. One of them features an unjustified belief whereas the other features a justified belief, and all other things about them are equal. This is a paradigm case of an instance where one life contains more epistemic goods than does another. So, it is a case of one life that is epistemically better than another.

With the gas gauge cases, neither of the alternative lives is preferable to the other, but with the justification cases, one of the alternative lives *is* epistemically preferable to the other. And one's gas gauge indicating that one's car has enough gas is a paradigm example of something that is valuable merely as a proxy. Justification is, we've just seen, not epistemically valuable in the same way that *one's gas gauge indicating that*

*one's car has enough gas* is valuable. Therefore, justification is not epistemically valuable merely as a proxy – even if it is more easily directly accessible than truth.

Stated in a more summarized way, the argument against accessibilist veritism is this:

1. If something is valuable merely as a proxy, then it adds to no value when it is not consulted.

(So, when one does not consult whether one's gas gauge points to the full marker, pointings of that gas gauge to the full marker *are not* better as an end than non-pointings of that gas gauge to the full marker).

2. But justification does add epistemic value when it is not consulted.

(So, when one does not consult whether one's belief is justified, justified beliefs *are* better epistemically as an end than unjustified beliefs).

3. Therefore, justification is not epistemically valuable merely as a proxy.

Accessibilist veritism thus goes by the wayside, just as do consequentialist veritism and aretaic veritism. And it is hard to see how true belief monism could be developed in any way *other than* the ways these three views try to develop it. Therefore, true belief monism should be abandoned: it is not an adequate theory of epistemic state value.

#### **4. A new approach: epistemism**

Now I'll offer up a new theory of epistemic state value. For reasons that will emerge as we move along, I'll call this theory *epistemism*.

What facts should theories of epistemic state value explain? At least all of the facts encoded into the following table, where each state in the top row is said to be *epistemically better as an end* than each state in the cell below it, *ceteris paribus*. (The abbreviations refer to knowledge, justified true belief, and so on in the obvious way).

**Table 1**

K	JTB	JB	TB
JTB	JB	B	B
JB	TB		
TB	B		
B			

Here is an argument that these comparative facts all hold. Suppose that there is some instance of a state in the top row, and some other instance of a state in the cell below it, and that these two state instances are as similar as they could possibly be save that the instance of the bottom state is not an instance of the top state. (*Inter alia*, these state instances will be identical in what they cause.)

Given these assumptions, we would on solely epistemic grounds rightly prefer the instance of the top-row state to the instance of the bottom-row state. Hence, each instance of each top row state is epistemically superior to each otherwise identical instance of each state in the cell below it.

Since otherwise identical state instances are identical in what they cause, this superiority cannot obtain in virtue of any differences in what these state instances cause. But then, the extra value in virtue of which the superior state instances are superior *must not be value as a means*. And all value is either value as a means or value as an end. Hence, each instance of each top row state is epistemically superior *as an end* to each otherwise identical instance of each state in the cell below it. Or to put the same point more efficiently, each top row state is epistemically superior as an end to each state in the cell below it. That is to say, all of the table's facts hold.

But *why* do they hold? *Why* is it right on solely epistemic grounds to prefer the states in the top row to the states below them whenever these states are otherwise identical?

The standard way to address these questions would be via some sort of elaboration of William James' slogan that truth is the good in the way of belief.<sup>21</sup> That slogan has structured our Gestalt ever since James expounded it. However, its elaborations in the three forms of true belief monism (consequentialist veritism, aretaic veritism, and accessibilist veritism) are not adequately explanatory.

Perhaps we need a Gestalt shift. Let us therefore consider a new slogan: *knowledge* is the good in the way of belief.<sup>22</sup> I'm going to try to elaborate this slogan into a new theory of epistemic state value, a theory that explains why the foregoing comparative facts hold. Since this new theory breaks somewhat radically from the contemporary truth-centered Gestalt, it will be heuristically useful to first consider the following analogous moral theory.

Respectful acts are morally good as ends: acts instantiating respectfulness are in that way morally better than they would have been otherwise, regardless of what they cause. Furthermore, respectful acts are *fundamentally* morally good. That is to say, nothing explains why respectful acts are morally good, even though they are. Despite not being *explained by* anything, the status as morally good of respectful acts *explains* certain other things. Among these other things are the moral statuses of honesty and non-cruelty.

Honesty and non-cruelty are necessary conditions on respectful acts, but they are not necessary conditions on acts. In that sense, acts that instantiate these properties are

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<sup>21</sup> James (1975: 42).

<sup>22</sup> Compare the claims that knowledge is "the desired end in the case of intellectual activity" (Zagzebski 1996: 226) and that "Belief does not aim merely at truth; it aims at knowledge" (Williamson 2000: 208).

thereby more similar to respectful acts than they would have been otherwise. Putting this point picturesquely, we might say that honesty and non-cruelty are *respect-constitutive goods*, in that they each bring mere acts a step closer to being respectful acts. Moreover, honesty and non-cruelty are morally valuable *as ends*, since acts that instantiate them are in that way morally better than they would have been otherwise, regardless of what those instantiations cause.

This moral theory is fairly unconventional and probably false. Nonetheless, it is *understandable*. Moreover, it explanatorily unifies a variety of moral facts; and it does so via their relationship to respectful acts, the moral status of which it takes to be fundamental.

I want to take items of knowledge to play the same role in the epistemic domain that this moral theory takes respectful acts to play in the moral domain. Just as the moral theory takes the status as morally good of respectful acts to be fundamental, I take the status as epistemically good of items of knowledge to be fundamental. And just as the moral theory takes the status as morally good of respectful acts to explain certain other things, I take the status as epistemically good of items of knowledge to explain certain other things. Among these other things are the epistemic statuses of justification and truth.

Justification and truth are necessary conditions on knowledge, but not necessary conditions on belief. In that sense, beliefs that instantiate these properties are thereby more similar to knowledge than they would have been otherwise. Putting this point picturesquely, we might say that justification and truth are *knowledge-constitutive goods*, in that they each bring mere beliefs a step closer to being knowledge. Moreover,



justification and truth are epistemically valuable *as ends*, since beliefs that instantiate them are in that way epistemically better than they would have been otherwise, regardless of what those instantiations cause.

Generalizing these thoughts to *all* of the knowledge-constitutive goods (i.e. all of the necessary conditions on knowledge but not belief), we get the first principle of epistemism:

**Principle 1: Knowledge-constitutive goods are epistemic ends**

Whenever one belief instantiates more of the knowledge-constitutive goods than another, the former is better than the latter, epistemically as an end, *ceteris paribus*.

(Belief  $B_1$  instantiates “more” of the knowledge-constitutive goods than does belief  $B_2$  iff: the logically strongest knowledge-constitutive good instantiated by  $B_1$  is logically stronger than the logically strongest knowledge-constitutive good instantiated by  $B_2$ .)

This principle explains all of the comparative facts in table 1. For instance, it explains why knowledge is epistemically better as an end than true belief: it is better because it amounts to belief that is more knowledge-like in the sense that it instantiates more of the knowledge-constitutive goods. Similar explanations apply to all of the other comparative facts encoded in the table. The *knowledge-constitutive goods are epistemic ends* principle not only generates these explanations, but it does so by elaborating a natural idea: the idea that knowledge is the good in the way of belief. Thus, in contrast with each of the three forms of true belief monism, it gives us what we’ve asked for from a theory of epistemic state value.

And it does more. To see why, we need to be clear about the *ceteris paribus* clause. What must be equal across two beliefs when one of them instantiates more of the knowledge-constitutive goods than another, in order for the principle to rule the one epistemically better as an end than the other? The answer is: everything that could

possibly remain equal across those two beliefs, given that one of them instantiates more of the knowledge-constitutive goods than the other. Consider e.g. the principle's result that justified true belief is better epistemically as an end than true belief, *ceteris paribus*.

Unpacking the *ceteris paribus* clause, we can restate this result as follows:

**JTB<sub>ee</sub>TB:**

For any beliefs B<sub>1</sub> and B<sub>2</sub>, if

- (a) B<sub>1</sub> instantiates justification and truth, and
- (b) B<sub>2</sub> is as similar as it could possibly be to B<sub>1</sub> given that it does not instantiate justification,

then B<sub>1</sub> is epistemically better as an end than B<sub>2</sub>

All of the other results of the *knowledge-constitutive goods are epistemic ends* principle are to be understood similarly. Once the *ceteris paribus* clause is unpacked, all of those results just say that if one belief is as similar as it could possibly be to another, except in that it instantiates more knowledge-constitutive goods, then it is better epistemically as an end than the other.

Now we are in a position to see that the *knowledge-constitutive goods are epistemic ends* principle explains more comparative facts than those encoded in table 1. In particular, it also explains all of the facts encoded in the following table, again where each state in the top row is said to be epistemically better as an end than each state in the cell below it, *ceteris paribus*:

**Table 2**

B	FB	¬JB
FB	F¬JB	F¬JB
¬JB		
F¬JB		

Take for example the comparison in the third column: the comparison saying that unjustified belief is epistemically better as an end than false unjustified belief, *ceteris paribus*. If we unpack its *ceteris paribus* clause, this principle just says that if a token

unjustified belief is as similar as it could possibly be to a token false unjustified belief except in that only the latter is false, then the former (unjustified) belief is epistemically better as an end than the latter (false unjustified) belief. Now, since this token unjustified belief differs from this token false unjustified belief only in that it is not false, *it is true*. But then, it instantiates more of the knowledge-constitutive goods than does the false unjustified belief. So, once we properly understand the *ceteris paribus* clause associated with the claim that unjustified belief is epistemically better as an end than false unjustified belief, we can see that this claim is entailed by the *knowledge-constitutive goods are epistemic ends* principle.

Similarly with all of the other comparisons encoded in table 2. Whenever one belief lacks some knowledge-constitutive good but is otherwise as similar as possible to some other belief, the latter instantiates more knowledge-constitutive goods than does the former. That is why the *knowledge-constitutive goods are epistemic ends* principle entails all of the comparisons encoded in table 2, as well as all of the comparisons encoded in table 1.

Given the plausible assumption that the <epistemically better as an end> relation is transitive, we can conjoin tables 1 and 2 to form the following summary table:

**Table 3**

K	JTB	JB	TB	B	FB	¬JB
JTB	JB	B	B	FB	F¬JB	F¬JB
JB	TB	FB	FB	¬JB		
TB	B	¬JB	¬JB	F¬JB		
B	FB	F¬JB	F¬JB			
FB	¬JB					
¬JB	F¬JB					
F¬JB						

It may be more perspicuous to express these claims with the following graph, in which arrows pointing from one state to another indicate that the first state is epistemically better as an end than the second, and the <epistemically better as an end> relation is assumed to be transitive:

**Figure 1:**

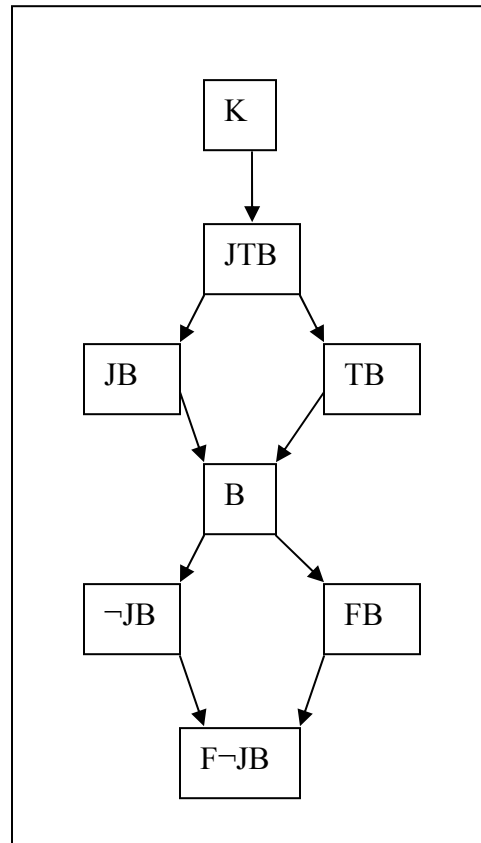


Table 3 and figure 1 each encode (the same) 26 comparative claims to the effect that some epistemic state is epistemically better as an end than another. All of these comparisons hold intuitively. But that does not *explain why* they hold. They can all be supported by arguments of the form I gave when first asserting them in table 1. But

again, these arguments do not *explain why* the comparisons hold, because at bottom they work by exploiting the intuitions that these comparisons hold in the first place.

When we find bodies of related data such as the data encoded in table 3 and figure 1, what we need to do is identify independently motivated, simple principles that explanatorily unify those data by jointly explaining why all of them hold. If we can find such principles, the fact that they do that explanatory work is an argument in their favor.

The *knowledge-constitutive goods are epistemic ends* principle does exactly what we want in this regard. It is a simple principle that jointly explains why the 26 related comparative facts in table 3 and figure 1 all hold. And it does so by elaborating a natural idea: the idea that knowledge is the good in the way of belief. The fact that it does this explanatory work constitutes an argument in its favor. The principle is, as we see in table 3 and figure 1, quite explanatorily powerful.

But there is more work for us to do. For instance, we should provide a story about the epistemic status as an end of withholding, the state one has towards a proposition when one considers it but does not believe it or its negation.

That story is best told by returning to our first analogy, the analogy of epistemology to archery criticism. Epistemology stands to withholding as archery criticism to stands to refraining from shooting. When one refrains from shooting one does not hit the target, but neither does one miss it. Similarly, when one withholds, one does not know, but neither does one have a *mere belief* – a belief that instantiates neither truth nor justification nor *any* of the knowledge-constitutive goods.

It is reasonable to take refrainings from shooting to be neutral as ends archery-wise: neither good nor bad. Therefore, it is also reasonable to take withholdings to be neutral as ends epistemically. Thus we have a second principle:

**Principle 2: Withholding is the neutral end**

Whenever an agent withholds on a proposition, that withholding is (a) better epistemically as an end than every belief that is disvaluable epistemically as an end, and (b) worse epistemically as an end than every belief that is valuable epistemically as an end, *ceteris paribus*.

Now, just as complete misses are worse as ends archery-wise than are refrainings from shooting, mere beliefs are worse as ends epistemically than withholdings. From the point of view we take in epistemic evaluation, mere beliefs are complete failures to know. They are the analogues of shot arrows that completely miss their targets. Similarly: justified beliefs and true beliefs are the analogues of shot arrows that hit their targets but only on the periphery, justified true beliefs are the analogues of shot arrows that hit their targets farther in, and knowledge is the analogue of shot arrows that hit the bull's-eye.

Continuing the analogy, it is *because they are closer to being bull's-eyes* that periphery hits are better archery-wise than complete misses. Similarly in the epistemic case: it is *because they are closer to being knowledge* that justified beliefs and true beliefs are better epistemically than mere beliefs.

And again, arrows hitting the target half way in are better archery-wise than periphery hits but worse archery-wise than bull's-eyes. This is *because* arrows hitting the target half way in are more like bull's-eyes than are periphery hits, but less like bull's-eyes than are bull's-eyes. Similarly, justified true beliefs are better epistemically than justified beliefs and true beliefs, but worse epistemically than knowledge. This is *because* justified true beliefs are more knowledge-like than are justified beliefs and true beliefs, but less knowledge-like than are items of knowledge. Just as the archery statuses

of periphery hits and middling hits are explained by the relationships of these things to bull's-eyes, then, the epistemic statuses of true belief, justified belief, and justified true belief are explained by the relationships of these things to knowledge.

We thus have a new epistemist picture of epistemic state value, one that eschews the explanatory priority of truth and replaces it with an explanatory priority of knowledge. This picture, elaborated as it is in our principles and illustrated as it is by the archery analogy, will no doubt seem odd to adherents of the standard veritist, truth-centered Gestalt. To them, the natural picture is that the epistemic target is constituted by true belief (as opposed to being centered on knowledge), and that complete misses of that target amount to false beliefs (as opposed to mere beliefs).

Even though the epistemist picture may seem odd at first, it is more explanatorily unifying than the veritist picture. The epistemist picture thus ought to be adopted on grounds of its explanatory power, even though it may seem odd at first. Eventually, after one spends some time inside its new Gestalt, it can come to seem just as natural as the old veritist picture once seemed.

Moreover, in considering the potential oddness of this epistemist picture, we would do well to note that breaks from the veritist picture are not without historical precedent. As we saw earlier, rejections of that picture can be found among the ancients, medievals, and moderns. The fact that other thinkers in other times (indeed quite great thinkers in those times) *did not share the veritist picture* may help blunt the force of the oddness that epistemism may seem to harbor.

To repeat, the main grounds for adopting the epistemist picture consist in its explanatory power, and in particular in its superior explanatory power as compared to

that of the veritist picture. We've already seen how the epistemic picture explains the facts in figure 1 (and table 3) and some other facts concerning withholding and mere belief. In addition to explaining these facts about states, it also explains some facts about properties. In particular, it explains why truth and justification are epistemically good whereas falsity and unjustification are epistemically bad.

Truth renders beliefs more similar to knowledge than they would have been without it. That is *why* truth is good epistemically. Falsity does not render beliefs more similar to knowledge than they would have been without it. And, unlike withholdings, false beliefs are not refrainings from shooting but rather genuine misses of the epistemic target. That is why falsity is epistemically *bad*, and not merely neutral.

So, the epistemic value of truth and the epistemic disvalue falsity both flow from something deeper: the role of these properties in transforming belief into knowledge. Epistemism thus explanatorily unifies the value of truth and the disvalue of falsity; this despite the fact that these two pillars of epistemic normativity are often taken to be completely separate in principle.<sup>23</sup>

What is more, epistemism further unifies these two pillars with two *other* pillars of epistemic normativity: the value of justification and the disvalue of unjustification. Just like truth, justification is epistemically good because it renders beliefs more knowledge-like. And just like falsity, unjustification is epistemically bad because it fails to render beliefs more knowledge-like, despite the fact that unjustified beliefs are misses of the epistemic target as opposed to refrainings from taking the shot.

The epistemic value of justification and disvalue of unjustification, just like the epistemic value of truth and disvalue of falsity, are therefore explained by the roles of

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<sup>23</sup> So taken by e.g. James (1911: 17) and Chisholm (1977: 14).



these properties in transforming belief into knowledge. In painting each of these four pillars of epistemic normativity into one and the same picture, epistemism explanatorily unifies them. This explanatory work, along with the explanatory work on states, constitutes an argument for epistemism.

But there is still more work to do. The aretaic veritists are certainly right in claiming that success through virtue is superior to success, and indeed superior *as an end* to success. We should sanction that insight, despite rejecting the further claims that epistemic success is true belief and that knowledge is epistemic success through virtue.

We can do as much by conjecturing that for each knowledge-constitutive good *G*, *belief that instantiates G through epistemic virtue* is epistemically better as an end than *belief that instantiates G*. Let me try to underwrite this conjecture with an account of what it is to be an epistemic virtue. Then, with that account in hand, I'll restate the conjecture a bit more carefully.

Epistemic virtues are standardly viewed as faculties or skills that in some sense tend to form a surplus of true to false beliefs.<sup>24</sup> These views are a relic of the veritist Gestalt. We should replace them with a new, epistemist view that countenances as epistemic virtues not only faculties that reliably form true beliefs, but also faculties that reliably form beliefs that instantiate *other* knowledge-constitutive goods – for instance justification. Beliefs that instantiate knowledge-constitutive goods other than truth are, after all, thereby epistemically good as ends.

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<sup>24</sup> That is how the “reliabilist” tradition that includes Sosa (1991, forthcoming), Goldman (1992), and Greco (2003, manuscript) views epistemic virtues. The “responsibilist” tradition that includes Code (1987), Montmarquet (1993), Zagzebski (1996), and Roberts and Wood (forthcoming) views them differently.

This epistemist view of epistemic virtues is not coextensive with the standard veritist view, because it is possible for faculties to reliably form beliefs that instantiate some of the knowledge-constitutive goods but not others. For instance, it is possible for faculties to reliably form true belief but not justified belief or knowledge; witness faculties that reliably form true beliefs while also forming other true beliefs that constitute misleading evidence against the first. It is also possible for faculties to reliably form justified belief but not true belief or knowledge; the faculties of the brilliant insane do that, producing maximally coherent fantasies. We should, then, separate knowledge-forming faculties from justified-belief-forming and true-belief-forming faculties. Contrary to the standard view, all of these faculties are epistemic virtues, because they all reliably form states that are epistemically good as ends. Thus, our definition of epistemic virtues is this:

**Definition of epistemic virtues**

One's faculty *v* is an epistemic virtue for one iff for some knowledge-constitutive good *G*, *v* in some relevant sense tends for one to form a surplus of *G* belief to non-*G* belief.

What are the "relevant senses" in which virtues can tend for one form a surplus of *G*-belief to non-*G* belief? This is a vexed issue. Standard accounts of epistemic virtues, according to which these things are faculties that tend to form true belief, sometimes say that epistemic virtues are faculties that tend *in the environments we normally traffic in here in the actual world* to form true belief. But this account of the relevant sense in which virtues must tend to form true belief unjustly discriminates against creatures from environments other than our own. It entails, for instance, that if some creature in another world uses faculties that tend to form true belief in *his* environment but not *our* environment, those faculties are not epistemic virtues for him.

An obvious way around this problem is to say that for a faculty to be an epistemic virtue for a creature is for that faculty to tend in the environments in which *that creature* normally traffics to form true belief. But this new view is problematic as well. It entails that vision is not a virtue for brains in vats: in the environments in which *they* normally traffic, vision does *not* tend to form true belief.

There are various extant attempts to evade these problems by finding an adequate way to delineate the sense in which one's faculties must be truth-conducive for one, if those faculties are to be epistemic virtues for one.<sup>25</sup> One of those attempts takes there to be *two* such senses: one corresponding to the first of the above proposals and the other corresponding to the second.<sup>26</sup> According to this sort of view, one's faculty is an epistemic virtue for one in *one* legitimate sense if it tends to form true belief in the environments we normally traffic in here in the actual world, and in *another* legitimate sense if it tends to form true belief in the environments in which one in fact normally traffics. I'm going to use a generalized version of this view to delineate the relevant senses in which epistemism takes faculties to be epistemic virtues, according to the above definition.

Thus, there are two "relevant senses" in which a faculty can tend to form a surplus of G-belief to non-G belief, in order for that faculty to be an epistemic virtue for one. First, such a faculty may tend to form a surplus of G-belief to non-G belief in the environments we normally traffic in here in the actual world. Second, such a faculty may tend to form such a surplus in the environments in which one in fact normally traffics.

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<sup>25</sup> See e.g. Goldman (1992: 157-163).

<sup>26</sup> See Sosa (1993) and Comesaña (2002).

Both of these senses of G-conduciveness are sufficient to render faculties epistemic virtues for one.

Now that the definition of epistemic virtues is filled out, we should define the notion of epistemic states as well. I've been using that notion roughly such that it corresponds to knowledge, true belief, justified belief and other such states. But we should have a precise characterization of these things, since they are what we are trying to evaluate.

Here we should include states that conjoin belief with knowledge-constitutive goods (such as justified belief), states that conjoin belief with the *negations* of knowledge-constitutive goods (such as unjustified belief), and states that conjoin belief with some of the knowledge-constitutive goods and some their negations (such as justified false belief). The following characterization seems sufficient for these tasks:

**Definition of epistemic states**

E is an epistemic state iff E is identical to belief, withholding, or the conjunction of belief with one or more elements of the set of the knowledge-constitutive goods and their negations.

These definitions of epistemic states and epistemic virtues are intended as attempts to construct a vocabulary that helps us explanatorily unify the facts about what is epistemically better than what else. Therefore, their adequacy should be judged by the explanatory fruitfulness of the theory in which they are put to work.

We've already seen the first two principles of that theory, namely that *knowledge-constitutive goods are epistemic ends* and that *withholding is the neutral end*. The third principle is this:

**Principle 3: Virtues improve epistemic ends**

Whenever a belief instantiates a knowledge-constitutive good through an epistemic virtue, and another belief instantiates that same knowledge-constitutive good but not through any epistemic virtue, the first belief is epistemically better as an end than the second, *ceteris paribus*.

This third principle follows aretaic veritism in applying to the epistemic realm the domain-general insight that success through virtue is superior to success. This widens the scope of the data that epistemism can explain. For instance, consider two equally intelligent philosophers trying to answer some question, one of whom learns that answer through diligent inquiry and the other of whom learns it through divine revelation (a pair of cases suggested by Plantinga).<sup>27</sup> The first philosopher's knowledge a better accomplishment epistemically than the second's, despite the fact that both of them really do know. For the first philosopher's knowledge comes through epistemic virtue and therefore is in some sense deserved, whereas the second philosopher's knowledge is undeserved, a mere gift of divine providence.

It is not clear how the aretaic veritist approach can make sense of this. On that approach, *all* knowledge is in some sense deserved, because all knowledge features belief the truth of which comes through one's virtues. But if undeserved knowledge can't exist, then it cannot be epistemically inferior to deserved knowledge. Therefore, it is not clear how the aretaic veritist approach can explain the relative epistemic standings of the items of knowledge in our pair of cases from Plantinga. At first glance at least, that approach cannot countenance the undeserved item of that pair as an item of knowledge at all.

On the other hand, epistemism makes quick work of the relative epistemic standings of these two items of knowledge. Its principle that *virtues improve epistemic ends* entails that knowledge through virtue is epistemically better as an end than mere knowledge. And, the diligent inquirer has knowledge through virtue whereas the

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<sup>27</sup> See Sosa (2003: 174 n.9).

recipient of divine revelation has mere knowledge. Thus, epistemism explains the relative epistemic standings of these two items of knowledge via its principle that *virtues improve epistemic ends*.

We can, then, explain quite a bit by elaborating the slogan that knowledge is the good in the way of belief, and combining that elaboration with domain-general insights about virtue and success. Nonetheless, there is still more to be explained.

Some knowledge-constitutive goods come in degrees, least controversially justification. Raises in degrees of these goods would seem to improve the epistemic standing as an end of one's beliefs. But the three foregoing principles do not explain why that is so. Nor do those principles explain why increases in the epistemic standing as an end of one's beliefs come with increases in the *extent* to which it is through one's epistemic virtues that those beliefs instantiate epistemic goods. We need a new principle to sanction these improvements in degree, in addition to the improvements in kind that we have already sanctioned.

Such a principle comes naturally. The basic ideas are: (a) increased degrees of knowledge-constitutive goods improve the epistemic value as ends of beliefs *because* it is knowledge-constitutive goods that they are increased degrees of, and (b) it is a domain-general normative matter that increases in the extent that it is through one's virtues that one obtains one's goods make for increases in the value as ends of those goods. Tidying these ideas up a bit, we get:

**Principle 4: Degrees improve epistemic ends**

- If G is a knowledge-constitutive good, then if B<sub>1</sub> instantiates a higher degree of G than does B<sub>2</sub>, B<sub>1</sub> is epistemically better as an end than B<sub>2</sub>, *ceteris paribus*.
- If G is a knowledge-constitutive good instantiated by B<sub>1</sub> and B<sub>2</sub>, then if for some epistemic virtue *v*, the degree to which B<sub>1</sub>'s G is due to *v* is greater than the degree to which B<sub>2</sub>'s G is due to *v*, B<sub>1</sub> is epistemically better as an end than B<sub>2</sub>, *ceteris paribus*.

This principle explains why more-justified belief is epistemically better as an end than less-justified belief. And it applies to belief that constitutes knowledge as well as belief that does not constitute knowledge. So it explains, via knowledge, why more-justified knowledge is epistemically better as an end than less-justified knowledge: a datum that on our approach might at first have seemed problematic.

It also illuminates some interesting cases, including that of the two gods one of whom learns through toiling inquiry and the other of whom learns from the first in conversation (a case from Zagzebski).<sup>28</sup> These two gods know the same things, have the same degrees of knowledge-constitutive goods, and both form their knowledge through epistemic virtues. But the toiling god's knowledge owes a greater debt to his virtues than does the listening god's knowledge; his active inquiry plays a larger role in the genesis of his knowledge than does the listening god's passive reception of testimony. It is because of the higher degree to which his knowledge comes through virtue, then, that the toiling god does better epistemically than the listening god.

Now, given principles 1-4, we are in a position to fulfill the promissory note from the end of chapter 2. There is an important objection to the theory of the nature of epistemic significance developed in that chapter, to wit that it does not make sense of the fact that one and the same epistemic state seems to be better when earned as opposed to when received as a mere gift. It is indeed correct that epistemic states are better earned than merely received, and indeed better to the degree that they are earned instead of merely received. But we should not try to build this fact into a theory of the nature of epistemic significance. Rather, we should build it into the theory of epistemic state value, as I've just done with principles 3 and 4. Given that this fact is explained by our

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<sup>28</sup> Zagzebski (1996: 26-28).

overall theory, it is no problem for this fact to be ignored by the part of the theory that describes the nature of epistemic significance.

So much for fulfilling the promissory note from the last chapter; back to work on our current issues. Our principles up to this point have only addressed epistemic value *as ends* of various epistemic states. But, clearly, some of those states are also epistemically valuable *as means*. These include justified belief and true belief, since each of these is epistemically valuable as an end and each tends to bring about the other – at least in the environments we normally traffic in here in the actual world. Thus we have a fifth final principle:

**Principle 5: epistemic states can be epistemic means**

If an epistemic state *e* tends *in some relevant sense* to bring about some other epistemic state *e\** for one, and *e\** is epistemically good as an end, then *e* is epistemically good as a means for one.

Two clarificatory points. First, the “relevant senses” here are analogues of the “relevant senses” that define the epistemic virtues. Thus, *e* tends in some relevant sense to bring about *e\** for one just in case either (a) *e* tends in the environments we normally traffic in here in the actual world to bring about *e\**, or (b) *e* tends in the environments in which one in fact normally traffics to bring about *e\**. Both of these senses of epistemic-end-conduciveness are sufficient to render epistemic states epistemically good as means for one.

Second, this principle applies only to states, and indeed only to epistemic states. Clearly, many other things can *also* be epistemically valuable as means, for instance belief-forming processes. A full epistemic value theory would explain why these too are epistemically valuable as means, and it would explain many other things as well. This dissertation attempts to explain many (though of course not *all*) of those other things.



But the five principles developed in this chapter are not a full epistemic value theory. They are just part of such a theory. Their subject matter is epistemic value of epistemic states; they constitute the *theory of epistemic state value* contained in a broader overall theory of epistemic value.

In addressing that particular species of epistemic value, the first five principles take knowledge to be a fundamental epistemic good, and they explain a variety of data by appeal to the status of knowledge as an epistemic good. In doing this, they take a variety states other than knowledge, including justified belief, to have their epistemic normativity *derivatively*.

This does *not* entail that they have their epistemic normativity *merely as means*. Many of these states are epistemically valuable *as ends*, and some of them, including false belief and mere belief, are epistemically disvaluable as ends. Therefore, the fundamental/derivative distinction is not identical to the as-an-end/as-a-means distinction. The instrumental relation is not the only relation via which value can be derived (a point that value theorists have long recognized).<sup>29</sup>

To recapitulate: the five principles of epistemism articulated in this chapter meet the minimal adequacy conditions we laid down on theories of epistemic state value. And they explain a variety of data beyond those marshaled in the minimal adequacy conditions. These other data include not only some interesting cases from Plantinga and Zagzebski, but also the epistemically normative statuses of (a) truth, falsity, justification, and unjustification, (b) states formed through epistemic virtues, and (c) degrees of both knowledge-constitutive goods and one's possession of those goods through epistemic virtues.

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<sup>29</sup> See Lewis (1946), Nozick (1980), Chang (1997), Harman (2000), and especially Korsgaard (1983).

The first five principles of epistemism have other advantages as well. In particular, they are well suited as a reaction to the swamping argument, since they explain why knowledge is epistemically superior to true belief. Let me end the chapter by exploring this point in more detail.

### **5. The swamping argument revisited**

It is one thing to give an account of something's nature, quite another to give an account of that thing's value. Consider eyeglasses, for instance. We should demand of accounts of the *nature* of eyeglasses that they describe the functional role of eyeglasses in bending light so as to render one's visual images more veridical. But we should not demand that they explain why whatever plays that functional role is thereby valuable. We should not, for instance, fault psychophysics textbooks for being devoid of evaluative claims, including evaluative claims about eyeglasses.

To be sure, it would be problematic for accounts of the nature of eyeglasses to be *inconsistent* with the fact that eyeglasses are valuable. But it would not be problematic for those accounts to simply *lack explanations* of that fact, while nonetheless being consistent with it. And so it is generally: insofar as we demand of accounts of the natures of things that they are somehow related to the facts about the values of those things, we should demand only that those accounts are consistent with those facts, and not that they explain them.

Given this general methodological point, we can see that reliabilism is not refuted by the swamping argument. For reliabilism is consistent with an explanation of the fact that knowledge is epistemically superior to true belief - namely the epistemist explanation. Since it is consistent with an explanation of that superiority, reliabilism is

consistent with the fact that that superiority holds. But then, reliabilism does all we should demand of it with respect to the fact that that superiority holds. Hence reliabilism is not refuted by the swamping argument.

Where then does the swamping argument go wrong? The answer seems to be: in tacitly assuming true belief monism. Given that assumption, the property *being reliably produced* can be epistemically valuable only as a means to true belief. And if  $\Psi$  is valuable merely as a means to  $\Phi X$ , then  $(\Psi \& \Phi)X$  is no better than  $(\neg \Psi \& \Phi)X$ . Thus, given true belief monism, reliably produced true belief is no better epistemically than unreliably produced true belief. But then given reliabilism, *knowledge* is no better epistemically than unreliably produced true belief.

This, of course, is just to say that reliabilism is refuted by the swamping argument *when it is conjoined with true belief monism*. But true belief monism is false. Thus it is of no surprise that the conjunction of reliabilism with true belief monism is false. The conjunction of *any* theory of knowledge with true belief monism would be false! What the swamping argument really refutes is not reliabilism, but rather the version of true belief monism that would seem to best fit with reliabilism, if the two had to be conjoined. And that version is, of course, consequentialist veritism.

It isn't completely clear why this point - that the swamping argument refutes not reliabilism but consequentialist veritism - has not yet been made in the literature. But perhaps one of the reasons is that the truth-centered Gestalt is so deeply engrained into contemporary epistemology that it is practically impossible for us to switch away from. From within that Gestalt it seems obvious that reliabilism is refuted by the swamping

argument. But this is only because that Gestalt traps us inside a picture of true belief as the only thing of fundamental epistemic value.

Once we break free from that picture, we can see that *it*, and not reliabilism, was the culprit all along. As a result, epistemism brings us to see what is right about the swamping argument as well as what is wrong with it. What is right about it is that it refutes consequentialist veritism; what is wrong with it is its claim to refute reliabilism.

## **6. Chapter summary and a look ahead**

In this chapter I've tried to do four things: show that epistemic value theories must address more than just significance, identify what those other things are, build an epistemic value theory that addresses them, and use that theory to dissolve the swamping argument against reliabilism. In the next chapter, I'll further develop the theory so that it deals with not only the epistemic value of epistemic states, but also the evaluative impact of epistemic significance on those states. Thus, whereas the theory as developed so far only answers questions like

Is knowledge epistemically better than true belief, and if so why?,

the next chapter further develops epistemism so as to also answer questions like

Is significant knowledge epistemically better than insignificant knowledge, and if so why?

## **Chapter 4**

### **The epistemic value of epistemic significance**

This chapter continues to develop epistemism. In doing this, it moves beyond comparisons of the epistemic states to one another, and makes further comparisons that have to do with significance. So, whereas chapter 2 argued for theory of the nature of significance, this chapter argues for a theory of the epistemic value of epistemic significance. That is to say, it argues for some principles that compare states like *believing a true significant proposition* and *believing a true insignificant proposition*.

#### **1. A new principle**

The first five principles of epistemism do not give us everything we need from an epistemic value theory. In particular, they do not tell us anything about the epistemic value of epistemic significance. We therefore need to supplement principles 1-5 so that they give a role to epistemic significance in epistemic value. We already built a theory in chapter 2 of the conditions under which a proposition has epistemic significance for a person. So, now, we can take that theory as one of our background assumptions. With that theory assumed to be true, we can try to give an account of the ways in which significance makes epistemic states better or worse.

The basic idea I want to push here is that significance *amplifies* epistemic value, so that otherwise good epistemic states like knowledge are even better when they concern significant propositions as opposed to insignificant ones, and otherwise bad epistemic states like false belief are even worse when they concern significant propositions as opposed to insignificant ones. A very first pass at that principle is as follows: (a) for any

epistemic state that has a positive level according to principles 1-5, that state is made *better still* to the extent that the proposition that it takes as its object is epistemically significant for the believer, and (b) for any epistemic state that has a negative level according to principles 1-5, that state is made *worse still* to the extent that the proposition that it takes as its object is epistemically significant for the believer. The basic idea behind this principle is that if one knows, or has a justified belief, or has some other positive epistemic state, then all the better if what one knows is significant, for one has succeeded *when it particularly matters*. However, if one has a negative epistemic state, then one has *made a mistake* when it particularly matters. Cleaning all of this up a bit, we get:

**Principle 6: significance amplifies epistemic value**

Suppose that A and B are token beliefs such that the proposition at which A aims is more significant (for the person who holds A) than is the proposition at which B aims (for the person who holds B). Then,

- If principles 1-5 render A of equal epistemic standing (as an end) as B and that standing is *positive*, then A is epistemically better as an end than B.
- If principles 1-5 render A of equal epistemic standing (as an end) as B and that standing is *negative*, then A is epistemically worse epistemically as an end than B.

The basic thrust of this principle is, again, that significance makes otherwise good states even better and otherwise bad states even worse. The basic idea behind the view is that if one does well then so much the better if it important things are at stake, and that if one does poorly then so much the worse if important things are at stake. Putting the same point slightly differently, success when it particularly matters it better than success when it does not particularly matter, and failure when it particularly matters is worse than failure when it does not particularly matter.

It is worth remarking on the fact that the *significance amplifies epistemic value* principle encodes an important departure from similarly themed work of Isaac Levi's.<sup>1</sup> Levi countenances something like epistemic significance; he calls it “informational value”. He combines the view that one’s beliefs ought to be true with the view that they ought to have as much informational value as possible, and uses this combination of views to define epistemic utility functions for persons at times. These functions take informational value to be good whether or not it is combined with truth. So, for Levi, if one’s views are all false, then one does better by having views with a lot of informational value as opposed to very little information value, even though those views are all false.

On my own account, however, one does *worse* by having views that are more significant, if one’s beliefs are false (and also lacking in all of the other knowledge-constitutive goods, other than truth). I’ve mentioned this difference between Levi’s position and my own because Levi’s position is one of the few positions in the ballpark of my own, so it is important to compare the two views. But now let me now move on, leaving Levi behind.

## **2. Summary and plan for the remainder of the chapter**

Epistemism as developed thus far takes two things to matter to what is epistemically better than what else as an end: epistemic significance and epistemic state value. These two inputs into epistemic value are expressed in principle 6 and principles 1-5 respectively. Just as the main arguments for the first five principles consisted in pointing out explanatory work that those principles do, so too will the main arguments for principles 6. The main way I’ll illustrate this explanatory work is by criticizing other theories for not doing it, and then showing how epistemism does do it.

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<sup>1</sup> Levi (1967, 1980, 1984, 1991)

The best worked-out extant theory in the ballpark of epistemism is probably Alvin Goldman's theory of veritistic value. (Levi's theory is also very well worked out; we've just seen, though, that it does not properly deal with the interface between significance and epistemic states.) Throughout most of this chapter, then, I'll be arguing for epistemism by pointing out explanatory work that epistemism does, but which Goldman's theory of veritistic value does not do.

### **3. Goldman's veritistic value theory**

In chapters 1 and 3, I critiqued two versions of true belief monism. According to the first, unrestricted version of true belief monism, truth is the unique thing of fundamental epistemic value. Chapter 1 argued that this unrestricted version true belief monism cannot in any obvious way account for the significance of epistemic significance. In light of that fact, true belief monists might fall back to a second, restricted version of the view, to wit that truth is the only thing of fundamental epistemic value *that is relevant to epistemic states*. These states (like knowledge and true belief) do not seem to have anything to do with significance. Thus the restricted version of true belief monism – we might call it “true belief monism *about epistemic state value*” – is not refuted by pointing out the significance of epistemic significance.

Chapter 3, however, built a case for the rejection of even true belief monism *about epistemic state value*. This case (a) pointed out three ways in which the details of true belief monism about epistemic state value have been developed, (b) argued that each of these three developments is in some way problematic, and (c) claimed that there is no other way to develop the details of the view.



I called the three developments of true belief monism about epistemic state value “consequentialist veritism”, “aretaic veritism”, and “accessibilist veritism”. In calling them “veritisms” I implied that they were attempts to explain all of epistemic state value in terms of truth. That is one thing that we can attempt to do with the notion of truth. Another, quite separate thing that we can attempt to do with the notion of truth is to take that notion to explain all of the facts about a *particular species of epistemic state value*.

Goldman’s “theory of veritistic value” is an attempt to do the latter thing: an attempt to use truth as the unique thing of fundamental epistemic value relevant to a *particular species of epistemic state value*. He calls that species “veritistic value”, and it is supposed to be a sub-part of epistemic state value having to do with only true belief.

In addition to advocating a particular “theory of veritistic value”, Goldman also, in other work, advocates *consequentialist veritism*. These two views of Goldman’s are not to be conflated. One of them (consequentialist veritism) uses truth to try to explain all of epistemic state value, and the other (the theory of veritistic value) uses truth to try to explain all of a particular species of epistemic state value, namely the “veritistic” species of epistemic state value.<sup>2</sup> Whereas chapter 3 constructed a case against consequentialist veritism, this chapter constructs a case against the other theory – Goldman’s theory of veritistic value.

The main reason for doing as much is, again, that this theory is the best worked-out extant theory in the ballpark of epistemism. That it is so well-worked out makes Goldman’s theory of veritistic value a good tool for comparison. The main project of this chapter is to compare epistemism to it, and to argue that epistemism is more explanatorily powerful.

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<sup>2</sup> On consequentialist veritism see Goldman (2001); on the theory of veritistic value see Goldman (1999).

### **3.1. Exposition of Goldman's individual veritistic value theory**

To repeat, Goldman's veritistic value theory is not concerned with epistemic value, or even with epistemic state value. Rather, it is concerned with "veritistic value", which is taken to be a sub-value of epistemic state value that is concerned with only sort of value: the *truth* of beliefs.

Goldman's theory of veritistic value is quite specific. One important aspect of it is the notion of interest. Suppose that some proposition does not answer any of the questions that a person is interested in. If that person believes or withholds on that proposition, then on Goldman's theory, that belief (or withholding) cannot be veritistically good, bad, or neutral: it is veritistically inevaluable.

Goldman argues that this view deals with cases of epistemically insignificant propositions such as propositions about random phone book numbers. By not allowing people to be veritistically evaluated with respect to these propositions, he makes room for that fact that these propositions are in some sense trivial or worthless epistemically. We can thus reasonably take him to have a solution of the problem of trivial truths, to wit: what makes trivial truths trivial is that one is not interested in them.

So Goldman uses his idea of interest to try to solve at least one of the main problems that theories of significance solve, namely the problem of trivial truths. Therefore, I will sometimes use the word "significance" in describing the parts of this theory that he would use the word "interest" to describe. That is to say, I'll sometimes talk about the role of "significance" within his theory, in places where he would talk about the role of "interest"; and that is because the role of interest in his theory is just the role that significance plays – whether significance turns out to be a matter of interest, or a

more mind-independent matter determined by the world itself, or (as my own theory of the nature of significance has it) something in-between.

Ultimately I think of the phenomenon of significance as, for the purposes of building theories from a relatively neutral starting point, identified in the first place with whatever phenomenon is such that by appealing to it we can give the most unified solution of the main problems I identified, in chapter 1, as problems for theories of the nature and value epistemic significance to solve. Against the background of this relatively theory-neutral identification of what it is that we are trying to describe when we try to describe significance, we can engage in productive arguments about which of those descriptions are more accurate than which others. So, given the way that we (or at least *I*) want to identify significance in the first place before going on to theorize about its nature, it is reasonable to take Goldman's use the notion of interest to solve the problem of trivial truths to show that he identifies significance with interest.

Again, Goldman takes beliefs and withholdings in uninteresting propositions to be veritistically inevaluable. When it comes to propositions one *is* interested in, however, Goldman has specific things to say about how well off one is veritistically with respect to them. So, Goldman takes interesting propositions to be significant, and uninteresting propositions to be insignificant. So, again, I will for the rest of this chapter use "significant" and "interesting" as coextensive according to Goldman's theory.

With respect to true beliefs in significant propositions, Goldman says the following: "If *S* *believes* a true proposition, the V-value is 1.0. If he *rejects* the true proposition, the V-value is 0. And if he *withholds judgment*, the V-value is .50."<sup>3</sup> He also evaluates epistemic states that feature *degrees of belief*. Here he takes agents to be

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<sup>3</sup> Goldman (1999: 89).

probabilistically coherent, and takes it that the veritistic value of an agent's degree of belief  $n$  in any true, significant proposition is simply  $n$ . In this chapter, however, I will not focus very much on the probabilistic parts of the theory.

There are two more important things within Goldman's theory that we'll need to expound: his account of instrumental veritistic value of practices, and his account of the veritistic value as an end of distributions of doxastic states across communities. Before discussing those things, though, it is worth looking at a particular part of the theory that we've already laid out, namely the part that concerns doxastic states of individuals.

### **3.2. Fifteen objections to Goldman's individual veritistic value theory**

As Michael DePaul has argued, there is a problem with the attempt to deal with insignificant propositions by taking states that concern them to be veritistically inevaluable.<sup>4</sup>

That approach does, as Goldman points out, have the perhaps initially appealing result that one cannot be penalized veritistically for lacking true beliefs in utter trivialities. But consider two people, one of whom believes a true, insignificant proposition and the other of whom *dis*believes a true, insignificant proposition.

Goldman's veritistic value theory entails that the first of these people does no better veritistically than the second. But that result seems wrong. One of the people has a false belief, whereas the other has a true belief; and all of the other things about these people are, we may suppose, equal. Isn't this a paradigm case of epistemic superiority, where one person has an epistemic success and an otherwise identical person has an epistemic failure? And since the difference between these people concerns truth and falsity, isn't this also a paradigm case of *veritistic* superiority?

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<sup>4</sup> DePaul (2004: 94-96).

While Goldman's veritistic value theory entails the wrong view about this case, epistemism entails the *right* view about it. For suppose that a given proposition is completely epistemically insignificant for two people, and that it is true, and that one of them believes it whereas the other disbelieves it. Then, by the first principle of epistemism, the principle that knowledge-constitutive goods are epistemic ends, the first person's belief is better epistemically than the second person's belief (so long as all other things are equal). So, in this particular case, epistemism does better than Goldman's veritistic value theory.

It is worth delving further into the theme of epistemic and veritistic evaluation as it concerns insignificant propositions. There are a number of subtly distinct issues in the neighborhood of this theme. I'm going to try to characterize all of these issues, and to resolve them.

Ultimately, veritistic evaluations are comparisons: comparisons of one person's doxastic state to another person's doxastic state. In considering whether a person should be "penalized" for lacking true beliefs in insignificant propositions, then, what we are really considering is the question of how well these peoples' doxastic states fare veritistically, as compared to various other possible doxastic states. We need, then, to characterize each of these possible states precisely. Then we will be in a position to answer all of the questions that arise from considering veritistic value as it concerns insignificant propositions.

Developing the idea that we need to characterize the states we compare as precisely as we can, it seems optimal to state our central question as follows:

Consider the states of belief, disbelief, and withholding. Among the six varieties of epistemic states consisting in the bearing of each of these states towards significant and insignificant

propositions respectively, which are better than, equal to, and worse than which others, veritistically as ends?

In order to answer that question we need to veritistically compare, as ends, each pair of epistemic states that is marked by a non-redundant cell in the following table:

**Table 1**

(The diagonal line of cells compares each state to itself. The cells on either side of that line are mirrors of each other. Thus the cells to the upper right of the diagonal are redundant, and therefore blocked out).

	B(t,-s)	B(t,s)	dB(t,-s)	dB(t,s)	W(t,-s)	W(t,s)
B(t,-s)						
B(t,s)						
dB(t,-s)						
dB(t,s)						
W(t,-s)						
W(t,s)						

This table encodes twenty-one pairs of states: one pair for each non-redundant cell. Goldman's veritistic value theory entails that each of those pairs, except for the six that concern only significant propositions, are *veritistically incomparable as ends*. Each of the remaining fifteen pairs of states includes a state that concerns an insignificant proposition. And such states cannot, according to Goldman's veritistic value theory, be veritistically better than, worse than, or equal to anything else, as an end.

I'm going to argue that that result is not theoretically optimal and that, in fact, *all* of the pairs of states encoded in the table are veritistically comparable as ends. Moreover, I will try to make each of the relevant kinds of veritistic comparisons.

Let us start with the pairs of identical states, such as believing a true, insignificant proposition and believing a true, insignificant proposition. It is plausible that each state encoded into the table is exactly as veritistically valuable, as an end, as it itself is.

After all, each of these compound states consist in some sort of cognitive substate (belief or withholding) combined with some amalgamation of either truth or significance, or the lack of either of these two things. Such states are exactly the sorts of things we should expect theories of veritistic value to evaluate. So, we should evaluate them if we can. And, since they are *identical* compound states, they must be equally valuable veritistically, if they are veritistically evaluable at all. Therefore, we should start filling in the table as follows, where each state is said to be of equal veritistic value with itself, *as an end*.

**Table 2**

This table and all the similar tables should be read as follows. First, look at a particular cell. Then, look at what row that cell is in. The table claims that the state in the row bears the relation in the cell to the state in the column. That is to say: the cells tell us how their rows compare to their columns, not how their columns compare to their rows.

	B(t,-s)	B(t,s)	DB(t,-s)	dB(t,s)	W(t,-s)	W(t,s)
B(t,-s)	= <sub>ve</sub>					
B(t,s)		= <sub>ve</sub>				
dB(t,-s)			= <sub>ve</sub>			
dB(t,s)				= <sub>ve</sub>		
W(t,-s)					= <sub>ve</sub>	
W(t,s)						= <sub>ve</sub>

What about the remaining comparisons? Let us start with the easiest of them: the comparisons of B(t,s) with the various other states. Clearly,  $B(t,s) >_{ve} dB(t,s)$ . Indeed, that is a comparison that Goldman's veritistic value theory sanctions. But if it is a comparison that genuinely holds, then certainly it also holds that  $B(t,s) >_{ve} dB(t,-s)$ . For how could the insignificance of a proposition – an epistemic *badmaker* – render dB(t-s) not veritistically inferior as an end to B(t,s), while dB(t,s) nonetheless *is* veritistically inferior as an end to B(t,s)? The answer is that it could not, and therefore that  $B(t,s) >_{ve} dB(t,-s)$ .

For the same reason, it is either true that  $B(t,s) >_{ve} B(t,-s)$ , or that  $B(t,s) =_{ve} B(t,-s)$ . I will not now try to adjudicate between the latter two comparisons (although I will do that later, at the end of the next section). For now I'll just note that one or the other of them holds, if  $B(t,s) >_{ve} B(t,s)$ .

In case there is any residual skepticism about the veritistic evaluability of states that concern insignificant propositions, I should note that the arguments of the above two paragraphs constitute more reasons to believe that those states *are* veritistically evaluable. For those arguments conclude with particular comparisons of  $B(t,s)$  with various states that concern insignificant propositions. So, their conclusions entail that states concerning insignificant propositions can enter into relationships of veritistic value (as an end) with other states. Those conclusions therefore entail that states that concern insignificant propositions are veritistically evaluable.

What about the rest of the comparisons that concern  $B(t,s)$ , that is, the comparisons of  $B(t,s)$  to  $W(t,s)$  and  $W(t,-s)$ ? Clearly,  $B(t,s) >_{ve} W(t,s)$ ; again, this is a comparison sanctioned even by Goldman's theory. And since  $B(t,s) >_{ve} W(t,s)$ , we can make an argument analogous to the one we made about  $B(t,s)$  and  $B(t,-s)$ . That argument goes as follows.

If  $B(t,s) >_{ve} W(t,s)$ , then  $B(t,s) >_{ve} W(t,-s)$ . For how could the insignificance of a proposition – an epistemic *badmaker* – render  $W(t,-s)$  not veritistically inferior as an end to  $B(t,s)$ , while  $W(t,s)$  nonetheless *is* veritistically inferior as an end to  $B(t,s)$ ? The answer is that it could not, and therefore that  $B(t,s) >_{ve} W(t,-s)$ , if  $B(t,s) >_{ve} W(t,s)$ .

With this conclusion in hand, we can fill in all of the cells of our table that concern  $B(t,s)$ :



**Table 3**

	B(t,-s)	B(t,s)	dB(t,-s)	dB(t,s)	W(t,-s)	W(t,s)
B(t,-s)	$=_{ve}$					
B(t,s)	$\geq_{ve}$	$=_{ve}$				
dB(t,-s)		$<_{ve}$	$=_{ve}$			
dB(t,s)		$<_{ve}$		$=_{ve}$		
W(t,-s)		$<_{ve}$			$=_{ve}$	
W(t,s)		$<_{ve}$				$=_{ve}$

We have ten more comparisons to make; let us start by addressing the remaining four comparisons that concern B(t,-s).

Our arguments about B(t,s) entail that B(t,-s) is veritistically evaluable. Given that B(t,-s) is veritistically evaluable, we should say that  $B(t,-s) >_{ve} dB(t,-s)$ . For, first of all, the latter state consists in veritistically evaluable false belief whereas B(t,-s) consists in veritistically evaluable, otherwise identical true belief. That fact alone should establish that  $B(t,-s) >_{ve} dB(t,-s)$ .

But, if it does not, consider a second fact: a person who *believes all* of the true insignificant propositions is clearly in some way better off epistemically than an otherwise identical person who *disbelieves all* of the true, insignificant propositions. Furthermore, if an epistemic difference between these people exists, then that difference must entail a veritistic difference, because the only differences between these people concern whether their beliefs are true. Therefore, a person who believes all of the true insignificant propositions is in some way better off *veritistically* than an otherwise identical person who disbelieves all of the true, insignificant propositions.

But then, each of the former person's beliefs in true, insignificant propositions must itself make some veritistic difference, however small; for there are no special truth-

linked properties of some of those beliefs as opposed to others, in virtue of which some of them could do more than an equal share of the overall veritistic work. Therefore, each of the former person's true, insignificant beliefs is veritistically superior to each of the latter person's false, insignificant beliefs.

In conjunction with the first argument, then, this second one should compel us to take it that  $B(t,-s) >_{ve} dB(t,-s)$ .

And if  $B(t,-s) >_{ve} dB(t,-s)$ , then  $B(t,-s) >_{ve} W(t,-s)$ . For all of the arguments for the former comparison can be altered into arguments for the latter comparison, with the negative status of  $dB(t,-s)$  simply replaced by the neutral status of  $W(t,-s)$ . And  $W(t,-s)$  is in fact veritistically neutral as an end, since withholding is epistemically neutral as an end. Hence,  $B(t,-s) >_{ve} W(t,-s)$ .

Also since withholding is epistemically neutral as an end, the arguments for  $B(t,-s) >_{ve} dB(t,-s)$  can be altered into arguments for  $B(t,-s) >_{ve} W(t,s)$ . So, it is also the case that  $B(t,-s) >_{ve} W(t,s)$ .

The only remaining comparison concerning  $B(t,-s)$  is that between  $B(t,-s)$  and  $dB(t,s)$ . Given that  $B(t,-s)$  is veritistically evaluable,  $B(t,-s) >_{ve} dB(t,s)$ . I've got two arguments for this.

The first argument is:  $dB(t,s)$  consists in veritistically evaluable *false* belief whereas  $B(t,-s)$  consists in veritistically evaluable *true* belief.

The second argument is a bit longer. Significant propositions are important propositions; they are propositions that particularly matter, epistemically. Therefore, given the assumption that significance is an aspect of veritistic value,  $dB(t,-s) >_{ve} dB(t,s)$ . For  $dB(t,s)$  is a state in which one makes a mistake when it particularly matters, and

$dB(t,-s)$  is a state in which one makes a mistake when it does not particularly matter. Furthermore, we've already established that  $B(t,-s) >_{ve} dB(t,-s)$ . Hence the following conjunction is true:  $B(t,-s) >_{ve} dB(t,-s)$  and  $dB(t,-s) >_{ve} dB(t,s)$ . Given the assumption that  $>_{ve}$  is transitive, that conjunction entails the conclusion we want, namely that  $B(t,-s) >_{ve} dB(t,s)$ .

Taken together, these two arguments constitute a good reason to believe that  $B(t,-s) >_{ve} dB(t,s)$  *whether or not* significance makes a difference to veritistic value, and they constitute a particularly good reason to believe as much if significance *does* make such a difference. I conclude, then, that  $B(t,-s) >_{ve} dB(t,s)$ .

We can now fill in more of our table, as follows:

**Table 4**

	$B(t,-s)$	$B(t,s)$	$dB(t,-s)$	$dB(t,s)$	$W(t,-s)$	$W(t,s)$
$B(t,-s)$	$=_{ve}$					
$B(t,s)$	$\geq_{ve}$	$=_{ve}$				
$dB(t,-s)$	$<_{ve}$	$<_{ve}$	$=_{ve}$			
$dB(t,s)$	$<_{ve}$	$<_{ve}$		$=_{ve}$		
$W(t,-s)$	$<_{ve}$	$<_{ve}$			$=_{ve}$	
$W(t,s)$	$<_{ve}$	$<_{ve}$				$=_{ve}$

Now to the remaining six pairs of states.

In the case of withholding, one is in an important sense refraining from committing. By doing so, one avoids getting any positive epistemic goods, while also avoiding getting any negative epistemic bads. And this is so whether or not the propositions one considers are significant.

But it is bad, epistemically, to have false beliefs, whether or not those beliefs take significant propositions as their objects. And we can assume that this particular epistemic

badness is a veritistic badness as well, since falsity is in general taken to be veritistically bad.

But then, withholding on any true proposition is better veritistically than disbelieving any true proposition, regardless of whether the propositions concerned are significant. And this conclusion gives us four more of the comparisons we're looking for:  $W(t,s) >_{ve} dB(t,s)$ ;  $W(t,s) >_{ve} dB(t,-s)$ ;  $W(t,-s) >_{ve} dB(t,s)$ ; and  $W(t,-s) >_{ve} dB(t,-s)$ . And since withholding is neutral as an end epistemically whether or not the propositions on which one withholds are significant,  $W(t,s) =_{ve} W(t,-s)$ .

The only states left for us to compare are  $dB(t,s)$  and  $dB(t,-s)$ . We have two options in trying to veritistically compare these states as ends. First, we might try, perhaps on the basis of the view that veritistic evaluation is by definition concerned *only* with the good *true belief*, to eschew the view that differences in the significance can make a difference to veritistic value. Significance is, after all, not an aspect of true belief. Significance might, on this approach, still make a difference to *epistemic* value; it just could not make a difference to *veritistic* value. If this is how we want to approach the matter, then we should say that  $dB(t,s) =_{ve} dB(t,-s)$ .

On the other hand, we might follow Goldman in thinking that significance can make a difference to veritistic value, at least in some sort of moderate way. If this is the view we take, then we ought to say that  $dB(t,s) <_{ve} dB(t,-s)$ . For, if significance makes a difference to veritistic value, and false belief is bad veritistically, then when one disbelieves a true *significant* proposition, one has done badly veritistically *when it was particularly veritistically important*, as opposed to doing badly veritistically when it was

not particularly veritistically important. On this second approach, then, we should say that  $dB(t,s) <_{ve} dB(t,-s)$ .

I will not now try to adjudicate between these two approaches, just as I did not try above to adjudicate between the analogous two approaches to the veritistic comparison of  $B(t,s)$  and  $B(t,-s)$ . Rather, I will just conclude that one of the two approaches is correct, and thus that  $dB(t,s) \leq_{ve} dB(t,-s)$ . Only in the next section will I try to adjudicate between the two approaches.

We have now resolved (almost) all of the several subtly distinct issues that arise when we consider veritistic evaluation (as an end) insofar as it concerns states that feature insignificant propositions. The views at which we have arrived are summarized as follows:

**Table 5**  
**(our final veritistic value table)**

	$B(t,-s)$	$B(t,s)$	$dB(t,-s)$	$dB(t,s)$	$W(t,-s)$	$W(t,s)$
$B(t,-s)$	$=_{ve}$					
$B(t,s)$	$\geq_{ve}$	$=_{ve}$				
$dB(t,-s)$	$<_{ve}$	$<_{ve}$	$=_{ve}$			
$dB(t,s)$	$<_{ve}$	$<_{ve}$	$\leq_{ve}$	$=_{ve}$		
$W(t,-s)$	$<_{ve}$	$<_{ve}$	$>_{ve}$	$>_{ve}$	$=_{ve}$	
$W(t,s)$	$<_{ve}$	$<_{ve}$	$>_{ve}$	$>_{ve}$	$=_{ve}$	$=_{ve}$

Note, again, that fifteen of the twenty-one claims encoded in this table break from Goldman's veritistic value theory: every claim that concerns at least one insignificant proposition. We have, then, offered up a position and some arguments about veritistic value that are importantly different from Goldman's.

Of course, what we've given is just the *first part* of this position and the arguments for it. We still need to address the relative veritistic values *as means* of these various states. Let us now briefly engage this additional task.

At first pass, it does not seem like any of the states in our table could be good or bad veritistically as means. They are just states of withholding and belief, along with given combinations of truth, significance, or a lack of either of these. How could such states tend to cause one to either possess or lack *other* veritistic goods?

Given some plausible assumptions about certain agents, some of these states *do* have these causal tendencies. For suppose that a given agent has finite cognitive resources (the agents we are about most, human beings, are clearly like this). Then, if that agent fills his mind with clutter such as insignificant beliefs or withholdings, he will thereby be less likely to later add to his mind new pieces of non-clutter, such as *significant* true beliefs.

But then, for finite agents, it turns out that the states of withholding, believing, and disbelieving true, insignificant propositions are veritistically *disvaluable* as means. For having these states tends to cause finite agents to lack other states that are better veritistically as ends because those other states concern true, *significant* propositions.

So, having these states tends to cause one to do worse veritistically than does lacking these states; this despite the fact that some of these states are better veritistically *as ends* than some other states. Each of these states is veritistically valuable as an end, but veritistically *disvaluable* as a means, at least for finite agents.

Now, with this view about the veritistic value *as a means* in hand, we are in a position to respond to one of Goldman's arguments against the sort of picture we've

articulated in our table. I'll call that argument the "anti-penalization" argument; it goes as follows. If a true proposition really is completely insignificant, then a person who does not believe it has not thereby made any sort of mistake. Why should someone be *penalized* in such cases? They should not.

Goldman attempts to refrain from penalizing these people by taking it that states that concern insignificant propositions are veritistically inevaluable. For the various reasons articulated above, I do not think that that is a theoretically optimal thing to do. Nonetheless, there is some appeal to the idea that people should not be penalized for refraining from believing what is completely insignificant. Given that this idea has some intuitive appeal, we ought to somehow honor it. And, as a matter of fact, I think that we can successfully do as much, within the veritistic framework that I've just argued for and summarized in table 5.

What we need to do is to honor the intuition that people should not be penalized for lacking true beliefs about completely insignificant matters, and to do so consistently with the claims encoded in our completed table. Here is how we can do that. First, note that the veritistic value *all things considered* of a given state is some sort of amalgamation of the veritistic values of that state as an end and as a means. Second, note that we've argued that while believing true insignificant propositions has some *positive* veritistic value as an end, it also has some *negative* veritistic value as a means. Given these two things, it follows that when we compare believing true insignificant propositions to withholding on those propositions *veritistically all things considered*, the former state may well turn out to be *inferior* to the latter.

In order to fully determine whether that inferiority in fact holds, we would need to engage in the project of determining the relative inputs of veritistic value as a means and veritistic value as an end, into veritistic value all things considered. That is a very hard kind of project, not just in the veritistic case, but in value theory generally. I do not have anything insightful to say about it. But it is quite possible that the veritistic disvalue *as a means* of believing true insignificant propositions outweighs the veritistic value *as an end* of believing those propositions, for finite agents like human beings. If this possibility actually holds, then the veritistic value *all things considered* of believing true, insignificant propositions is negative. And, in that case, the veritistic value *all things considered* of believing true, insignificant propositions is less than the veritistic value *all things considered* of withholding on those propositions. But then, veritistically all things considered, people in fact are not penalized for not believing true, insignificant propositions.

In conclusion, then, given certain assumptions about the relative inputs of veritistic value as a means, and veritistic value as an end, into veritistic value all things considered, we get the result that, veritistically all things considered, people are in fact not penalized for not believing true, insignificant propositions. And we get this result consistently with all of our comparisons veritistically *as ends* of the various states that concern insignificant propositions.

We have therefore succeeded in honoring the intuition that people should not be penalized veritistically for failing to believe true insignificant propositions, consistently with the rest of our claims. We therefore have a response – a conciliatory response – to



the anti-penalization argument that Goldman gives against the sort of approach to veritistic value that we've argued for in this section.

Moreover, this response is a better reaction to that argument than is Goldman's own reaction of allowing veritistic evaluation only of states that concern significant propositions. One argument for this conclusion consists in pointing out all of our arguments for the 15 conclusions of our table that break with Goldman's inevaluability thesis. But there are other arguments as well.

First, we should make note of a point that I haven't explored much yet, but which will play an important role later on. There is something strange about allowing significance to make a difference to veritistic value *at all*, given that veritistic value is supposed to be value that only concerns true belief. To be sure, there are many reasons to let significance make a difference to *epistemic* value. However, veritistic value is explicitly not identical to epistemic value, but rather something like sub-value of it, and a sub-value that only concerns true belief. It is in virtue of this restriction of veritistic value to *true belief* that it is no problem for Goldman's veritistic value theory that it does not tell us about the epistemic statuses of knowledge, justified belief, understanding, and wisdom.

Given the distinction between epistemic and veritistic value, and given that *significance is not true belief*, why think that significance can ever make a difference to *veritistic* value, as opposed to *epistemic* value?

It is hard to come up with a good answer to that question. I will explore this point in more detail below. But for now, I just want to make note of the fact that there is some pressure to not let significance ever make a difference to veritistic value. That pressure,

in turn, goes some way towards neutralizing the worry about penalizing people for not having true beliefs in insignificant propositions. For if there is a principled reason for thinking that significance can never make a difference to veritistic value, then there is thereby a principled reason for thinking that people should be penalized just as much for failing to believe true *insignificant* propositions, as they are penalized for failing to believe true *significant* propositions.

So, in conclusion, there is some reason for thinking that it is actually not a problem at all, but in fact a good result, when theories of veritistic value penalize people for lacking beliefs in true, insignificant propositions.

But let us forget about that, and assume for the sake of argument that it really is a problem for theories of veritistic value, if those theories penalize people for lacking beliefs in true, insignificant propositions. Goldman attempts to solve this problem in his own theory by taking beliefs (and withholdings) in true, insignificant propositions to be veritistically inevaluable. Quite apart from the other critical questions we've raised about that theoretical stance, we should ask: does that theoretical stance successfully solve the problem raised by the worry that we should not veritistically penalize people for lacking true beliefs in insignificant propositions?

The answer is *no*: the view that beliefs and withholdings in true propositions are veritistically inevaluable *does not* solve the problem raised by the worry that we should not veritistically penalize people for lacking true beliefs in insignificant propositions. Or so I'll now argue.

Assume that beliefs (and withholdings and disbeliefs) in true, *completely* insignificant propositions are, as Goldman claims, veritistically inevaluable. Also assume, as Goldman also claims, that beliefs (and withholdings and disbeliefs) in propositions that have any positive degree of significance whatsoever *are* veritistically evaluable.

Now, consider propositions that have arbitrarily low positive degrees of significance. Given our two assumptions, people *are* penalized for lacking beliefs in these propositions of epsilon significance, despite their not being penalized for lacking beliefs in propositions of zero significance. But if it is a genuine problem to veritistically penalize people for lacking beliefs in true propositions of zero significance, then surely it is also a problem to veritistically penalize people for lacking beliefs in true propositions of epsilon significance. Indeed, the problem with true propositions of epsilon significance is the very same problem as the problem with true propositions of zero significance. In both cases, there seems to be something wrong with penalizing people for lacking beliefs in true propositions of such little significance. In the epsilon case, the “little significance” just happens to be a bit larger – that is, an arbitrarily small amount larger. And how could a mere epsilon of difference in significance make penalization not a problem in some cases, whereas it is a problem in others?

It could not. Therefore, if we take Goldman’s theoretical stance that states concerning completely insignificant propositions are veritistically inevaluable, we are nonetheless left with the problem raised by the worry that we should not veritistically penalize people for lacking true beliefs in insignificant propositions. That is to say, Goldman’s response to the anti-penalization argument does not solve the problem raised

by that argument. But our own response to that argument does solve the problem that that argument raises. So, our own response to that argument is superior to Goldman's.

Moreover, it would not help Goldman's approach to simply add an extra clause to the effect that states concerning propositions of epsilon significance cannot be veritistically evaluated. For consider true propositions of, not epsilon significance, but *very* low non-epsilon significance, say, significance of level  $1.0 \times 10^{-1,000}$ . Call that amount of significance an *iota*. (Iotas are *incredibly* small: the number of atoms in the observed universe is estimated to be only  $1.0 \times 10^{80}$ ).

Clearly it is a problem to veritistically penalize people for lacking beliefs in true propositions of iota significance, if it is a problem to veritistically penalize them for lacking beliefs in true propositions of epsilon significance. And if it is a problem to veritistically penalize people for lacking beliefs in true propositions of iota significance, then it is also a problem to veritistically penalize them for lacking beliefs in true propositions of  $\text{iota} + \text{iota}$  significance. Indeed, for any level  $n$  of significance, if it is a problem to veritistically penalize people for lacking beliefs in true propositions of  $n$  significance, then it is a problem to veritistically penalize people for lacking beliefs in true propositions of  $n + \text{iota}$  significance. A mere iota of significance cannot make a difference to whether it is wrong to veritistically penalize people for lacking a true belief.

But from this it follows that it is a problem to penalize people for lacking beliefs in true propositions of *any* level of significance, if it is a problem to penalize them for lacking beliefs in true propositions of zero significance. This conclusion is a *reductio ad absurdum* of the view that it is a problem to veritistically penalize people for lacking true

beliefs in propositions of zero significance. Out then with the view, and out with the anti-penalization argument that relies on it.

I've already put forth several independent reasons for doubting that view anyway. Indeed, I've put forth and argued for a whole veritistic value theory that rejects that view. The theory rejects that view because it penalizes people for lacking true belief in insignificant propositions, when it veritistically evaluates those peoples' doxastic states *as ends*. Consistently with this, of course, the theory honors what is right about the anti-penalization argument; and it does this by considering finite agents and veritistic value *all things considered*.

Let me summarize this section. I started by identifying some problems for Goldman's veritistic treatment of states that concern insignificant propositions. These problems led to a characterization of several comparative questions that arise when we consider veritistic evaluation of states that concern insignificant propositions. On 15 of these questions, I gave specific arguments for answers that are different from Goldman's. The views that resulted from these arguments comprised an alternative theory of veritistic value, which is summarized in table 5. After filling in that table, I addressed Goldman's anti-penalization argument against the sort of alternative veritistic view that I'd just developed.

In addressing that anti-penalization argument, the first thing I did was to show how the alternative theory I've developed can honor what is right about it. Then I argued that Goldman's own way of trying to resolve the problems that drive the anti-penalization argument, namely the adoption of the position that states concerning insignificant propositions are veritistically inevaluable, does not in fact resolve those problems.

Finally, I constructed a *reductio* of the anti-penalization argument's central assumption, thereby providing further reason not to take that argument to refute the veritistic value theory I've articulated.

### **3.3. Epistemism deals with all fifteen objections**

The previous section dealt with a big set of connected issues about the relative veritistic values of various states that concern insignificant propositions. It did so by giving relatively separate arguments with respect to each one of those issues, one after another, in a long and tedious list.

Faced with issues that when dealt with one by one give rise to unruly, long, list-like discussions of this sort, what we need to do is find simple, general theories that systematize all of the relevant issues by resolving all of them at once in an explanatorily unified way. When such theories can be identified, the fact that they tame such unruly sets of issues is an argument in their favor.

Epistemism does exactly what we want in this regard. It tames the unruly issues about insignificance discussed in the previous section. Moreover, it does so in a simple, explanatorily unified way. Or so I'll now argue.

In making this argument I will, at first, simply talk in the terminology of my own theory, the terminology of *epistemic value* as opposed to the terminology of *veritistic value*. Then, with the central ideas laid out, I will describe how this talk can be translated into the terminology of veritistic value, therefore resolving the particular *veritistic* problems arising from states that concern insignificant propositions, as well as those problems' more general, overall epistemic analogues.

Let us start, then, with the principle that “knowledge-constitutive goods are epistemic ends”, that is, the principle that *ceteris paribus*, beliefs instantiating more of the knowledge-constitutive goods are better epistemically as ends than beliefs instantiating fewer of those goods. In conjunction with the principle that “withholding is the neutral end”, that principle entails that believing a true proposition has *positive* epistemic status, whether or not that proposition is significant. And, on its own, the “withholding is the neutral epistemic end” principle entails that withholding on a proposition has *neutral* epistemic status, whether or not that proposition is significant.

These two results entail four of the comparisons we’re looking for, to wit:  $B(t,-s) >_{ee} W(t,s)$ ;  $B(t,-s) >_{ee} W(t,-s)$ ;  $B(t,s) >_{ee} W(t,s)$ ; and  $B(t,s) >_{ee} W(t,-s)$ . So we can now fill out the following parts of the table, here understood as a table about what is better than what else *epistemically* as an end:

**Table 6**

	B(t,-s)	B(t,s)	dB(t,-s)	dB(t,s)	W(t,-s)	W(t,s)
B(t,-s)						
B(t,s)						
dB(t,-s)						
dB(t,s)						
W(t,-s)	$<_{ee}$	$<_{ee}$				
W(t,s)	$<_{ee}$	$<_{ee}$				

Moving right along, we should recall that the “withholding is the neutral end” principle explains why false belief is epistemically *disvaluable* as an end. Since it explains that fact, it also explains (relative to the *positive* epistemic status of true belief) why believing and withholding on a true proposition are both better epistemically as an end than disbelieving a true proposition, regardless of whether the propositions concerned are significant or not.

We've thus derived eight more of the comparisons we're after: each of the comparisons between (on the one hand) beliefs and withholdings in significant and insignificant true propositions and (on the other hand) disbeliefs in significant and insignificant true propositions. Therefore we can explain twelve of the comparisons encoded in our table, simply on the basis of the "knowledge-constitutive goods are epistemic ends" and "withholding is the neutral epistemic end" principles. So far, then, we've made the epistemic version of the table look like this:

**Table 7**

	B(t,-s)	B(t,s)	dB(t,-s)	DB(t,s)	W(t,-s)	W(t,s)
B(t,-s)						
B(t,s)						
dB(t,-s)	< <sub>ee</sub>	< <sub>ee</sub>				
dB(t,s)	< <sub>ee</sub>	< <sub>ee</sub>				
W(t,-s)	< <sub>ee</sub>	< <sub>ee</sub>	> <sub>ee</sub>	> <sub>ee</sub>		
W(t,s)	< <sub>ee</sub>	< <sub>ee</sub>	> <sub>ee</sub>	> <sub>ee</sub>		

Now consider the "significance amplifies" principle. Relative to the positive epistemic status of true beliefs and the negative epistemic status of false beliefs, this principle gives us two more comparisons:  $B(t,s) >_{ee} B(t,-s)$  and  $dB(t,s) <_{ee} dB(t,-s)$ . Furthermore, if we reconsider the principle that "withholding is the neutral epistemic end", we get the result that withholding on a true, significant proposition is of equal epistemic status as an end, as is withholding of a true, insignificant proposition: in neither of these cases does one have a positive or negative state to be amplified in the first place.

With the foregoing conclusions in hand, we need only to compare each of the table's states with itself. I take it to be a fairly theory-neutral idea that any given state should count as epistemically equally as valuable as itself, if that state is epistemically



evaluable at all. Note that epistemism entails that each of the states in our table is epistemically evaluable. Given a fairly theory-neutral idea, then, epistemism entails the remaining five comparisons as well, the comparisons that say of each state that it is equally as epistemically value as it itself is. We've thus filled out the entire table on the basis of epistemism and theory-neutral auxiliary resources:

**Table 8**

	B(t,-s)	B(t,s)	dB(t,-s)	DB(t,s)	W(t,-s)	W(t,s)
B(t,-s)	= <sub>ee</sub>					
B(t,s)	> <sub>ee</sub>	= <sub>ee</sub>				
dB(t,-s)	< <sub>ee</sub>	< <sub>ee</sub>	= <sub>ee</sub>			
dB(t,s)	< <sub>ee</sub>	< <sub>ee</sub>	< <sub>ee</sub>	= <sub>ee</sub>		
W(t,-s)	< <sub>ee</sub>	< <sub>ee</sub>	> <sub>ee</sub>	> <sub>ee</sub>	= <sub>ee</sub>	
W(t,s)	< <sub>ee</sub>	< <sub>ee</sub>	> <sub>ee</sub>	> <sub>ee</sub>	= <sub>ee</sub>	= <sub>ee</sub>

It is worth noting that epistemism deals with these issues – these issues that arise when we consider epistemic value and insignificant propositions - in a particularly strong way. On the one hand, a theory can be consistent with a datum. This is certainly better than being inconsistent with a datum. However, it is not as good as *explaining why* that datum is true. It is the latter thing that epistemism does with respect to the data adduced in our table: it goes beyond being consistent with them, and positive explains why they are true.

There is one more thing to discuss in this section, namely the application of the foregoing ideas to *veritistic* value, as opposed *epistemic* value. That application goes as follows.

First, we can break epistemism up into two parts: the part that only lets truth make a difference to its comparisons, and the part that lets things other than truth make a difference to its comparisons. Take the first of these two parts, and replace all of its

references to “epistemic” value with references to “veritistic” value. The result is a theory of veritistic value that amounts to a sub-theory of an overall theory of epistemic value.

This veritistic value theory is identical to the veritistic value theory I argued for above, except that it is a bit more specific on two particular issues. That theory was noncommittal about whether  $B(t,s)$  is veritistically better than or equal to  $B(t,-s)$  as an end, and it was similarly noncommittal about  $dB(t,s)$  is veritistically worse than or equal to  $dB(t,-s)$  as an end.

But the veritistic value theory consisting in the parts of epistemism that deal only with true belief is *not* noncommittal on those issues. *That* theory renders  $B(t,s)$  equal to  $B(t,-s)$  veritistically as an end, and it also renders  $dB(t,s)$  equal to  $dB(t,-s)$  veritistically as an end. For that theory takes significance to be irrelevant to veritistic value. The overall epistemic value theory does *not* take these pairs of states to have equal *epistemic* value as ends, but the sub-theory that is a theory of veritistic value *does* take these pairs of states to have equal *veritistic* value as ends. That is, of course, just how it should be, given that (a) veritistic value is the sub-value of epistemic value that concerns only truth, and (b) significance is not truth.

In this section I’ve argued that epistemism is a theoretically optimal approach to those issues that, in the previous section, I argued were problematic for Goldman’s veritistic value theory. Epistemism entails all of the right answers to the questions that constitute those issues. Or, more exactly, it entails all the right answers to the *overall epistemic analogues* of the *veritistic questions* that constitute the issues that I argued were problematic for Goldman’s veritistic value theory. Moreover, it entails those answers in

an *explanatorily unified way*, because it uses a small number of principles, some of them independently motivated, to arrive at all of them. In addition to all of this, epistemism contains a sub-theory that amounts to a theory of *veritistic value*, and that sub-theory resolves all of the problematic issues we've discussed.

These results constitute an argument for epistemism, additional to the other arguments advanced elsewhere in this dissertation.

### **3.4. A sixteenth objection to Goldman's individual veritistic value theory**

At the end of the exposition of Goldman's veritistic value theory, I said that we still needed to understand the roles of practices, and of distributions of belief in a given proposition across people, in order to understand that theory as a whole. Let me now outline these last two aspects of Goldman's theory of veritistic value.

With respect to distributions of belief in a given proposition across persons, Goldman takes it that the veritistic value of these distributions is identical to the mean of the values of each of the persons in the group with respect to that proposition.<sup>5</sup>

What of the final element of Goldman's veritistic framework, the *practices* through which people and communities form beliefs? These practices are, in fact, what Goldman is most interested in, in his work in social epistemology. He is interested in evaluating them and comparing them in various domains such as education and law; the main purpose of his evaluative discussion of veritistic states is to lay the groundwork for his veritistic theory of *practices*.

Goldman evaluates these practices in consequentialist terms, and relative to given ranges of cases, where these cases consist in propositions to be learned in given

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<sup>5</sup> But he explicitly notes that there are other possible measures here, such as the root mean square or some sort of weighted average of the individual values.

background contexts. Basically, the view is this: for any given range of cases, the veritistic value of any given practice is the average performance of that practice across those cases. The performance for each of the particular cases is determined in accordance with the veritistic values of the individual beliefs, or community distributions of belief, that that practice produces in those cases. The veritistic values of individual and community belief states are therefore the relevant consequences with respect to which the veritistic value of practices is to be determined.

Since we've seen above how Goldman intends to evaluate the relevant states, and we've how he intends to evaluate practices as a function of the values of those states, we've now seen how the theory works as a whole. Now let me make some critical and constructive remarks on exactly what is supposed to get veritistically compared to what, within this theory. According to the official statement of the theory, in the single-person case, and with respect to significant propositions, veritistic evaluation works as follows:

Official statement of the theory: "If S *believes* a true proposition, the V-value is 1.0. If he *rejects* the true proposition, the V-value is 0. And if he *withholds judgment*, the V-value is .50."

There is more than one way to interpret the phrase "a true proposition" as it occurs in this statement, and among these ways there are distinctions that make a difference. Consider the following two distinct claims:

Same-proposition claim: For any true proposition P, believing P is better veritistically as an end than is disbelieving P.

Cross-proposition claim: For any true propositions  $P_1$  and  $P_2$ , believing  $P_1$  is better veritistically as an end than is disbelieving  $P_2$ .

The official statement of the theory could be taken to entail either of these two claims, depending on how we interpret the phrase "a true proposition". Among the two claims, the cross-proposition claim is the stronger: it entails but is not entailed by the same-

proposition claim. But which of the two claims makes for the best overall theory, when combined with the rest of Goldman's veritistic value theory?

I'm going to lay out a dilemma. I'll argue that, on either understanding of the official statement of the theory – the same-proposition claim and the cross-proposition claim – certain problems arise. In either case, then, the theory should be changed. (This argument will amount to my sixteenth objection to Goldman's theory; hence the section title).

Suppose that it is only same-proposition claims to which the theory is committed. Then the theory's evaluations only compare states concerning the very same proposition. If one person believes truly that his keys are in the ignition, and another person believes falsely that the sky is green, then if the theory only issues same-proposition comparisons, it does not compare these two peoples' belief states. Nor does it compare belief states both of which take false propositions as their objects, or both of which take true propositions as their objects, so long as the states to be compared concern different propositions. The theory is therefore quite informationally sparse, if it is to be interpreted as asserting the same-proposition claim as opposed to the cross-proposition claim. So, on this horn of the dilemma, the theory ought to be informationally enriched, as it does not tell us very much.

Now suppose that the theory is committed to the cross-proposition claim. In this case the theory does not seem to have a problem of informational sparsity. Moreover, when one looks at the theory as a whole, the cross-proposition interpretation seems to be the one Goldman really has in mind. For, even though the official statement of the theory does not settle the issue of whether cross-proposition states or only same-

proposition states are to be compared *as ends*, another part of the theory *does* settle that issue.

In particular, the part of the theory that evaluates practices veritistically *as means* turns out to entail a particular answer to the question of whether cross-proposition or only single-proposition states are to be veritistically compared *as ends*. Let me now explain why that is.

Recall that for any range of cases and any practice, the veritistic value of a practice with respect to that range of cases is the *average* of the veritistic values of the belief states produced by that practice, across all of the cases in the range. For convenience we should give this view a label; let us call it the *averaging view* of veritistic practice evaluation.

In order to get a better grip on the averaging view and what it entails, we should consider some alternative views that are inconsistent with it. For instance, we should consider the following view, which (following Fallis forthcoming) we'll call the *weighted averaging view*: for any range of cases and any practice, the veritistic value of that practice with respect to that range of cases is the *weighted average* of the veritistic values of the belief states that that practice produces across all of the cases in that range, weighted by the *level of significance* of each proposition in each case.<sup>6</sup>

Here is an illustration of the difference between the averaging view and the weighted averaging view. Suppose that some range of cases features one person (S) and four true propositions (A, B, C, and D). Also suppose that there are two practices,  $\Pi_1$  and  $\Pi_2$ , such that in our cases,  $\Pi_1$  brings S to truly believe A and B but falsely disbelieve

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<sup>6</sup> Fallis (forthcoming) argues that the weighted averaging view is superior to the averaging view. I'll argue below that both of those views are inferior to a third view, in particular an altered version of the averaging view, altered in that it evaluates true beliefs in insignificant propositions.

C and D, while  $\Pi_2$  brings him to falsely disbelieve A and B but truly believe C and D. Finally, suppose that degrees of significance can take any real values between 0 and 1 inclusive, and that S has degree of significance 1 in both A and B, and degree of significance 0.01 in both C and D.

Given these assumptions, it follows from the averaging view that  $\Pi_1$  and  $\Pi_2$  are equally valuable veritistically with respect to this range of cases. However, the *weighted averaging view* entails that  $\Pi_1$  is veritistically superior to  $\Pi_2$  with respect to this range of cases, because it produces true beliefs in propositions of greater significance.

This example illustrates that there are ranges of cases in which the averaging view and the weighted averaging view give different veritistic evaluations of practices. But practices are veritistically valuable *only as means*. Hence whenever two theories attribute different veritistic values to practices, those theories must also attribute different veritistic values *as ends* to the belief states that those practices produce. And from this it follows that the averaging view and the weighted averaging view attribute different veritistic values *as ends* to the belief states that they produce respectively.

Different evaluative views about means can entail different evaluative views about ends, as we've just illustrated. Given this illustration, we are now in a position to see some important general facts about Goldman's veritistic value theory, facts about what the part of it that concerns means entails about the part of it that concerns ends.

Since the averaging view does not countenance any difference in the values of means that produce beliefs in different true propositions (so long as those propositions are at all significant), the averaging view entails that belief in any true proposition is equally veritistically valuable as belief in any other true proposition. If beliefs in

different true, significant propositions had different veritistic values as ends, then those values would have to be reflected in some sort of weighted averaging principle for evaluating practices as means, weighted by whatever makes some of those propositions better veritistically than others.

We can therefore conclude that Goldman's theory as a whole *does* offer up cross-question veritistic comparisons. And we can conclude more than that. Goldman's theory offers up a *particular way* of making cross-question comparisons: so long as two beliefs take as their objects propositions that are to at least some extent significant for their believers respectively, true beliefs in those propositions are equally veritistically valuable, *no matter what* those propositions are. That is to say, Goldman's averaging view of practices renders the veritistic value as ends of true beliefs insensitive to the content of those beliefs, so long as those beliefs are to at least some extent significant for their believers respectively.

Goldman is therefore committed to the cross-proposition claim, and to an *equalist* version of the cross-proposition claim, in that he takes each true proposition to be equally as veritistically valuable as each other true proposition (so long those propositions are at least somewhat significant).

Now I'll argue that this view - *cross-proposition equalism* - is suboptimal. Suppose that  $S_1$  truly believes the proposition  $P_g$  that grass is green, and that  $S_2$  truly believes the proposition  $P_c$  that is the conjunction of all the true propositions of chemistry. Further, suppose that both of these propositions are significant for these people. Cross-proposition equalism entails that  $S_1$ 's belief state with respect to  $P_g$  is veritistically equally as valuable as  $S_2$ 's belief state with respect to  $P_c$ .



But that result seems wrong. For, in an obvious sense,  $S_2$ 's belief state contains more true belief than does  $S_1$ 's. And, if true belief is what is good, then *more* true belief ought to be better than *less* true belief. (It is not the case that whenever *anything* is good in *any* way, more of that thing is better in that way. To take just one example, pipelines are good in surfing partly *because* of their rarity, which is part of what makes them special. Epistemic goods are not like this, however.).

Since *more* true belief ought to be epistemically better than *less* true belief if true belief is epistemically good, the spirit of Goldman's veritistic value theory would be best served by allowing  $S_2$ 's belief state to be better veritistically as an end than is  $S_1$ 's. Yet cross-proposition equalism, implied as it is by the averaging view of practice-evaluation, renders  $S_2$ 's belief state equally as veritistically valuable as an end as is  $S_1$ 's.

The difference between  $P_g$  and  $P_c$  is *not* a difference in degrees of significance. The degree of significance for  $S_1$  for  $P_g$  may be identical to the degree of significance for  $S_2$  for  $P_c$ . The differences in these cases are differences in *how much true belief* the different people have, not differences in *how significant* the believed propositions are for those people.

Theories of veritistic value – theories explicitly concerned with evaluation solely with respect to the value true belief – should render states with *more* of this thing better than states with *less* of it. As a result, the averaging view about practice evaluation should be replaced with some other sort of view allows states containing more true belief to be better, veritistically, than states containing less true belief. That is the first change that we should make to Goldman's veritistic value theory on the cross-proposition horn

of the dilemma – the horn which, I’ve argued, the theory’s treatment of practices commits it to.

Now I want to argue that there is another change that the theory should make as well, on this horn of the dilemma. This other change has to do with the role of significance, instead of the role of amounts of true belief. So let us forget about amounts of true belief for a moment, and assume that we are dealing only with pairs of states that concern the same amounts of true belief respectively. With that assumption in the background, we should consider the following argument about significance.

According to Goldman’s veritistic value theory interpreted as being committed to cross-proposition equalism, so long as a given true proposition has *any level of significance whatsoever*, any person does equally well veritistically by believing it, as any person does by believing any other true proposition, so long as that other true proposition has *any level of significance whatsoever*. In effect, then, the view has it that the difference between *no significance* and *some significance* matters to veritistic evaluation, but no other possible difference between levels of significance matters to veritistic evaluation.

But what is so special about *that* difference in significance levels, such that *it alone* can make a difference to veritistic evaluation? Why make the zero-level of significance the cutoff level, as opposed to some other level such as the 0.26-level?

I cannot think of any plausible answer to that question. To restrict the differences in significance that matter to differences between some-significance and no-significance is *arbitrary*, given that we could pick any other possible difference in significance levels instead as the one that uniquely matters to veritistic evaluation.

How could the theory be amended to avoid this arbitrariness? There seem to be only two options. The first option is to evaluate belief states in completely insignificant propositions along the same lines as it evaluates propositions with some significance – that is, evaluate them but not let *amount* of significance matter. If the theory evaluated belief states in these completely insignificant propositions, then it would not arbitrarily choose one sort of difference in significance levels as the one that can uniquely make a difference to veritistic value, because it would *not let any* difference in significance levels make a difference to veritistic value.

The second option is to alter the theory so it *lets every* difference in significance make a difference in veritistic value. Given this option, the theory would say that whenever there are true beliefs in propositions that have different significance levels for their believers, the veritistically better of these beliefs is the one whose object has a higher level of significance for its believer.

I think that the choice between these two options illuminates a tension at the heart of Goldman's veritistic value theory.

On the one hand, that theory is explicitly not about epistemic value *tout court*, but only about a restricted part of epistemic value, veritistic value. It is in virtue of this restriction that the theory's lack of attention to knowledge, justified belief, understanding, and wisdom is not a problem for it. On the other hand, though, there is an understandable desire to make the theory of veritistic value reflect as many normative facts as possible. It is, after all, a theory, and we want our theories to tell us as much as they can.

The motivation to say as much as we can is in tension with the motivation to respect the claim that the only thing of value with which the theory is concerned is truth.

The second of these motivations seems to counsel us to avoid significance entirely, since one's beliefs are just as true, or just as untrue, whether or not they take significant propositions as their objects. But the first of these motivations counsels us to pay attention to significance, as we can add content to the theory by speaking about it as opposed to not speaking about it. How should this tension be resolved?

I submit that we should resolve it by sticking with the motivation that veritistic value is concerned only with true belief, and jettisoning the notion of significance (for Goldman, interest) from the theory entirely. We should completely drop the notion of significance (i.e. interest) from Goldman's theory of veritistic value.

If we do that, the theory will veritistically evaluate beliefs (and withholdings) in completely insignificant true propositions as well as significant ones. This is a *good* result, as I argued at length above. Nonetheless, the notion of significance should be remain in the overall theory of *epistemic value*. For, as I argued in chapter 1, there are many reasons for thinking that significance matters to epistemic value.

The position I'm trying to advocate, then, is that significance matters to epistemic value but not to veritistic value. The latter value is concerned only with true belief, and significance is a quite separate thing from true belief. By theorizing about significance as part of epistemic value as opposed to veritistic value, we put that notion where it belongs theoretically, *and* we honor the motivation to say as much as possible, while *also* honoring the fact that veritistic value is by definition value concerning true belief alone.

Now let me summarize this section. I've laid out an overall dilemma for Goldman's veritistic value theory as it concerns significant propositions, and within one of the horns of that dilemma, I've laid out a sub-dilemma. The overall dilemma is

between the same-proposition and cross-proposition claims. The same-proposition claim does not provide enough content, so the theory as a whole should not adopt that claim. But on the cross-proposition side of the overall dilemma, there is a sub-dilemma. On the one hand, we can let at least some differences in degree of significance matter to veritistic value. But then, we should let *all* differences in degree of significance matter to veritistic value, because it would be arbitrary to choose just one of these differences as uniquely relevant to veritistic value. And, if we let all differences in degree of significance matter to veritistic value, then we will have changed Goldman's overall theory of veritistic value. On the other hand, we can refrain from letting *any* differences in degree of significance matter to veritistic evaluation. But then we will have again changed Goldman's theory, as we will have *inter alia* refrained from letting the difference between *some significance* and *no significance* make a difference to veritistic value.

All of the branches of this combination of dilemmas ultimately end up with us changing Goldman's theory. Therefore, we should change that theory. The question is: how? I've argued that the best way to change it is to take the horn of the cross-proposition claim on which we do not let *any* differences in degree of significance to make a difference to veritistic value. I've also argued that we should drop equalism and let amounts of content make a difference to veritistic value. These changes let us respect the fact that veritistic evaluations are supposed to allow only truth to be a relevant thing of value; and they allow room for other things of value, like justification and significance, in *epistemic* evaluations.

### **3.5. Epistemism deals with the sixteenth objection**

In section 3.2, I critiqued Goldman's veritistic approach to *insignificant* propositions, articulating and defending a different theory of veritistic value that parted with Goldman's on fifteen specific points having to do with those propositions.

Then, in section 3.3, I argued that my own epistemic value theory, epistemism, provides a better approach to those propositions. Epistemism not only provides the right *epistemic* value claims about those propositions, but it can also be restricted to provide the right *veritistic* value claims about those propositions.

Section 3.4 went on to further critique Goldman's approach to *significant* propositions, laying out a series of dilemmas having to do with those propositions, and arguing that every adequate way to resolve those dilemmas involves altering Goldman's theory.

Now, in section 3.5, I will again point to epistemism, and again argue that it successfully deals the issues that are problematic for Goldman's veritistic value theory. Epistemism, I will argue, does a better job of comparing different states all of which concern *significant* propositions, just as it did a better job of comparing different states some of which concern *insignificant* propositions.

Didn't I already show how epistemism does as much, by using it to derive the required comparisons of both the epistemic and the veritistic variety? Partially, yes – but not completely. I already used the principles of epistemism to derive all the comparisons we need between epistemic states concerning propositions of *some* significance to epistemic states that concern propositions of *some* significance. It also used those principles to derive all the comparisons we need between epistemic states concerning propositions of *no* significance to epistemic states concerning propositions of *no*

significance. And, finally, it further used those principles to derive all of the comparisons we need between states that concern propositions of *no* significance and states that concern propositions of *some* significance. In sum, that section showed that epistemism generates all the comparisons we need between *some-some-significance*, *no-no-significance*, and *no-some-significance* states.

But there is one more sort of pair of states that we should compare: *some-significance* states and *more-significance* states. We should compare, both epistemically and veritistically, states that concern propositions of *some significance* to states that concern propositions of *some but more significance*. Once we have these final comparisons in addition to the others, we will have shown how epistemism generates a fairly comprehensive treatment of the epistemic and veritistic value *as an end* of the various levels of significance – at least in the case of individuals (if not the case of groups), and at least in the cases of withholding and true and false belief (if not the cases of knowledge, justified belief, understanding, wisdom, and so on). Let us then get down to showing how epistemism entails the right comparisons between states that concern propositions of *some significance*, and states that concern propositions of *more significance*.

First some terminology. Let us use the symbol  $\prec_s$  to mean *of less epistemic significance*, and the symbols  $\succ_s$  and  $=_s$  similarly. Given this terminology, we can (for example) abbreviate the claim “believing a true, more significant proposition is better epistemically as an end than is believing a true, less significant proposition” as follows:  $B(t, \succ_s) \succ_{ee} B(t, \prec_s)$ .

Now we can use the following table to represent all of the comparisons we need to make, of epistemic states as ends, when those states concern propositions of significance but different levels of significance, and when they concern belief, withholding, truth, and falsity.

**Table 9**

	$B(t, < s)$	$W(t, < s)$	$dB(t, < s)$
$B(t, > s)$			
$W(t, > s)$			
$dB(t, > s)$			

The most original work on the nine sorts of comparisons encoded in this table is done by the seventh principle of epistemism, the principle that “significance amplifies epistemic value”. But before getting to that work, we should note that many of these comparisons are dealt with by various combinations of epistemism’s other principles.

The “withholding is the neutral end” principle gives us three of the comparisons on its own. First of all, it entails that  $W(t, > s) =_{ee} W(t, < s)$ . For when one avoids both success and failure by refraining from trying, it does not matter whether one has done neither good nor bad where it particularly matters: one has, regardless of whether it particularly matters, *avoided both success and failure*. The “withholding is the neutral end” principle also entails that  $dB(t, > s) <_{ee} W(t, < s)$ , since it entails that  $dB(t, > s)$  is bad whereas  $W(t, < s)$  is neutral, epistemically as an end. And, finally, that principle entails that  $W(t, > s) >_{ee} dB(t, < s)$ , since it entails that  $dB(t, < s)$  is bad whereas  $W(t, > s)$  is neutral, epistemically as an end. So that makes three of the nine comparisons we need.

The conjunction of the principles that “knowledge-constitutive goods are epistemic ends” and “withholding is the neutral end” gives us four more of those



comparisons. Clearly, that conjunction entails that  $dB(t, ^>s) <_{ee} B(t, ^<s)$  and that  $W(t, ^>s) <_{ee} B(t, ^<s)$ . Equally clearly, that conjunction also entails that  $B(t, ^>s) >_{ee} W(t, ^<s)$  and that  $B(t, ^>s) >_{ee} dB(t, ^<s)$ . That gives us seven of the nine comparisons we're looking for; all that remains are the  $B(t, ^>s)/B(t, ^<s)$  and  $dB(t, ^>s)/dB(t, ^<s)$  comparisons.

The “significance amplifies” principle is designed specifically to deal with these last two kinds of comparisons. It entails that  $B(t, ^>s) >_{ee} B(t, ^<s)$  and that  $dB(t, ^>s) <_{ee} dB(t, ^<s)$ . Again, the idea behind this principle and these claims it entails are that it is better to do well concerning important things than it is to do well concerning unimportant things, and that it is worse to do badly concerning important things than it is to do badly concerning unimportant things.

Let me summarize all of this with a filled-out version of the relevant table, including references in each cell to the particular principles of epistemism that generate the comparison encoded in that cell:

**Table 10**

	$B(t, ^<s)$	$W(t, ^<s)$	$dB(t, ^<s)$
$B(t, ^>s)$	$>_{ee}$ (KCG, SA)	$>_{ee}$ (KCG, WNE)	$>_{ee}$ (KCG, WNE)
$W(t, ^>s)$	$<_{ee}$ (KCG, WNE)	$=_{ee}$ (WNE)	$>_{ee}$ (WNE)
$dB(t, ^>s)$	$<_{ee}$ (KCG, WNE)	$<_{ee}$ (WNE)	$<_{ee}$ (WNE, SA)

I've now shown that epistemism generates all of the kinds of comparisons that are problematic for Goldman's theory: comparisons between beliefs (and withholdings) in true propositions of every possible combination of relative amounts of significance. And

epistemism does more as well; for instance, it deals with the relative epistemic values of knowledge and justified belief.

Moreover, as I'll argue in chapter 6, epistemism deals with the epistemic value of *wisdom*. And it can be expanded to deal with epistemic states as they are instantiated distributively across persons, as well as dealing with them insofar as they are instantiated singly in individual people (as I'll argue in chapter 5). Before moving to distributive social epistemology and wisdom, though, I'll give a summary of epistemism as it has been developed so far.

#### **4. Summary of epistemism thus far**

Epistemism as developed thus far is a system of six principles that induce rankings of what is epistemically better than what else, in what ways. The things that it epistemically ranks are beliefs, withholdings, and properties like truth and justification.

The principles by which epistemism induces its rankings of these things appeal to only one thing of fundamental epistemic value: knowledge. It is in virtue of their relationships to knowledge that all of these things have their epistemically normative statuses. It is even in virtue of its relationship to knowledge (via curiosity) that the property *epistemic significance* makes a difference to the epistemic ranking of the states in which it is instantiated.

Epistemism is thus an *epistemic value theory*: it is an attempt to do in the epistemic domain what value theories do generally. The principles that constitute it up to this point are, to repeat, as follows:

1. Knowledge-constitutive goods are epistemic ends
2. Withholding is the neutral end

3. Virtues improve epistemic ends
4. Degrees improve epistemic ends
5. Epistemic states can be epistemic means
6. Significance amplifies epistemic value

(See the appendix for a spelled-out version of this list)

These principles jointly induce a system of rankings of what is epistemically better than what else, all ultimately on the basis of the relationships of these things to knowledge. Epistemism is therefore a form of knowledge monism about epistemic value.

To be sure, there is a sense in which normative considerations beyond those based on knowledge are included in the mix. For instance, the consideration that *goods obtained through virtue are better than goods merely attained* is included in the mix. But these extra normative considerations are *domain-general*; they are not specifically epistemic. The only thing of fundamental value specific to the epistemic domain is knowledge. Our seven principles combine that domain-specific value with domain general values to induce a system of epistemic rankings; but the input of those domain-general values does not render them specifically *epistemic* values.

The central argument for epistemism consists in pointing out some ways in which it is explanatorily powerful, and indeed more explanatorily powerful than its competitors. Despite doing all of this explanatory work, epistemism does not do everything. Let me end this summary by explicitly pointing out an important thing that it does not do.

Suppose that one person knows a completely insignificant proposition, and that another person has a mere true belief in a highly significant proposition. Epistemism does not compare these two token beliefs of these two persons.

This example generalizes. Epistemism does not compare *any* pair of otherwise identical states such that one element of the pair is better according to *one* of the goodmakers identified in epistemism's principles, and the other element of the pair is better according to *another* of the goodmakers identified in epistemism's principles. Epistemism identifies several dimensions of epistemic value (all explanatorily unified via their relationships to knowledge), but it does not tell us how those dimensions *trade off* against one another.

I wish I had something insightful to say about tradeoffs, but unfortunately I don't. It is hard to make tradeoffs in *any* branch of value theory, and the epistemic branch is no exception. I hope, however, that by building up epistemism in the explicit way that I have, I've nonetheless managed to shine some light on epistemic value.

We've now summarized what epistemism does (it makes a variety of epistemic comparisons), as well as what it does not do (it does not make tradeoffs). We can thus move on to new material.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Epistemic Value Socialized**

#### **1. Introduction**

How should well-being be distributed across people? Should the *average* level of well-being be maximized, or should the *total* level of well-being be maximized? Or should well-being be distributed *equally* across people, or even with a *priority* for the group's worst-off members?

These are standard questions from ethics and political philosophy. Their concern is not how well off individual people are, but rather the ways in which goods ought to be distributed across people. We epistemic value theorists should ask epistemological questions with an analogous social concern: a concern not for how individual people do epistemically, but for how epistemic goods ought, epistemically, to be distributed *across* people.

Should the average epistemic standing of peoples' cognitive states be maximized, or should something like the total amount of epistemic goods be maximized? Or should epistemic standings be distributed equally to everyone? Or should they be distributed with priority to the worst off? Or should they be distributed in yet some other way?

In this chapter I'll try to address these questions. In so doing, I'm going to try to take the *individual* epistemic value theory built so far, and extend it into the *social* realm. First, though, I'll need to lay down some groundwork, starting with a brief survey of social epistemology.

#### **2. What is Social Epistemology?**

Many projects count as social epistemology. These projects go at least as far back as Plato, who engaged several of them. For instance, in the *Charmides*, he discusses the problem of how one can determine who is an expert in a field in which one does not have any expertise of one's own. This same problem has been discussed in more recent years by Alvin Goldman and others, and it is clearly a social epistemological problem.<sup>1</sup>

Social epistemology is also concerned with the organization of cognitive labor. How should topics and methods of inquiry be distributed across persons, so as to produce the best epistemic ends? Should everyone inquire into the same topics with the same methods? Or should different people inquire into different topics, or use different methods? These questions were at the center of Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*, and in more recent years they have been fruitfully explored by Philip Kitcher.<sup>2</sup> They unsurprisingly go back to Plato, who famously counsels a division of labor into guardians, artisans, and philosopher-kings. Only the latter ought to engage in theoretical inquiry, on Plato's view, because only they have the proper combination of natural constitution and formal training to do it properly. Plato, then, thinks that cognitive labor should be divided so that only certain particular people engage in theoretical inquiry, and indeed so that other people are not even *permitted* to do so. This is an epistemological version of the ethical view that Derek Parfit calls *perfectionism*: the view that goods ought to be distributed across persons so that at least some people have the very best kinds of goods.<sup>3</sup>

Many further topics also count as social epistemology. For instance, there is a large literature inquiring into the conditions under which one person can gain knowledge

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<sup>1</sup> Goldman (2001: 139-163)

<sup>2</sup> Bacon (1627/1966), Kitcher (1993: 303-389, 2001a: 109-197).

<sup>3</sup> Parfit (1986). Others use the term "perfectionism" differently; see e.g. Griffin (1986: 60-64).

and/or justified belief from another person's *testimony*. All of this literature is part of social epistemology. So is the small body of work on "knowing people" – of what it is to know a person, and of how to attain this kind of knowledge.<sup>4</sup> There is also work in feminist epistemology on the social dimensions of knowledge, in particular on the relationships between knowledge and factors like gender and race.<sup>5</sup> Other work in social epistemology asks whether *groups* of people can have knowledge, justified belief, and other epistemic states, and how these group epistemic states might best be promoted.<sup>6</sup> Other work still inquires into which social belief-forming processes (like voting) best promote epistemic goods in *individual persons*.<sup>7</sup>

One promising way to classify all of this work comes from Christian List, who divides it into the "more radical", which takes *groups* to be knowing subjects, and the "less radical", which takes only *individuals* to be knowing subjects.<sup>8</sup> This classification is on the right track, but its "more radical" category should be expanded; or so I'll now argue.

Recall the question of how well-being should be distributed across persons. Answers to this question – e.g. that total well-being should be maximized and that average well-being should be maximized – need not entail that *groups themselves* have well-being. But those answers are still quite social, in that they evaluate *social entities*: distributions of well-being across people.

Social epistemologists can make similar evaluations – *epistemic* evaluations of distributions of goods across people. Let us call the project of making such evaluations

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<sup>4</sup> See Zagzebski (1996: 50) and Dalmiya (2001).

<sup>5</sup> See Longino (1990) and Fricker (1998, forthcoming).

<sup>6</sup> See Schmitt (1994), List (2005), and Mathiesen (forthcoming).

<sup>7</sup> See Goldman (1999) and Koppl (2005).

<sup>8</sup> List (2005).

“distributive” social epistemology. This project is radically social, *not* in that it attributes epistemic states to social entities, but in that it epistemically ranks social entities. It is thus radically social in a way that transcends Lists’s classifications.

I conclude that Lists’s classifications should be expanded to recognize two sorts of radically social epistemology: one that attributes epistemic states to social entities, and one that epistemically evaluates social entities without attributing epistemic states to them. This chapter engages in the latter.

### **3. Reasons to do distributive social epistemology**

All of the social-epistemological projects discussed above are worth doing. But there are some particular reasons for doing the distributive project, and those reasons are worth emphasizing.

First, there is a growing movement towards theorizing about epistemic value.<sup>9</sup> This movement addresses many of the issues I’ve discussed so far, for instance epistemic significance and epistemic state value. In exploring these issues, the movement often analogizes epistemic value to other sorts of value. It is natural to ask just how far these analogies can be pushed. One way to answer that question is by trying to build epistemic analogs of distributive theories in other domains: that is, to engage in distributive social epistemology.

Here is another reason to do distributive social epistemology. We should epistemically evaluate institutional structures such as the centralization of news reporting to only a few conglomerates. These structures produce distributions of beliefs across people. Given the assumption that these structures are to be epistemically evaluated by what they produce, it follows that we should epistemically evaluate distributions of

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<sup>9</sup> For reviews, see Riggs (2006) and Pritchard (manuscript a).



beliefs across people. In other words, it follows that we should do distributive social epistemology.

There is only a little bit of work in distributing social epistemology, most of it by Alvin Goldman and Philip Kitcher. Let me briefly discuss this work before building my own position.

#### **4. Kitcher's work**

One of the path-breaking works in social epistemology is Kitcher's book *The Advancement of Science*. In that book and a series of related papers, Kitcher develops the idea of a consensus practice, which is somewhat similar to the idea of a Kuhnian paradigm. For our current purposes, we can focus on the fact that these consensus practices feature generally held "consensus" views. On the basis of the notion of consensus practices, Kitcher constructs a system of notions of epistemic scientific progress. These notions include *conceptual progress*, *explanatory progress*, *erotetic progress*, and several others.<sup>10</sup>

Kitcher does some interesting work on the issue of how social aspects of communities (such as the assignments of expertise levels to each scientist by each other scientist) can promote or retard progress as measured via these notions. That work includes arguments to the effect that it is good for communities to include dissenters, as the existence of such people hedges against the possibility of the community getting stuck in a rut. It also includes arguments that the existence of sullied motives, such as motives to obtain credit and authority as opposed to learning the truth, can serve to promote community epistemic progress rather than retard it.

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<sup>10</sup> Kitcher (1993: 105-124).

For several reasons, I will not focus on this work. First, while it seems reasonable to conceptualize the progress of science as a process by which earlier consensus practices are replaced by later ones, it does not seem reasonable to conceptualize the epistemic progress of communities in general in that way. For it does not seem plausible that communities generally have consensuses. Secondly, Kitcher's social epistemological work features a good deal of algebraic formalism that I am not mathematically clever enough to productively engage. Finally, that work focuses mainly on social *means* towards social epistemic goods. But in this dissertation I'm interested primarily in question what is epistemically good *as an end*.

### **5. Goldman's social veritistic value theory**

In chapter 4 I argued for the individual part of epistemism by arguing that it is superior to the best extant theory in its ballpark, namely the individual part of Goldman's veritistic value theory. Now I'm going to do the same thing again. I'm going to argue that the social veritistic value theory that epistemism generates is superior to Goldman's social veritistic value theory – the latter of which is, it turns out, the best extant theory in the ballpark.

We should start with a summary Goldman's social veritistic value theory. The official statement that theory only issues veritistic evaluations of distributions of belief across persons *in a given proposition*; it does not issue such comparisons across propositions. With respect to distributions of belief in a given proposition across persons, Goldman takes it that the veritistic value of these distributions is identical to the mean of

the values of each of the persons in the group with respect to that proposition.<sup>11</sup> That, officially, is Goldman's social veritistic value theory.

Now, Goldman veritistically evaluates practices in the social case the same way that he evaluates them in the individual case: in accordance with their average veritistic outputs. In the individual case we showed that this "averaging view" of practices entails cross-proposition comparisons and, in particular, *equalist* cross-proposition comparisons. Therefore, the same holds in the social case. Let me briefly elaborate this point.

In virtue of the "averaging view" of practices, Goldman's social veritistic value theory compares distributions across persons of belief (and withholding and disbelief) in *any one* true significant proposition, to distributions across persons of belief (and withholding and disbelief) in *any other* true significant proposition. These comparisons are *equalist*, in the sense that they are insensitive to any differences in these propositions other than differences in their truth values.

Why are they equalist in that sense? Answer: because any view that *is* sensitive to such extra things must reflect that sensitivity by taking a *weighted average* as the measure of the instrumental veritistic value of practices, weighted towards propositions with whatever extra properties make the extra difference. And Goldman's view of practice-evaluation is an *averaging* view, not a weighted averaging view.

Therefore, Goldman's social veritistic value theory is best interpreted as follows: for any true significant propositions P and Q, and any distributions across people of belief (and withholding and disbelief) in those propositions, one of those distributions is veritistically better than the other as an end just in case the first distribution features a

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<sup>11</sup> But he explicitly notes that there are other possible measures here, such as the root mean square.

higher average veritistic value with respect to P than the second distribution features with respect to Q.<sup>12</sup>

Now to a first criticism. Since the view is equalist, it is prone to a social analogue of the problem I raised for equalist views in the individual case. That is, it entails that communities with more true belief are veritistically equal to communities with less true belief, at least in certain cases. And since *more true belief* should count as better than *less true belief* within veritistic value theories, this result is a problem. (A problem which, of course, is just the social analogue of the problem for the individual theory's commitment to cross-proposition equalism, discussed in the first half of chapter 4 section 3.4).

Now to a second criticism. Recall that Goldman does not veritistically evaluate states that concern insignificant (for him: uninteresting) propositions. And note that communities can contain some people for whom a proposition is significant while also containing other people for whom that proposition is not significant. These communities, we might say, have "mixed significance" with respect to the propositions under consideration.

How, on Goldman's view, should we veritistically evaluate communities with respect to propositions for which those communities have mixed significance? Should we take the community veritistic values here to be the average of the veritistic values of the people *for whom the proposition is significant*? Or should we take those values to be the averaged over the *whole community*, including the people for whom the proposition is *insignificant*? Stated a bit more carefully, these two choices are as follows:

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<sup>12</sup> See Goldman (1999: 93-94).

Significant mean reading: the veritistic value of any community with respect to any proposition is the sum of the veritistic values of the members of that community *for whom that proposition is significant*, divided by the number of *those* members.

Total mean reading: the veritistic value of any community with respect to any proposition is the sum of the veritistic values of the members of that community for whom that proposition is significant, divided by the *total number* of community members.

I'm going to argue that whichever of these readings we choose to adopt, there are important problems with the resulting social veritistic value theory. Then I'll put forth a different social veritistic value theory. I'll argue that this different theory is superior to the social veritistic value theories we get from Goldman's view on both readings.

Consider the following case. Two communities - the physicists and the aestheticians - go to the same parties. An annoying physicist always corners the aestheticians at these parties and rambles on about the relative weights of protons and neutrons. As a result, all the aestheticians all truly believe the right answer to the question of whether protons are heavier than neutrons, despite having only a small amount of interest in the issue. The physicists too all believe the true answer to this question, while being very interested in the issue. In this case, the two communities have the same significant mean in the proposition that protons are heavier than neutrons, while that proposition is more significant for the physicists than it is for the aestheticians (but at least a little bit significant for both).

On the significant mean reading Goldman's theory entails that the two communities are doing equally well veritistically with respect to the relevant proposition. But that is the wrong thing to say about these two communities, if we are going to say that significance matters at all to veritistic value. Given that significance matters at all to veritistic value, the relative significance levels in these two communities should make a

difference to their veritistic standings with respect to the proposition that protons are heavier than neutrons.

The sort of case illustrated by the communities of the physicists and the aestheticians therefore constitutes a problem for the significant mean reading. It shows that that reading fails to let significance play the role that it should, given that it plays any role at all. And the same problem holds for the total mean reading as well, since the total mean reading *also* takes significance to make a difference to veritistic value. What we have here is therefore a problem for both readings. (A problem which, of course, is just the social analogue of problem for Goldman's individual veritistic value theory that I raised in the latter half of chapter 4 section 3.4).

To summarize the discussion so far: two of the problems raised for Goldman's individual veritistic value theory in chapter 4 have analogues in the social case. Now let me point to a third such problem. Recall the problem that if we cannot veritistically evaluate states of individual people when those states concern insignificant propositions, then it turns out that  $B(t,s)$  is not veritistically better than  $dB(t,-s)$ . This problem too has an analogue in the social case.

First consider the problem on the significant mean reading. According to that reading, a community's veritistic value with respect to a true proposition cannot be lowered in virtue of that community's containing people for whom that proposition is insignificant, and who disbelieve it. A similar result holds for the total mean reading. That reading renders the veritistic value of a community with respect to a proposition invariant under changes to whether the people for whom that proposition is insignificant believe it. Contrary to that invariance, a community ought to be said to do worse off

veritistically with respect to a true proposition, when members of that community for whom that proposition is insignificant stop believing it and start disbelieving it.

We've just seen that the problem from chapter 4 concerning comparisons in the individual case between the states  $B(t,s)$  and  $dB(t,s)$  has analogues in the social case, on both the significant mean reading and the total mean reading. And before that, we saw that two of the other problems from chapter 4 also have analogues in the social case.

Chapter 4 actually explored a variety of problems. I believe that *each* of those problems has an analogue in the social case. But I will spare the reader from a detailed one-by-one discussion of those analogues. Hopefully the foregoing three illustrations suffice.

I conclude that we should not adopt either of the versions of Goldman's social veritistic value theory; let me now develop an alternative social veritistic value theory.

### **5.1 An alternative social veritistic value theory**

In the individual case, I argued that we can deal with the problems I raised for Goldman's theory was to jettison significance (i.e. interest) from that theory. We should do something similar in the social case; for in that case too, we can solve the problems by jettisoning significance. We can start by considering the following replacement view:

The veritistic value of any community with respect to any proposition is the average of the veritistic values of the members of that community, where those values are computed in accordance with the significance-independent veritistic theory articulated in chapter 4.

This view captures the spirit of the alternative social veritistic value theory that I want to conjecture. But it does not ultimately make sense, because the veritistic value theory that the last chapter built up out of epistemism only gives *ordinal* comparisons of individual states. For a social principle that invokes averages to make sense, it must assign a

cardinal number to each individual state, and not merely assign ordinal “better than” relations between those states.

Fortunately, there is a natural way to convert the individual ordinal theory (that I built in the last chapter) into a *cardinal* theory that assigns numbers to each individual state. I’ll now proceed to do as much. Once that cardinal individual veritistic value theory is laid out, I will be able to state a social-level theory that legitimately invokes averages.

First a preliminary argument about truth, content, and veritistic value. If truth is of veritistic value, then more truth is veritistically better than less truth (compare: if happiness is of hedonic value, then more happiness is hedonistically better than less happiness). Furthermore, if two beliefs are true but one of them has more content, then the more-contentful belief instantiates more truth than the less-contentful belief (compare: if two canvases are wholly red but one is bigger, then the bigger canvas instantiates more redness than the smaller canvas). More-contentful true beliefs are therefore veritistically better than less-contentful true beliefs.

This argument assumes that content comes in degrees. We all at least tacitly hold some such view already. We all hold that *Analysis* has more content per page than any other philosophy journal, that we’ve learned a lot from David Lewis’ writings, and that philosophers sometimes respond to objections by making their views less committal. All of those claims commit us to the view that content comes in degrees. Furthermore, the assumption that content comes in degrees is sometimes developed in formal



epistemology, where some authors take content to be inversely proportional to probability.<sup>13</sup>

Nonetheless, the assumption that content comes in degrees is rarely explicitly sanctioned in mainstream analytic epistemology. I'm going to rely on a version of it. In particular, I'll assume that there is a function  $C$  that measures the amount of content of every proposition  $P$ . In order to be a proposition at all, something must have *some* content; therefore,  $C(p) > 0$  for all  $P$ . Given this content measure, and given the foregoing argument that more-contentful true beliefs are better veritistically than less-contentful true beliefs, we are in a position to state the cardinal version of the individual veritistic value theory that I developed in the last chapter. To wit:

**Alternative cardinal individual veritistic value theory**

Let  $P$  be any true proposition, and let  $V(Bp)$ ,  $V(dBp)$ , and  $V(Wp)$  be the veritistic values as an end of believing, disbelieving, and withholding on  $P$ . Then,

$$\begin{aligned} V(Bp) &= C(p) \\ V(Wp) &= 0 \\ V(dBp) &= -C(p) \end{aligned}$$

For any true propositions  $P$  and  $Q$ , all of these theorems follow trivially:

1. If  $C(p) = C(q)$ , then  $V(Bp) > V(Wq) > V(dBp)$
2. If  $C(p) = C(q)$ , then  $V(Bp) = V(Bq)$  and  $V(dBp) = V(dBq)$
3.  $V(Bp) > V(Bq) > V(Wp) > V(dBq) > V(dBp)$  iff  $C(p) > C(q)$
4.  $V(Wp) = V(Wq)$

These results should suffice to show that our cardinal individual veritistic value theory entails all of the comparisons that constitute its ordinal counterpart, and therefore amounts to a quantitative precisification of that ordinal counterpart.

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<sup>13</sup> See e.g. Popper (1959) and Levi (1967).

The cardinal theory assigns a number to each doxastic state of each person, in each proposition (given the idealizing assumption that everyone believes, disbelieves, or withholds on every proposition). Call these numbers “v-scores”. Our new alternative *social* veritistic value theory is, then, just the following claim:

**Alternative social veritistic value theory**

For any community C and any proposition P, the veritistic value as an end of the distribution of belief (and withholding and disbelief) in P across C’s members is the average of those members’ v-scores on P.

This new theory evades the objections I raised for Goldman’s social veritistic value theory. The first of those objections turned on that theory’s equalism – its attribution of equal veritistic values to all beliefs in true, significant propositions. The problem with this sort of equalism is that it renders true beliefs in more-contentful significant propositions veritistically equal to true beliefs in less-contentful significant propositions. The new alternative theory does not have this problem. Its comparisons are not equalist, because it attaches higher v-scores to true beliefs when those true beliefs have more content. Therefore, the new alternative theory is not prone to the first objection I raised for Goldman’s social veritistic value theory.

The rest of the objections turned on the role of significance; they drew out undesirable consequences from the veritistic inevaluability of belief states that concern insignificant propositions. But the new alternative theory evaluates states that concern insignificant propositions as well as states that concern significant propositions. The new theory is thus immune to not only the first of the objections I raised, but to rest of those objections as well.

I want to make one more claim about this new alternative social veritistic value theory: it gives a plausible account of the relative veritistic weights of truth and falsity.

## **5.2 Weighing truth against falsity**

The (individual and social) cardinal veritistic value theory I've just developed entails a view about how the veritistic value of true belief weighs against the veritistic disvalue of false belief. In particular, it entails that the two things are equal: true belief is exactly as valuable as false belief is disvaluable, veritistically.

Here is why the theory entails that. It entails that for any proposition  $P$ , the extent to which  $V(Bp)$  is greater than zero is identical to the extent to which  $V(dBp)$  is less than zero. And moreover, it entails something logically stronger: that for any true propositions  $P$  and  $Q$  of equal amounts of content, the extent to which  $V(Bp)$  is greater than zero is identical to the extent to which  $V(dBq)$  is less than zero. If these results do not amount to the view that true belief is as veritistically valuable as false belief is veritistically disvaluable, it is hard to see what would.

There is often discussion within epistemology of the importance, and the difficulty, of weighing the epistemic value of true belief against the epistemic disvalue of false belief.<sup>14</sup> It might therefore be thought that the quantified version of the veritistic value theory I've articulated does too much: in particular that it resolves the important issue of the relative value and disvalue of true and false belief, *without argument*.<sup>15</sup>

But that objection does not hold water. For consider the following two facts. First, false belief is identical to untrue belief (by excluded middle). Second, we are *not* dealing with *epistemic* value: we are dealing with veritistic value, the part of epistemic value that only concerns truth.

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<sup>14</sup> See James (1911) and Riggs (2003b).

<sup>15</sup> Fallis (2002, forthcoming) raises a similar criticism against Goldman's veritistic value theory.

That argument goes as follows. Given that the one thing of value with which we are concerned is *truth*, it seems reasonable to take the one thing of disvalue we are concerned with to be *falsity*. Moreover, given that both truth and falsity come in amounts (given by the content of the propositions believed), we *should* say that any amount of truth is equally valuable as the same amount of falsity is disvaluable.

Why should we say that? Answer: because we would say the very same thing in other analogous cases. For example, assume that we are basketball critics and that we are concerned with, not basketball value *per se*, but just a particular sub-value of basketball value, namely the sub-value *winning basketball games*. It then makes sense to say that winning any number of games is equally as good as losing that same number of games is bad, and that the same number of cancelled games falls exactly in the middle of these two things on our value scale. But this basketball case is exactly analogous to our veritistic case: basketball value is the analogue of epistemic value, winning basketball games value is the analogue of veritistic value, won games are the analogue of true beliefs, lost games are the analog of false beliefs, and cancelled games are the analogue of withholdings.

Since it seems thoroughly reasonable to let won games be equally as good as lost games are bad when we theorize about “basketball winning value”, it should also seem thoroughly reasonable to take true beliefs to be equally as good as false beliefs are bad when we theorize about *veritistic value*. We therefore have a positive argument for the equal weights of true belief and false belief, within veritistic value theory. (This is not to say that we have an argument about how we should weigh the value of truth against the disvalue of falsity within *epistemic* value theory.)

### **5.3 Section summary**

This section has discussed the closest extant thing to the distributive social epistemic value theory that I'm going to try to build, namely Goldman's social veritistic value theory. Let me briefly summarize this discussion before moving on.

I started with an exposition of the social, distributive part of Goldman's veritistic value theory. I argued that this part of Goldman's theory is prone to analogues of the objections raised in the last chapter against the individual part of the same theory. I then claimed that a different sort of social veritistic value theory, one based on the individual veritistic value theory articulated in the last chapter, is immune to those objections (5.1). I ended the section by defending a certain consequence of this new theory, namely its assignments of equal weights to the veritistic value of truth and the veritistic disvalue of falsity (5.2). Next I'll develop a socialized version of epistemism itself: a theory that makes *epistemic* (as opposed to veritistic) evaluations.

## **6. Epistemism Socialized**

Finally we can get to the positive project of using the individual principles of epistemism to build a distributive *epistemic* value theory, in addition to the distributive *veritistic* value theory articulated and defended above. (The two theories have different subject matters. The one I am about to defend is about epistemic value; the one I just defended was about veritistic value.)

The attempt to build a distributive epistemic value theory is an attempt to say which communities of people are better off epistemically than which others. It is *not* an attempt to say which communities are better off *morally* or *prudentially* than which

others, or to say which communities are *more just* than which others (or for that matter even to say which communities are better off *veritistically* than which others.)

How could one *community* be epistemically better off than another? In a fairly straightforward way, actually. One community can be identical to another except in that some of its members are better off, and none of its members are worse off, epistemically. Surely this sort of relationship between communities makes the first better off epistemically than the second. It is therefore worth honing in on the relevant relationship a bit more carefully. To do so, I'll first need to develop the individual part of epistemism a bit more.

### **6.1. Individual belief-body comparisons**

The principles of epistemism developed so far (i.e. principles 1-6) only compare particular beliefs and withholdings. I'll now build some further principles into epistemism that compare *bodies* of these things. First we should get clear on the notion of a "body" of beliefs and withholdings. I'll use a particular version of that notion, namely the notion of an "overall cognitive state", defined as follows:

#### **Definition of overall cognitive states**

One's overall cognitive state is the set one's beliefs and withholdings. That is to say, two persons R and S have the same overall cognitive state iff: for all propositions P, R believes P iff S believes P, and R withholds on P iff S withholds on P.

This notion allows us to state a new, belief-body-level principle of epistemism, to wit:

#### **Principle 7: Belief-body optimality**

Let  $Cr$  and  $Cs$  be the overall cognitive states of persons R and S. Suppose there is a bijection  $f: Cr \rightarrow Cs$  such that for some  $x \in Cr$ ,  $x >_{ee} f(x)$ , and for no  $x \in Cr$  is  $x <_{ee} f(x)$ . Then,  $Cr >_{ee} Cs$ .

This is just a Pareto optimality principle applied to overall cognitive states; it should be plausible to anyone willing to allow epistemic comparisons of those things. I'll therefore

refrain from arguing for it, and instead state the eighth and final individual principle of epistemism:

**Principle 8: more goods are better and more bads are worse**

Suppose that two overall cognitive states Ca and Cb are as similar as they could possibly be, save that Ca contains more belief than does Cb. Then,

- If that additional belief is according to the *other* principles epistemically good as an end, then A is better epistemically as an end than B.
- If that additional belief is according to the *other* principles epistemically *bad* as an end, then A is *worse* epistemically as an end than B.

As an illustration of this principle, suppose that John knows that James K. Polk was the 11<sup>th</sup> president, and that Tom has never considered that proposition, or even heard of James K. Polk. Further, suppose that John and Tom's overall cognitive states are as similar as they could possibly be, save the foregoing difference. The *more goods are better and more bads are worse* principle entails that John's overall cognitive state is epistemically better as an end than Tom's. John possesses more epistemic goods than Tom, and all other things are equal; so John is doing better epistemically than Tom.

Now consider a different case in which Fred has a *mere belief* that James K. Polk sought a second term, and Sam has never considered the proposition that James A. Polk sought a second term. Suppose that Fred and Sam's overall cognitive states are as similar as they could possibly be, save the foregoing difference. The *more goods are better and more bads are worse* principle entails that Fred's overall cognitive state is epistemically worse as an end than Sam's. Fred possesses more epistemic bads than Sam, and all other things are equal; so Fred is doing worse epistemically than Sam.

If you don't agree that John is doing better than Tom and Fred is doing worse than Sam, then consider the following argument.

Suppose that, except for the differences listed above, the overall cognitive states of John and Tom (and Fred and Sam) are as similar as they could possibly be *over their whole lives*. Given these assumptions, it would be right to epistemically prefer John's whole life to Tom's whole life, and Sam's whole life to Fred's whole life. But since these whole lives are as otherwise similar as they could be, they are identical in what their differing overall cognitive states cause. Therefore, the extra value in the more valuable lives cannot obtain in virtue of what their differing overall cognitive states cause. Hence those overall cognitive states do not evaluatively differ as means. Hence they evaluatively differ *as ends*. That is to say, John is doing better than Tom and Fred is doing worse than Sam.

It is one thing to point out that these comparisons hold intuitively, and to give the foregoing argument that they hold. It is quite another to *explain why* they hold. Principle 8 does the latter thing; I conclude that we should adopt it.

## **6.2. Distributive social principles**

The above foray into individual belief-body comparisons takes us a long way towards being in a position to state our social-level principle to the effect that if a community has some epistemically better off people and no epistemically worse off people, then that community is epistemically better off. But we still need one more notion: the notion of a distribution of beliefs across persons. Such distributions consist in the overall cognitive states of the people in a given set. That is to say, two sets A and B of people have the same distributions of belief across their members iff: every member of A can be paired with a unique member of B, such that the members in each pair have identical overall cognitive states. Using this notion, we can finally state our principle:

### **Principle 9: Social optimality**



Let  $D$  and  $D^*$  be any distributions of belief across the same number of persons. If  $D^*$  is obtainable from  $D$  by making the overall cognitive state of some member of  $D$  better epistemically as an end while making no overall cognitive state of any member of  $D$  worse epistemically as an end, then  $D^* >_{ee} D$ .

This principle is distributive, in that it evaluates *distributions* of belief across persons. And it is epistemic, in that it *epistemically* (as opposed to e.g. veritistically) evaluates those distributions. In making its epistemic evaluations of those distributions, it appeals to epistemic differences in overall cognitive states of individual persons. On the views I have been developing, the latter epistemic differences are adjudicated by the individual principles of epistemism – both those individual principles that concern particular beliefs and withholdings (1-6) and those that concern bodies of beliefs and withholdings (7-8).

It may be helpful to work through an illustration of this, i.e. an illustration of *social optimality* working in conjunction with the individual principles of epistemism. Thus suppose that two persons  $A$  and  $B$  have the same overall cognitive state, but that some true proposition that they both believe is more significant for  $A$  than for  $B$ . Given these stipulations, the conjunction of *significance amplifies epistemic value* and *belief-body optimality* entails that  $C_a >_{ee} C_b$ .

Now suppose that two communities  $S_a$  and  $S_b$  have the same distributions of belief across their members, and that their members include the  $A$  and  $B$  respectively, and that there are no evaluative differences across any of their members except for these two. Then, given the conclusion that  $C_a >_{ee} C_b$ , it follows from *social optimality* that the distribution of belief across  $S_a$  is epistemically better as an end than the distribution of belief across  $S_b$ . This result is an example of a distributive social epistemic comparison that follows from *social optimality* in conjunction with the rest of the principles of epistemism.

Many other results also follow from the conjunction of these principles. Of course, it is not only the individual principles of epistemism with which *social optimality* can be combined. If one were to develop a different individual epistemic value theory, one could still adopt *social optimality*. The principle is therefore of interest not just as an aspect of epistemism, but also more generally as a potential addition to *any* epistemic value theory. What then are the grounds for holding it?

Well, for one, it seems reasonable on its face, at least to some of us. For those who *don't* find it reasonable on its face, there is an argument from analogy, to wit: analogous principles hold in analogous domain of value.

Socializing an example from the individual case, consider archery teams at shooting competitions. If two archery teams contain equal numbers of players that can be put into pairwise correspondence such that one of the teams has a more successful shooter on one of the pairs and no less-successful shooter on any of the pairs, then the first team has done better, archery-wise, than the second. Since this is the right thing to say about the archery case, it is also the right thing to say about the epistemic case. And it is just what *social optimality* would counsel us to say.

In conclusion, then, *social optimality* is intuitively compelling (at least to some of us) and is also supportable by argument. And, of course, it is a natural extension of the first seven principles of epistemism, the principles of *individual* epistemic value. Now let me formulate and argue for two more social principles of epistemic value.

*Social optimality* only concerns pairs of distributions with the same numbers of members. It would be nice to also compare distributions with *different* numbers of

members. But as the problems of population ethics teach us, there are tigers here.<sup>16</sup>

Consider the following principle:

For any the distribution D of belief across persons and any distribution D\* obtainable from D by increasing the total amount of epistemically good belief summed across its members, D\* is better epistemically as an end than D.

This principle might seem plausible at first, but it entails that extremely populous communities each member of which has barely any epistemic goods and no epistemic bads are *epistemically better off* than much less populous communities whose members have a lot of knowledge and no mere belief. That is the well-known “repugnant conclusion”, applied to the epistemic domain.

Nonetheless, I think it is possible to construct a social-level principle of epistemism that compares differently-sized communities, and which is not prone to the repugnant conclusion or any other standard problem from population ethics. The basic idea is twofold. First, whenever there is a change to a community that for some proposition P raises the proportion of the members of that community whose doxastic states towards P are epistemically good, that change makes that community better off epistemically, *ceteris paribus*. And second, whenever there is a change to a community that for some proposition P raises the proportion of the members of that community whose doxastic states towards P are *bad* epistemically, that change makes that community *worse off* epistemically, *ceteris paribus*. More precisely and officially:

**Principle 10: Social proportionality**

Let D and D\* be distributions of belief across people such that D is a proper subset of D\*. Let P be any proposition. Let n and n\* be the proportions of people in D and D\* whose doxastic states concerning P are positive. If  $n^* > n$ , then  $D^* >_{ee} D$ , *ceteris paribus*. Furthermore, if  $n > n^*$ , then  $D^* <_{ee} D$ , *ceteris paribus*.

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<sup>16</sup> See e.g. Parfit (1984) and McMahan (1981).

This principle just says that if you add people to a community and that addition raises the proportion of the members of that community who have epistemically good states with respect to some proposition P, then you have thereby raised the epistemic standing of that whole community – and conversely if you add people to a community and those people have epistemically *bad* states with respect to P. Of course, other things must remain equal. The communities must be as similar as they could be, given the difference the principle describes.

*Social optimality* and *social proportionality* both tell us that, in some sense or other, we can improve communities epistemically by adding epistemic goods to them. *Social optimality* roughly says that we can add epistemic value to a community by adding epistemic value to one of its members. *Social proportionality* roughly says that we can add epistemic value to a community by adding a new member with some epistemic value of his own. So, these principles can be glossed as the claims that we can add epistemic value to a community by either adding epistemic value to one of its members, or by adding a new member with some epistemic value of his own. I now want to explore a third way to add epistemic value to a community.

Suppose that a community – the *conformists* - consists of a bunch of people who know exactly the same things, and believe only what they know. Suppose that another equally sized community – the *mavericks* - consists of a bunch of people who know *different* things, and who also believe only what they know. In a sense, the mavericks know more than the conformists. And it need not just be that the mavericks have more belief than do the conformists; the total believed content may be the same in both communities.

In what sense of “more” do the mavericks know more than the conformists? Just the sense of “more” that obtains between the expertise levels of the following two communities. The first community has members all of whom are experts at laying concrete but not anything else. The second community has the same number of members who have the same amounts of expertise respectively as do the members of the first community. But among the members of the second community, different ones are experts at different things. Some are experts at concrete laying, others are expert carpenters, and others still are expert physicians.

There is an obvious sense in which the second community has more expertise than the first. In the very same sense, the mavericks have more knowledge than the conformists. And more generally: whenever communities are otherwise epistemically identical, and one of them features more distinctions in content across its members’ epistemically valuable states than does the other, that more diverse community has more epistemic goods.<sup>17</sup>

Since epistemic goods are *epistemic* goods, more of them is better epistemically than less of them – in this most recent sense of “more” as well as the earlier two. We should recognize that fact with a new principle:

**Principle 11: Social breadth**

Let  $D$  and  $D^*$  be distributions of belief across persons such that the persons in  $D$  and  $D^*$  are pairwise identical in both the number and the epistemic value as an end of each of their token doxastic states that is positively epistemically valuable as an end. If there are more distinctions in content across these tokens in  $D^*$  than there are in  $D$ , then  $D^* >_{ee} D$ , *ceteris paribus*.

This principle just says that communities do well epistemically by featuring breadth of content across the doxastic states of their members, if those states are good

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<sup>17</sup> A similar principle holds for epistemic bads: when there are more distinctions in content across the epistemic bads of a community, that community contains more epistemic bads.

epistemically. The argument for it is, again, that it picks out a sense in which one community can have more epistemic goods than another, and that if *some* epistemic goods are good, then *more* epistemic goods are better.

Like the two social principles before it, *social breadth* picks out a property of the social entities *distributions of belief across persons*, and claims that that property is of epistemic value as an end. In that sense, it is a radically social principle of epistemic value. But the extent to which it is social goes even farther than that. Unlike *social optimality* and *social proportionality*, it allows for differences in the community epistemic value without any differences in individual epistemic value. That is to say, it entails that community epistemic value does not supervene on individual epistemic value. Let me explain.

Whenever *social optimality* or *social proportionality* entail that one community is better off epistemically than another, it is in virtue of the better off community featuring some added individual good. With *social optimality*, the added good comes without adding any members to the community, and with *social proportionality* the added good comes via adding members to the community who individually possess that good. So *social optimality* and *social proportionality* only sanction social differences when there are individual differences.

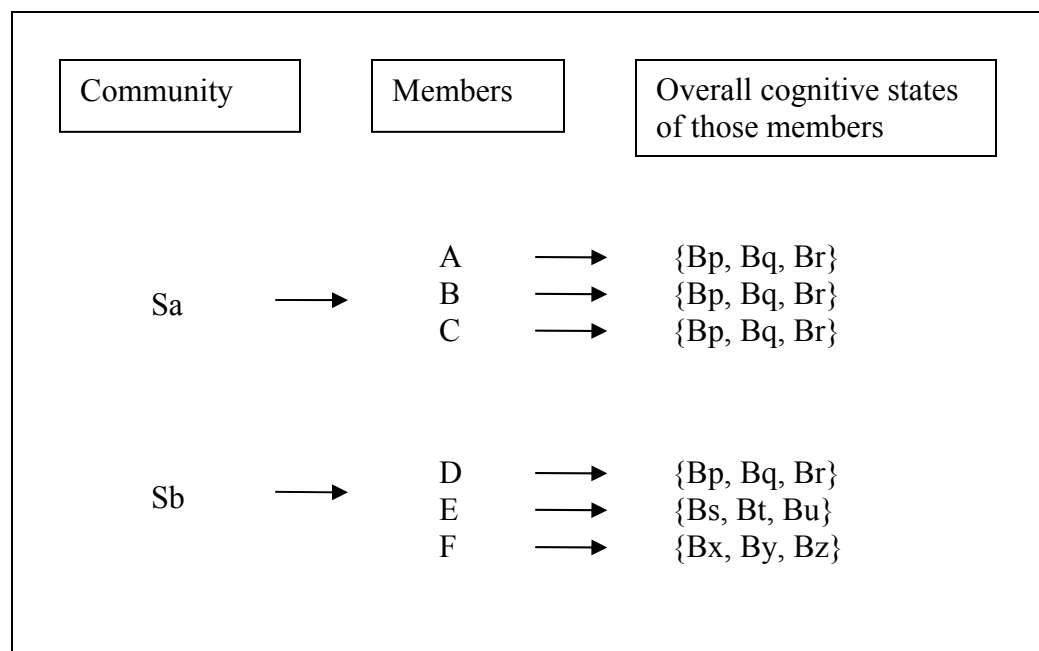
But *social breadth* sanctions social differences *without* individual differences. Suppose that two communities can be placed in a 1-1 correspondence such that, for each pair of people in this correspondence, their overall cognitive states are evaluatively identical in the following sense: for each person of the pair, each his token believings

(and withholdings) corresponds to a unique token believing (or withholding) of the other member of the pair, such that those two tokens are equally epistemically valuable as ends.

When two communities are related in this way, there are (in an important sense) no epistemically evaluative differences across their members. Yet *social breadth* entails that these very communities can be *distinct* in their own epistemic values. For it can turn out that in one of these communities there is more breadth of content across the propositions that its members bear positive epistemic states towards. Let me give a simplified illustration of this.

Suppose that two communities each have three members, each of whom believes exactly three propositions. That makes nine beliefs per community, eighteen total. Suppose that all of those beliefs are equally, and positively, epistemically valuable as ends. Also suppose that the members of the first community believe the same things, whereas the members of the second community believe different things. We can represent these communities as follows:

**Figure 1**



Pick any two beliefs you like, out of our eighteen. By stipulation, those beliefs are equally epistemically valuable as ends. So, in an important sense, there are no differences in epistemic value across the members of  $S_a$  and  $S_b$ . Nonetheless, *social breadth* entails that  $S_a >_{ee} S_b$ .

So *social breadth* is not only radically social in making epistemic comparisons of social entities as ends, but *very* radically social: it entails that the facts about social epistemic value do not supervene on the facts about individual epistemic value. Despite this radical upshot, the principle seems quite right. It simply identifies a way, mirrored in other domains, in which one community can have more goods than another.

We have, then, articulated three social-level distributive principles of epistemism: *social optimality*, *social proportionality*, and *social breadth*. Just as the individual principles of epistemism do not compare every individual state with every other individual state, the social principles do not compare every social state with every other social state. For instance, if two communities differ epistemically only in that one pair of their members differs epistemically, and the members of this pair are epistemically identical in all but one of their doxastic states, and for one of the members this state is a justified false belief whereas for the other it is an unjustified true belief, then our three social principles do not compare these two communities. Similarly with all of the other pairs of individual states that epistemism does not compare: whenever two communities differ only on those pairs, the social principles do not compare those communities. Each absence of an individual comparison percolates up to an absence of a social comparison.



And it is not only by lacking individual comparisons that epistemism lacks social comparisons. For suppose that we alter a distribution  $D$  in accordance with *social optimality* by giving someone in it an epistemic gain without giving anyone in it an epistemic loss. Call the resulting distribution  $D^*$ . Suppose that we also alter  $D$  in a different way to produce a different distribution  $D^{**}$ , this time in accordance with *social breadth*, introducing more breadth of content. Epistemism does not compare  $D^*$  and  $D^{**}$ . Thus there are social comparisons epistemism does not make, which are not traceable to individual comparisons it does not make. On the social level as well as the individual one, epistemism does not make trade-offs.

## **7. Chapter Summary**

This chapter has engaged in distributive social epistemology. In surveying the literature in this sort of social epistemology, I focused on to Goldman's theory of veritistic value. I argued that analogues of the criticisms of Goldman's individual theory apply to this social theory. Then I argued that epistemism spawns a social veritistic value theory that is immune to those criticisms.

Then I built a social version of epistemism itself – a social *epistemic* value theory. In building that final theory I laid out and argued for three particular distributive, social level principles of epistemic value: *social optimality*, *social proportionality*, and *social breadth*. These principles are all deeply social, in that they evaluate social entities. And the last of them is even more deeply social still. It entails that the facts about social epistemic value are in a sense *emergent*: they do not supervene on the facts about individual epistemic value.

## **Chapter 6**

### **The mind's true source of nourishment**

Persons, in whom the principal part is the mind, ought to make their principle care the search after wisdom, which is its true source of nourishment.

- René Descartes <sup>1</sup>

This chapter applies epistemism as developed so far to a topic that has for the last several centuries been relatively neglected, namely wisdom. Exactly how wisdom is related to epistemism will not become clear until late in the chapter. Before that, I'll need to defend a theory of the nature of wisdom.

#### **1. Why we need theories of wisdom**

There are at least five good reasons for epistemic value theorists to construct theories of wisdom. For one, people sometimes write about wisdom as if it were an epistemic good, and these people do not seem to be misguided. Among these people is Wayne Riggs, who uses “wisdom” as a term of art for the highest epistemic good, whatever that good is.<sup>2</sup> This use of “wisdom” is telling, because it is no random selection. It is not strange to use “wisdom” as a term of art for the highest epistemic good, whereas it would be strange to use e.g. “toothpaste” as a term of art for the highest epistemic good. Riggs is not alone in writing about wisdom as if it were a particularly high-grade epistemic good; in this he is joined by Kvanvig, Zagzebski, Code, and others. None of these theorists are confused in any obvious way.

The second reason derives from the connections between epistemology and psychology. As several theorists have pointed out, some parts of psychology are either

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<sup>1</sup> In a letter to Abbé Picot, reprinted in Haldane and Ross (1931: vol. I, 205). Modernized.

<sup>2</sup> Riggs (2003a).

tacitly or explicitly engaged in studying epistemically valuable phenomena such as intelligence, creativity, and rationality.<sup>3</sup> It would behoove us epistemic value theorists to pay attention to this work, since it addresses some of the very same issues as our own work.

As it turns out, there is a body of psychological work on wisdom, and that work widely recognizes the standing of wisdom as a particularly high-grade intellectual state. There seem to be three main strands of motivation for this body of work. The first strand derives from developmental psychology. Cognitive developmental psychologists in the tradition following Piaget, and personality-centered developmental psychologists in the tradition following Erikson, both sometimes theorize about wisdom as a particularly high-end characteristic obtained late in life by people who have properly risen through all of the developmental stages. This work takes wisdom to be, as it were, a pinnacle of psychological development, be that development either of the particularly intellectualized variety with which cognitive theorists are concerned, or of the more whole-person variety with which the personality theorists are concerned. The second strand derives from work on the nature of intelligence. A variety of intelligence researchers have found traditional psychometric work, the sort of work which focuses on the very formal sorts of operations with which traditional intelligence tests are concerned, to presuppose an unsatisfyingly over-intellectualized view of what intelligence amounts to. One way that some of these researchers have responded to this dissatisfaction is by theorizing about other phenomena as well, in particular other phenomena that seem to be more practical or more connected to success in the real world. Paramount among these other phenomena has been wisdom. The third strand has to do with the recent movement in favor of “positive psychology”,

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<sup>3</sup> Goldman (1986), Bishop and Trout (2004).

that is, psychology that deals with positive states like happiness or well-being as opposed to negative states like mental illness. One of the positive states that these researchers focus on is wisdom.

So there is a body of psychological work that takes wisdom to be one of the sorts of things that we epistemic value theorists are interested in. This body of work may well be on to something. That is the second reason why we should construct accounts of wisdom.<sup>4</sup>

The third reason is that within the history of philosophy there are rich veins of material that take wisdom to be a central and high epistemic achievement. This material includes work by Plato and Aristotle, their medieval followers, and the moderns who followed them in turn. Strangely, though, it seems to have petered out by the twentieth century. It is as if twentieth century epistemologists grabbed a big set of interconnected issues from the ancients and their followers, and then theorized about some of those issues much more than others. Wisdom is one of the others, so our own theorizing about it has some catching up to do.

The fourth reason is that wisdom is connected to some of the applied issues with which our general theories are intimately associated. For instance, it is connected to the design of educational curricula. In pursuing this connection, Goldman (1999) argues that his veritistic approach to epistemic value resolves the issue of how school curricula should be designed. Roughly, his view is that curricula should be centered on the cultivation of true belief. However, some people have argued that school curricula should be centered on the cultivation of *wisdom*.<sup>5</sup> It is worth getting straight on the

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<sup>4</sup> See Sternberg (ed. 1990), Sternberg (2003), Sternberg and Jordan (eds. 2005), and Baltes (In progress).

<sup>5</sup> Norman (1996), Sternberg (2001a, 2001b).

relative merits of these two approaches. And in order to do that, it would be helpful to first have a theory of the nature of wisdom.

The fifth reason to construct accounts of wisdom has to do with certain large-scale debates about the structure of epistemic value. In her book *Virtues of the Mind*, Zagzebski claims that consequentialist accounts of epistemic value have difficulty making sense of the epistemic value of wisdom, and that her own virtue-theoretic theory does better at the task.<sup>6</sup>

Epistemism is a consequentialist epistemic value theory. It identifies what is epistemically better than what else as an end; and in light of this identification, we are in a position to identify what is epistemically better than what else as a means. A thorough defense of epistemism therefore must respond to Zagzebski's claim about consequentialist epistemic value theories and wisdom.

This chapter attempts to make that response. In so doing it critically surveys the extant work on wisdom, argues for a particular account of the nature of wisdom, and then finally shows how this theory explanatorily coheres with epistemism. That explanatory coherence, in turn, suffices as a response to Zagzebski's wisdom-based argument against epistemic consequentialism.

## **2. Critical survey of the extant work on wisdom**

I've been able to find three sorts of extant views about the nature of wisdom. Some, following Socrates, take wisdom to be a form of epistemic humility. Others, following Aristotle, take wisdom to come in two forms, the practical and the theoretical, the former of which is a capacity for good judgment about how to act and the latter of

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<sup>6</sup> Zagzebski (1996: 28-29, 50).

which is deep knowledge. Others still follow Aristotle only part way, taking wisdom as a practical matter only.

Let us call these three sorts of views about wisdom the *Humility*, *Twofold*, and *Practical* views, respectively. I'm going to describe and criticize the central philosophical theories of wisdom of these three sorts; then I'll defend a new approach.

### **Humility views**

Plato's *Apology* suggests that wisdom amounts to some sort of epistemic humility. The Oracle says that Socrates is the wisest of all men; Socrates tests the prophecy; he finds his interlocutors deeply ignorant and unaware of that fact. Socrates alone *recognizes* his ignorance, and in this he seems the wisest of all men indeed.

Thus we might think that Socrates took wisdom to consist in recognizing one's epistemic shortcomings. Such views are also sometimes conjectured in the contemporary psychology literature, for instance by John Meacham.<sup>7</sup> And even among people who do not claim that epistemic humility is in any sense *definitional* of wisdom, it is often claimed that epistemic humility is nonetheless somehow central to being wise. The latter sort of view can be found in the work of one of the main psychologists of wisdom, Paul Baltes, who measures peoples' wisdom with (among other things) tests of their ability to recognize and manage uncertainty.<sup>8</sup>

So the views that epistemic humility is necessary and sufficient for, or maybe just necessary for, or maybe just a good predictor of wisdom can be found in a variety of writings. To what extent are these views plausible?

If epistemic humility is sufficient for wisdom, then it stands to reason that the

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<sup>7</sup> Meacham (1990); also see Kitchener and Brenner (1990).

<sup>8</sup> Kunzmann and Baltes (2005) is a good summary of Baltes' research program.

wiser one is, the more epistemic humility one has. However, if two people have equal epistemic humility, and then one of them gains vast amounts of knowledge about every subject matter there is, then the gainer of this knowledge has become wiser. Yet this wiser person has not made any gains in epistemic humility. Thus, contrary to the view that epistemic humility is sufficient for wisdom, it is not the case that the wiser one is the more epistemic humility one has. So epistemic humility is not sufficient for wisdom.

It isn't necessary either. For one could by having vast amounts of knowledge be such that epistemic humility was inappropriate for one, and therefore with propriety *not* be epistemically humble. And vast amount of knowledge should not keep one from being wise. Epistemic humility is therefore neither sufficient nor necessary for wisdom. Nonetheless, it might in some sense be a good predictor of wisdom. I'll come back to this possibility later.<sup>9</sup>

### **Practical views**

Lots of people have Practical views about wisdom, including Sharon Ryan, Robert Nozick, Paul Baltes, Robert Sternberg, and others (see table 1 at the end of the chapter). What all of these views share in virtue of which they are *Practical* views of wisdom is that they all take wisdom to be some sort of practical knowledge or ability. Let me try to make this clearer by discussing some of the particular views.

Let's start with Sharon Ryan's views. In two illuminating papers she advocates one, and then later another, theory according to which wisdom is a compound state the most central aspect of which is knowledge of how to live well. In the first of these papers, she argues that to be wise is to (i) be a free agent who (ii) knows how to live well

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<sup>9</sup> Also see Ryan (1996) on humility views of wisdom.

and (iii) does live well, whose (iv) living well is caused by her knowledge of how to live well.

In the second paper, she drops the first, third, and fourth of these conditions. There are good reasons for doing so. A wise and free agent who is suddenly metaphysically enslaved does not thereby cease to be wise; therefore, wise agents need not be free. Wise agents need not live well either: it may turn out that, through ceaseless bad luck, their wise choices always bring about tragedies. Alternatively, wise people may be akratic, or perhaps even evil, and on those grounds fail to live well despite their wisdom (I'll say more about these possibilities in a moment).

So there are several ways in which wise people can fail to live well. And if wise people need not live well, then *ipso facto* they need not live well *via* their knowledge of how to live well. All that remains of Ryan's original account, then, is the epistemic condition - the condition according to which wise people know how to live well.

Her second paper combines this condition with another, and argues for the view that to be wise is to (i) know how to live well, while also (ii) having an appreciation of the true value of living well. This view needs a bit of unpacking. First we should get straight on what Ryan means by "know how to live well". By this phrase she seems to mean to pick out a very general sort of knowledge that is relevant to one's actions across many situations and which tends to make one live well if it is implemented in one's practical reasoning. She does not give specific examples of what sort of knowledge this might be, but knowledge of truths like "living well requires being honest" and "living well requires one to make sacrifices" seems to be what she has in mind.



These aphoristic truths tend to bring one to live well if they are implemented in one's practical reasoning. They are not, however, very detailed. For instance, they do not directly entail anything which candidate one should vote for in a given presidential election, if one desires to live well. Knowledge of how to live well seems, then, to consist in knowledge of general maxims the following of which tends to make for good living, but the advice of which does not on its own unambiguously tell one what to do in any particular situation.

It seems reasonable enough to think that being wise requires having this sort of knowledge. But what about Ryan's appreciation condition, the condition that being wise requires having an appreciation of the true value of living well? As far as I can tell, Ryan means by the phrase "an appreciation of the true value of living well" to pick out a mental state that one is in just in case one values or desires living well (or, perhaps, a mental state one is in just in case one values or desires living well *as such*).

Certain other philosophers hold Practical views that also take wisdom to require and appreciation of the true value of living well. These other Practical theorists mean for this "appreciation" to require that one value or desire living well, but they mean for it to require more as well. Additionally, they mean for it to require that one *take living well to heart*, and thereby apply it to oneself in a way that runs deeper than mere lip service.

Thus, following Kekes 1983, these philosophers sometimes allude to Tolstoy's character Ivan Ilych, who always knew what the good life consisted in, and in some sense always desired or valued that life, but never really got around to it, and who was hit on his deathbed by the sudden and longing realization of that fact. Ivan Ilych did not take the good life to heart – not until it was too late, at least. Those who follow Kekes (on

taking living well to heart) hold that wisdom requires what Ivan Ilych lacked. This thing seems to somehow outstrip whatever is picked out by Ryan's phrase "an appreciation of the true value of living well".<sup>10</sup>

Nonetheless, Ryan and the other Practical theorists share at least the view that wisdom requires valuing or desiring the good life. They all go wrong in holding that view; or so I'll now argue.

Why in the first place should we think that wisdom requires that one value the good life or desire to live it? It seems possible to know how to live well, and even to know what is valuable about living well, and nonetheless not personally value living well or desire to live well. Perhaps people who are self-destructive can know how to live well and what is valuable about the good life, but nonetheless neither value nor desire that life. Maybe this sometimes happens with depression; deeply depressed people may desire nothing but to sit in a dark room alone, all the while knowing both how to live well and what is valuable about the good life. Why should their depression rob them of this knowledge?

Now consider a wise person who knows how to live well and values and desires the good life. Suppose that at some point in this person's life, he is beset by a fit of deep depression, as a result of taking a medication with this as a side effect. It seems unfair to this person, to say that his medication destroys his wisdom. Isn't his depression bad enough on its own? Can't his doctor rightly avoid mentioning wisdom loss when discussing the medicine's risks?

Our unfortunate medicine-taker could still retain all of his knowledge, including all of his knowledge of how to live well. People might still go to him for good advice;

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<sup>10</sup> See Godlovitch (1981), McKee (1990), and Nielsen (1993).

and with poking and prodding, they might even get it. He might even be a stereotypical wise sage, sitting on a mountain and extolling deep aphorisms. Should his visitors feel slighted because he is deeply depressed? Should they think that they have not found a wise man after all, despite the man's knowledge and good advice?

*I certainly wouldn't think that. If I ran across such a person, I'd take his advice to heart, wish him a return to health, and leave the continuing search for sages to his less grateful advisees. So I think that wisdom does not require valuing or desiring the good life.*

For those who aren't convinced by this argument from depression, there is also an argument from evil. Consider Mephistopheles, that devil to whom Faust foolishly sells his soul. Mephistopheles knows what advice will bring Faust to lead a bad life, and that is precisely the advice that he gives him. But then, it stands to reason that Mephistopheles also knows what advice will bring Faust to lead a *good* life. So, it stands to reason that Mephistopheles knows how to live well. Despite this knowledge, the life Mephistopheles lives is bad, and so is the life he brings Faust to live. Mephistopheles is sinister, fiendish, and wicked. But whatever he is, he is not a fool. He is, it seems, wise but evil.<sup>11</sup>

If it helps, we can recall that the devil was once an angel (or so the legend goes, of course). Should we say that the devil was wise as an angel but, through no loss of knowledge, became unwise in his attempt to take over the throne and his subsequent fall into hell? That seems no more plausible than the view that the depression-inducing medication destroys the sage's wisdom, despite not destroying any of the sage's knowledge. It seems, then, that wisdom can coexist both with depression and with evil,

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<sup>11</sup> Thanks to Peter Kivy for suggesting Mephistopheles as a character who may be both wise and evil.

but that wise people who are depressed or evil do not meet Ryan's appreciation condition.

All accounts of wisdom that include an appreciation condition are therefore at least partly wrong. Those accounts require that wise people desire or value what they know to be valuable; but the compossibilities of wisdom and depression, and of wisdom and evil, show that this requirement does not hold.

Yet surely there is something right about the requirement that wisdom entails knowing how to live well. Thus we should consider views on which wisdom just amounts to as much, that is, on which to be wise is to know how to live well. Views in this neighborhood have been advocated by Robert Nozick and Richard Garrett. According to Nozick,

Wisdom is what you need to understand in order to live well and cope with the central problems and avoid the dangers in the predicament(s) human beings find themselves in.<sup>12</sup>

The sort of understanding Nozick has in mind here seems to be understanding-that, the relatively tame sort of understanding invoked by such statements as

Yes officer, I understand that there is a speed limit.

and

I understand that the meeting is on Wednesday.

This is *not* the sort of understanding invoked by philosophers like Elgin, Zagzebski, and Kvanvig in their attempts to take understanding as particularly high-grade epistemic good that is related to insight and theoretical unification. At least one philosopher, though, *does* take wisdom to be a species of that particular sort of understanding, namely Richard Garrett. According to his view,

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<sup>12</sup> Nozick (1989: 267).

Wisdom is that understanding and those justified beliefs which are essential to living the best life.<sup>13</sup>

Since the relevant sort of understanding here is supposed to be something like unificatory insight, there is a live question as to whether it must in any way feature knowledge.<sup>14</sup> Elgin argues that such understanding can consist in false beliefs. Zagzebski claims that such understanding does not even feature *beliefs*. On her view, unificatory-insight understanding does not feature any propositional states at all, but rather takes as its objects such non-propositional items as paintings or domains of inquiry.

Garrett recognizes that these are potential views about unificatory-insight understanding, and he does not rule them out. But he nonetheless thinks that, *ceteris paribus*, a person who holds with justification those beliefs the holding of which is essential to living the best life is more wise than a person who holds those same beliefs but without justification. That is why his definition identifies wisdom not with that understanding that is essential to living the best life, but with the combination of said understanding with a justified holding of those beliefs the holding of which is essential to living the best life.

So Nozick and Garrett both take Practical views of wisdom: they both take wisdom to consist in beliefs, or understanding of one variety or another, or some combination of these things, where these things concern living well. But they both add an important twist: they take the relevant beliefs and understandings to be those beliefs and understandings that are *essential to* living well.

This twist renders their theories implausible, for the following reasons. It seems possible, and in fact even likely, that there are multiple sets of beliefs (or understandings

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<sup>13</sup> Garrett (1996: 230).

<sup>14</sup> See Kvanvig (2003) and Grimm (2006).

etc.) such that possessing any one of those sets of beliefs (or understandings etc.) is sufficient for living well, given that all of the extra-doxastic conditions for living well are also met. But if there are indeed such multiple sets of beliefs (or understandings etc.), then there *is no* set of beliefs (or understandings etc.) that is essential to living the best life. Nozick and Garrett's theories therefore render it impossible for anyone to be wise. If to be wise is to possess those beliefs or understandings that are essential to living the best life, and there is no set of beliefs or understandings that are essential to living the best life, then wisdom can't be had!

So Nozick and Garrett's Practical theories of wisdom, just like Ryan's and the take-to-heart theorists' Practical theories of wisdom, turn out to be implausible. Could any other Practical theory of wisdom do a better job?

Perhaps. If we drop the condition about essential-ness that plagues Nozick's and Garrett's theories, and we also drop the appreciation condition that plagues Ryan's theory and the take-to-heart theories, then we are left with something like the view that to be wise is to know how to live well. This seems to be the best practical theory of wisdom.

Nonetheless, it is problematic. To see why, pick what you think is the best sort of knowledge to have, save knowledge of how to live well. This sort of knowledge may be fundamental metaphysical or epistemological knowledge; or it may be some more scientific sort of knowledge; or it may be any other sort of knowledge. Call this "the best non-practical knowledge". Now, consider two people, A and B, with equal knowledge of how to live well, but such that A has much more of the best non-practical knowledge than does B. Is A wiser than B? To many, including myself, the answer seems to be "yes". But if in this case A is wiser than B, then wisdom cannot be knowledge of how to live

well. At the end of the day, then, not even the best Practical theory of wisdom is entirely plausible. (Thanks to Ned Markosian for suggesting this argument against the best Practical theory of wisdom.)

Now let us ask another question: is B more foolish than A?

B does, after all, have just as much practical knowledge as does A. Why should lacking the best *non-practical* knowledge, be it deep scientific or philosophical knowledge or anything else, render him *foolish*? Doesn't everyone or at least almost everyone lack deep philosophical and scientific knowledge? And aren't most people nonetheless not particularly foolish?

It does not seem right to call B more foolish than A. But this leaves us in a bind. For foolishness is in some sense the absence of wisdom. And if foolishness is the absence of wisdom, and foolishness is no more present in B than in A, then A is not wiser than B. Thus in taking B to be no more foolish than A, we ought to also take A to be no wiser than B.

But earlier, when we asked not about foolishness but about wisdom, we wanted to say that A *is* wiser than B. So it has turned out that different things happen when we ask different questions about the case of A and B. When we ask about "wisdom" we think that A is wiser than B, but when we ask about "foolishness" we think that A is not wiser than B.

What is going on here? Is it that we tacitly hold contradictory beliefs about wisdom, or what? The answer, I think, is that there are two kinds of wisdom, the practical and the theoretical. Theoretical wisdom is something like deep knowledge or understanding, and practical wisdom is something like knowledge of how to live well.

Somehow, foolishness-talk in our case leads us to interpret “wisdom” as “practical wisdom”, whereas wisdom-talk in our case leads us to interpret “wisdom” as “theoretical wisdom”. Our responses to the case, then, are not so much contradictory as they are concerned with two different varieties of wisdom.

I’ll say more about these two varieties of wisdom later. But right away, I should say that there are additional motivations, independent of those motivations having to do with the foregoing argument, for taking wisdom to be a twofold phenomenon. In particular, twofold views are motivated by the historical literature on wisdom. Aristotle took wisdom to come in both practical and theoretical varieties, and so have many of his followers, including Linda Zagzebski. Maybe these theorists are on to something; let us examine their views.

### **Twofold Virtue Theories**

Aristotle operated with at least two distinct concepts that are not unreasonable to express with the word “wisdom”. In several places (especially Book 6 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*), he discusses the intellectual virtues, two of which are “sophia” and “phronesis”. These terms are typically translated as “theoretical wisdom” and “practical wisdom” respectively.

Aristotle seems to regard theoretical wisdom as the highest cognitive state or the best position one can be in epistemically. It consists in “episteme”, or what most translators call “scientific knowledge”, that is properly grounded in “nous”, which is something like immediate comprehension of the most fundamental principles in virtue of which all other principles hold. It seems reasonable, then, to call sophia “theoretical wisdom”.



Phronesis is a faculty for good practical reasoning. The person with phronesis, that is, practical wisdom, has the ability to make good judgments. He therefore has a general knowledge not only of what ends are good for him, but also of what means are good for producing those ends. Phronesis is somewhat similar to knowledge of how to live well; and it seems to be quite reasonably translated as “practical wisdom”.

Zagzebski's views about wisdom are deeply influenced by Aristotle's. She countenances something like phronesis as a faculty of good judgment and calls it “practical wisdom”; she also recognizes a more intellectualized form of wisdom, which she calls “theoretical wisdom”. She takes practical wisdom to be a virtue consisting in good judgment about what to do and what to believe. Thus, she takes <do what a practically wise person would do in one's situation> as the proper rule for action, and <believe what a practically wise person would believe in one's situation> as the proper rule for belief formation. She writes:

The proper way for us to conduct ourselves cognitively is exactly the same as the proper way for us to conduct ourselves in more overt forms of behavior, namely, by acting the way a person with practical wisdom would act.<sup>15</sup>

Those who are inclined to find this advice unhelpful, and to ask for greater specificity in the rules for action and belief, are not going to get it from Zagzebski. She, like Aristotle, takes it that the subject matter of ethics does not allow for such precision, and that decision rules phrased in terms of what the practically wise person would be quite precise enough.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Zagzebski (1996: 230). Note the conditional fallacy here. A practically wise person in one's situation would believe that she is practically wise; but sometimes it is improper for one to believe that one is practically wise.

<sup>16</sup> Zagzebski (1996: 223-225).

Again like Aristotle, Zagzebski takes theoretical wisdom to be a particularly high intellectual good, and to be quite distinct from practical wisdom. Furthermore, she has several substantive things to say about its nature.

First, she takes it to be a species of the sort of understanding that has to do with unificatory insight. On her view, this sort of understanding not propositional, i.e. it is not any sort of attitude directed at any sort of proposition or propositions. It is instead directed at non-propositional structures in reality like paintings or domains of inquiry.<sup>17</sup> She does not take theoretical wisdom to be *identical* to this sort of understanding. Rather, she takes it to be the species of this sort of understanding that “is a matter of grasping the whole structure of reality”.<sup>18</sup>

It is worth noting right away that by classifying understanding and its species theoretical wisdom as epistemically valuable phenomena but not propositional phenomena, Zagzebski is breaking from what is sometimes, following Kvanvig 1992, called the “atomistic” approach to epistemic value. The distinctive character of this atomistic approach is, to put the matter in Zagzebski’s terms, that it “makes all of its evaluations a function of individual propositions believed or individual states of believing”.<sup>19</sup>

Zagzebski doubts that any atomistic approach can make sense of the epistemic value of wisdom and understanding, and she is probably right to do so. She also thinks that virtue-structured epistemic value theories, that is, epistemic analogues of virtue theories in ethics, are particularly well-positioned to make sense of these particular

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<sup>17</sup> Zagzebski (1996: 49-50).

<sup>18</sup> Zagzebski (1996: 50).

<sup>19</sup> Kvanvig (1992), Elgin (1996), Zagzebski (1996: 22-24). Chapter 1’s arguments for the need to make belief body comparisons amount to arguments against atomism.

values, or at least the particular value of wisdom. Her basic reason for thinking as much seems to be that understanding and wisdom are literally properties of *persons*, not persons' cognitive states, and that virtue theories take properties of persons as the primary objects of evaluation. Zagzebski thus uses her theory of wisdom, and theory of understanding in which it is embedded, to support a virtue theoretic approach to the whole domain of epistemic value.

I think Aristotle's and Zagzebski's theories are both wrong in many of their details. However, I do not want to push too hard on that point. This is partly because Aristotle and Zagzebski are importantly right in thinking that wisdom comes in both theoretical and practical varieties. But it is also because I want to focus on Zagzebski's claim that considerations about wisdom lend support to virtue theoretic approaches to epistemic value.

That claim is not true. My main argument against its truth will appear in section 3; it will consist in constructing a twofold theory of wisdom that is *not* virtue theoretic and then arguing that that theory is superior to Aristotle's and Zagzebski's own. Before getting into that main argument, though, I'm going to run through some of the details on which Aristotle and Zagzebski's twofold virtue theories seem to go wrong.

First some remarks on Aristotle on theoretical wisdom. His *sophia* is a form of knowledge through deduction from first principles that one grasps via *nous*. This "grasping" amounts to something like rational intuition. So for Aristotle, every theoretical wise person rationally intuits first principles. But that seems wrong. A person can be theoretically wise though deep empirical knowledge of physics. Such

knowledge does not require rational intuition; hence we should reject Aristotle's account of theoretical wisdom.

His account of practical wisdom does not fare any better. He takes it that people have practical wisdom if and only if those people are virtuous. And he takes it that akratic people are not virtuous. But consider the wise sage who is forced into heroin addiction. This sage's practical wisdom is not destroyed by this addiction. But since addiction is a form of akrasia, Aristotle is committed to the view that this sage's addiction *does* destroy his virtue, and therefore his practical wisdom as well. Thus we should reject Aristotle's account of practical wisdom. (Of course, we could re-translate Aristotle's terms "sophia" and "phronesis" instead of rejecting his theory. But I'll leave that to the side.)

In addition to rejecting Aristotle's accounts of theoretical and practical wisdom, we should also reject Zagzebski's account of practical wisdom. She thinks that all practically wise people make good choices most of the time. But depression, evil, and addiction show that the choices of practically wise people need not be mostly good ones.

What about Zagzebski's account of theoretical wisdom? About this account I have just two things to say. First, it would be nice to precisify her remarks about grasping the structure of reality. I think they are on to something, and that there are good things to be done in the way of developing them. Second and more critically, it is wrong to think that this account of theoretical wisdom is of particular help to virtue-theoretic approaches to the overall structure of epistemic value. For, when we try to precisify Zagzebski's account of theoretical wisdom, we end up with a theory that does just as well

at serving the purposes of those of us who take epistemic value to have a consequentialist structure. That, at any rate, is what I'll argue in the next section.

### **3. Twofold consequentialism**

Virtue-theoretic accounts of wisdom entail that all practically wise people reliably act wisely. For if wisdom is a virtue, then no more could a wise person not reliably act wisely, than could a courageous person not reliably act courageously. In both instances, and with virtues generally, possessing the virtue guarantees reliably acting from it.

But, as I've argued, practically wise people need not reliably act wisely. Therefore, virtue-theoretic accounts of wisdom are false. I'm going to try to replace them with a consequentialist twofold view. This view is consequentialist not in attempting to locate the epistemic value of wisdom in its consequences, but rather in taking wisdom to be partly *constitutive* of the epistemically good consequences. Various phenomena such as the designs of research programs, the architectural structures of libraries, and the contents of educational curricula can be epistemically evaluated according to the extent to which they produce the epistemically good ends, one of which wisdom. In filling out these claims I'll first give an account of what it is to be wise; then I'll explain why wisdom, so defined, is an epistemic end.

#### **Statement of the theory**

There are two kinds of wisdom, practical wisdom and theoretical wisdom. To be practically wise is to have a certain kind of knowledge, namely knowledge of how to live well. To be theoretically wise is to possess deep understanding.

Knowledge of how to obtain one's ends is not alone sufficient for practical wisdom, because if one can get whatever one wants but does not have any idea what to

get in order to live well, then one does not know how to live well. Knowledge of what ends to obtain in order to live well is not sufficient for practical wisdom either. For even if one knows, of every set of ends the fulfilling of which is sufficient for living well, *that* its fulfilling is sufficient for living well, one may nonetheless not know how to fulfill any of those sets of ends. And, if one does not know how to fulfill any of those sets of ends, then one does not know how to live well.

If one knows how to live well, then, one thereby knows both (a) of at least some of the sets of ends the fulfilling of which is sufficient for living well, that the fulfilling of those sets of ends is sufficient for living well, and (b) of at least some of the means are sufficient for bringing about those sets of ends, that those means are sufficient for bringing about those sets of ends. Moreover, if one knows both (a) and (b), then one thereby knows how to live well. Therefore, one has practical wisdom if and only if one knows of at least some of the sets of ends the fulfilling of which is sufficient for living well that the fulfilling of those sets of ends is for living well, and one also knows of at least some of the means sufficient for bringing about those ends that those means are sufficient for bringing about those ends.

Theoretical wisdom is a form of understanding, and a particular form of it, namely deep understanding. Thus it is to be contrasted from understanding-that and also from unificatory-insight understanding of a shallow variety. It is a kind of explanatory knowledge, because it consists in knowledge of the principles that explain things in a relevant domain. For instance, to have theoretical wisdom in chemistry is to have a

systematic knowledge of the fundamental chemical structures, and of the laws governing their interaction.<sup>20</sup>

In virtue of having such knowledge, one is able to explain a wide variety of particular, token chemical phenomena that occur in labs and in the real world. One knows the fundamental chemical principles in virtue of which these token chemical phenomena obtain, and one cognitively subsumes these token phenomena, or at any rate can cognitively subsume these phenomena, under the fundamental principles that explain them. It is this fundamental knowledge and ability to subsume particular facts under it that constitutes unificatory insight. The more fundamental one's explanatory knowledge in a domain is, then, the more theoretically wise one is with respect to that domain.<sup>21</sup>

So that is what wisdom is, or at least a first pass across the issue. Wisdom is a twofold phenomenon concerning on the one hand knowledge of how to live well, and on the other hand explanatory knowledge of the fundamental truths in a domain. Let us call this theory "twofold consequentialism".

So far I've only articulated twofold consequentialism; I have not argued for it. Nor have I explained how it helps fit wisdom into epistemism - a consequentialist epistemic value theory - as one of the epistemically good ends. I now turn to those two tasks.

### **Defense of the theory**

Here I'll list out some adequacy conditions. For each condition on the list, I'll argue that it is a reasonable adequacy condition on theories of wisdom, and that twofold consequentialism meets it. Moreover, I'll argue that twofold consequentialism does a

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<sup>20</sup> See the OED for cases in which "wisdom" is used in this way.

<sup>21</sup> Here I gloss over complicated literatures on explanation (Pitt 1988) and understanding (Grimm 2005).

better job of meeting the whole package of conditions than does any other extant theory. Twofold consequentialism is, then, the best extant theory of wisdom.

1. **Advice**: Theories of wisdom should explain or at least be consistent with the fact that wise people have the ability to give good advice.

There is within popular culture an image of the wise man as the sage to whom we can go for deep insight into what we ought to do with our lives. The existence of this image suggests that wisdom and the ability to give good advice are importantly related. Furthermore, we generally think of wise people as good people to go to when we are in need of advice. So, the advice condition is a reasonable one.

And it is a condition that twofold consequentialism meets, in the following way. If wisdom entails or is in some other significant way related to knowledge of how to live well, then it stands to reason that wise people are able to give good advice. For their knowledge of how to live well can, if combined with the right background information, bring them to know what their advisees ought to do. And to actually give good advice, wise people need only convey this knowledge to their advisees.

Thus the view that wisdom features knowledge of how to live well explains why wise people are able to give good advice. And twofold consequentialism takes one kind of wisdom, practical wisdom, as identical to knowledge of how to live well. Therefore, twofold consequentialism explains why wise people have the ability to give good advice. (Or better: it explains why *practically* wise people have the ability to give good advice. Theoretically wise people are a different ball of wax.)

2. **Anti-Wickedness**. Theories of wisdom should explain or at least be consistent with the fact that wise people tend to not be wicked.



Many theorists suggest that it is impossible for wise people to be wicked.<sup>22</sup> The only argument for this view that I know of is the argument from the claim that wisdom is a virtue. According to that argument, virtues are reliably acted on by whomever possesses them, wisdom is a virtue by which one knows how to live well, and reliably acting so as to live well is incompatible with being wicked; put together, these claims entail that wise people cannot be wicked.

As I argued above, this virtue-theoretic line of thought is not persuasive. The devil, that figure in the imagination of some religious people and writers of fiction, is evil but nonetheless wise. He was wise as an angel, and through no loss of knowledge but rather through some sort of affective restructuring tried and failed to take over the throne. And mere affective changes accompanied by no loss of knowledge should not remove one's wisdom. So, wisdom and evil are compatible.

Nonetheless, every writer about wisdom that I know of subscribes to some sort of anti-wickedness condition, at least tacitly. (All of those who say that wisdom is incompatible with wickedness subscribe to some such condition, for instance). Furthermore, it is hard to think of actual characters in the history of literature and film, or even in our own personal lives, who are both wise and wicked. Save sinister characters like Goethe's Mephistopheles and perhaps Machiavelli, I can't think of any such characters. I conclude from these observations that if one is wise, it is objectively unlikely that one is also evil. Theories of wisdom should explain or at least be consistent with the fact that this relationship between wisdom and evil holds.

And twofold consequentialism does as much. The argument is just this: if one knows how to live well, then it stands to reason that one *will* live well, to the extent that

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<sup>22</sup> Aristotle, Zagzebski (1996), Ryan (1996), Sternberg (2004: 88).

one can. Of course, one may be so devilishly evil that one knows how to live well and quite purposely does not do it. But this case seems unlikely, in the same way that it seems unlikely that a person who knows how to walk well would, through strange desires, nonetheless walk badly. Given the view that wisdom somehow features knowledge of how to live well, then, it seems unlikely that a wise person would be evil. And twofold consequentialism has as an aspect the view that wisdom somehow features knowledge of how to live well. Therefore, twofold consequentialism explains the strangeness of the wisdom being combined with wickedness. (Of course, there is nothing inconsistent or even strange about being merely *theoretically* wise and yet evil; nor does twofold consequentialism suggest that there is.)

3. **Anti-Foolishness**. Theories of wisdom should explain or at least be consistent with the fact foolishness is in some sense the absence of wisdom.

Theorists talk all the time as if it were true that foolishness is the absence of wisdom.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, foolish action can be characterized as action that is not informed by wisdom. The view that foolishness is the absence of wisdom goes some way towards explaining why this is so. The anti-foolishness condition is therefore a reasonable one.

And, twofold consequentialism meets it. This is because knowing how to live well makes it likely that one in fact does live well, at least to the extent that one can, given one's circumstances. The view that wisdom, or practical wisdom, is knowledge of how to live well therefore explains why it is likely that wise people in fact live well (to the extent that they can, given their circumstances). But the fool's life is not a good life; it is not even a life that is good given the fool's circumstances. Thus the view that wisdom, or practical wisdom, amounts to knowledge of how to live well would lead us to

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<sup>23</sup> See e.g. Ryan (1999) and Sternberg (2003).

predict that practically wise people do not live foolishly. And that, in turn, would lead us to predict that practically wise people are not fools; which itself helps explain why foolishness is the absence of wisdom.

4. **Explanation of other theories.** Theories of wisdom should be able to explain, in their own terms, what is plausible about the theories with which they disagree.

The folks who have theorized about wisdom are all quite smart and well-informed. It would be strange for such people to be totally off the mark. There ought to be at least *some* right things in what they say. A proper theory of wisdom should explain what these things are; it should explain what is right in the other theories with which it disagrees.

Twofold consequentialism meets this condition: it can locate something right within humility views, practical views, and twofold views of the virtue-theoretic variety.

First of all, it is difficult for one to live well if one is bad at recognizing what one knows and what one does not know. People who are bad at recognizing these things are bad at decision making, which is itself an important aspect of living well. Twofold consequentialism therefore predicts that practically wise people should tend to be epistemically humble, in the senses of epistemic humility relevant to the views of wisdom perhaps held by Socrates and others. So, twofold consequentialism identifies something right within humility views of wisdom.

Furthermore, twofold consequentialism recognizes a certain kind of wisdom, practical wisdom, that is identical to the thing that according to Practical theorists constitutes wisdom *simpliciter*. Practical theories are right in recognizing practical wisdom as a part of wisdom; where they go wrong is in thinking that it is *all* there is to

wisdom. So twofold consequentialism identifies something right within Practical views as well.

Finally, twofold consequentialism explains what is right in virtue-theoretic twofold views. It does so by sharing their recognition of two sorts of wisdom, and by countenancing similar views about both of those sorts of wisdom.

5. **Degrees**. Theories of wisdom should explain or at least be consistent with the fact that wisdom comes in degrees.

Most people who write about wisdom agree, at least implicitly, that it comes in degrees. Nor have I found anyone either implicitly or explicitly denying that wisdom comes in degrees. The view even goes as far back as Plato, who tells us that the Oracle claimed that Socrates was the “wisest” of all men. So the degrees condition seems fairly uncontroversial.

And, twofold consequentialism meets it. With respect to theoretical wisdom, twofold consequentialism can appeal to the view that for any given domain, some knowledge about that domain is deeper than other knowledge about that domain. One can then be said to be theoretically wise about a domain to the extent that one has a large amount of knowledge with a large amount of depth in that domain. Practical wisdom can be dealt with similarly: one can have more or less knowledge of how to live well, and one can therefore be practically wise to a higher or lower degree.

6. **Difficulty**. Theories of wisdom should explain or at least be consistent with the fact that high degrees of wisdom are difficult to get.

We don't think of ordinary people as particularly wise. Furthermore, there is empirical work suggesting that high degrees of wisdom are in fact a rare phenomenon.<sup>24</sup> So the difficulty condition is a reasonable one.

And twofold consequentialism meets it. Deep knowledge is hard to get. Therefore, theoretical wisdom is hard to get. Furthermore, we all sometimes do foolish things. But if we had extremely high levels of knowledge of how to live well, then it would be very unlikely for all of us to sometimes do foolish things. So, practical wisdom is also hard to get.

7. **Weak sanctioning of intuitions about cases.** Theories of wisdom ought to explain the truth of, or at least be consistent with, one's wisdom-relevant intuitions about cases.

This condition touches on some recent debates about intuitions in philosophical theorizing; let me elaborate it a bit. First of all, it is explicitly just one condition among many. There is no stipulation that every theory that meets it is superior to every theory that does not meet it. Strong advocates of intuitions (such as Bealer), though, seem to want consistency with intuitions about cases to trump all other theoretical virtues.<sup>25</sup> The weak sanctioning of intuitions condition does not favor intuitions as much as those theorists would like.

The condition does, however, make the methodological role of intuitions significant, or at least more significant than strong deniers of intuitions (such as Stich) would like them to be.<sup>26</sup> And we should certainly do as much, if we intend to engage in normative theorizing. For it is difficult to see how we could get very far in normative

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<sup>24</sup> See Kunzmann and Baltes (2005).

<sup>25</sup> Bealer (1996).

<sup>26</sup> Stich (1991, 1993).

philosophical theory building without adopting something in the neighborhood of this weak sanctioning condition.

Now let me argue that twofold consequentialism meets this condition. The argument is simple: I have not so far found any counterexamples to the theory. Of course, new cases are constructed all the time, and so it may in the future turn out that there are counterexamples to twofold consequentialism. I just haven't found any so far.

Actually, twofold consequentialism does better than merely meeting the weak sanctioning of intuitions about cases condition. Among the extant philosophical theories of wisdom, it meets that condition *uniquely*. Humility views are subject to the counterexamples that I discuss above; so too are Practical views and virtue-theoretic twofold views.

What is more, twofold consequentialism does not do *worse* than any of the other extant theories on any of the *other* conditions I have outlined. Indeed, on some of those other conditions, including the anti-wickedness condition, it does even better than some of those other theories. Therefore, twofold consequentialism is the best extant philosophical theory of wisdom.

#### **4. Twofold consequentialism as an application of epistemism**

Theories of wisdom ought to be naturally embeddable into independently motivated overall epistemic value theories. If they are, then this embeddability constitutes an argument for the relevant overall epistemic value theories and also for the relevant theories of wisdom. Zagzebski has tried to use these considerations in favor of her virtue theoretic approaches to wisdom and to the overall structure of epistemic value. I'll now use the same argumentative strategy to favor the twofold consequentialist theory

of wisdom and my own consequentialist approach to overall epistemic value - epistemism. That is to say, I'll argue for twofold consequentialism and epistemism on grounds that they explanatorily cohere with each other. I'll start with a very quick re-statement of some of the central ideas of epistemism.

Epistemism takes beliefs and withholdings to be epistemic value bearers. It takes the fundamental thing *of* epistemic value is knowledge. Thus it is in virtue of their relationships to knowledge that some beliefs and withholdings are better epistemically than others.

The first principle that uses these ideas to induce epistemic rankings is that *knowledge-constitutive goods are epistemic ends*. That principle has it that other things being equal, one belief is better epistemically as an end than another to the extent that it is more knowledge-like. This principle and several others deal with epistemic states independently of the significance of the propositions that those states take as their objects. Those principles entail of variety of comparisons of epistemic states, for instance the comparisons that  $K >_{ee} TB$  and  $TB >_{ee} FB$ .

Some propositions are epistemically significant; others are trivial. Significance *amplifies* epistemic value, in the sense that otherwise epistemically good states are made better by taking significant propositions as their objects, and otherwise epistemically bad states are made worse by taking significant propositions as their objects. Thus, for instance, knowledge of a significant proposition is epistemically *better* as an end than knowledge of an insignificant proposition, and mere belief in a significant proposition is epistemically *worse* as an end than mere belief in an insignificant proposition.

There is much more to epistemism, but these are some of its central ideas. With these ideas reiterated, we can now see how epistemism and twofold consequentialism explanatorily cohere.

First of all, theoretical wisdom consists in particularly epistemically significant knowledge. This is because deep truths tend to explain the truth of the answers to the questions people are curious about. And, as I argue in chapter 2, explaining those truths is one way for something to be epistemically significant. Theoretical wisdom is particularly epistemically good as an end, then, both because it tends to consist in knowledge of things that are particularly epistemically significant. So given twofold consequentialism, wisdom turns out to be something that epistemism takes to be a particularly epistemically valuable phenomenon. Epistemism and twofold consequentialism therefore explanatorily cohere.

Now to practical wisdom. This form of wisdom is epistemically good as an end according to these two theories because, as a form of knowledge, it is more knowledge-like than mere belief.<sup>27</sup> It need not be a particularly epistemically significant form of knowledge, though. It is morally and prudentially significant knowledge to be sure, but it need not be particularly epistemically significant knowledge. Practical wisdom, then, turns out according to twofold consequentialism, and according to epistemism, to be epistemically good as an end, but *less* epistemically good as an end than is theoretical wisdom. And that is precisely how it ought to be.

In conclusion, there are two things to highlight. First, twofold consequentialism is the best extant philosophical theory of wisdom. Second, twofold consequentialism

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<sup>27</sup> Here I gloss over difficulties about the relationships between know-how, knowledge-that, and knowledge-of-how.



explanatorily coheres with epistemism. Twofold consequentialism lends credence to epistemism, and vice versa.

**Table 1: Extant theories of wisdom**

Humility	Twofold	Practical
Socrates?, Meacham 1990?, Kitchener and Brenner 1990?	Aristotle, Zagzebski 1996	Godlovitch 1981, Kekes 1983, Nozick 1989, Baltes 1990, McKee 1990, Nielsen 1993, Ryan 1996, Garrett 1996, Lehrer and Smith 1996, Sternberg 1998, Ryan 1999.

## Appendix:

### Definitions and Principles

#### 1. List of definitions

alternative cardinal individual veritistic value theory: Let  $P$  be any true proposition, and let  $V(Bp)$ ,  $V(dBp)$ , and  $V(Wp)$  be the veritistic values as an end of believing, disbelieving, and withholding on  $P$ . Let  $C$  measure the content of every proposition  $P$  such that  $0 < C(p) \leq 1$ . Then,  $V(Bp) = C(p)$ ,  $V(Wp) = 0$ , and  $V(dBp) = -C(p)$ .

alternative social veritistic value theory: For any community  $C$  and any proposition  $P$ , the veritistic value as an end of the distribution of belief (and withholding and disbelief) in  $P$  across  $C$ 's members is the average of those members'  $v$ -scores on  $P$ .

distribution of belief across persons: The overall cognitive states the people in a set of people. That is to say, two sets  $A$  and  $B$  of people have the same distributions of belief across their members iff: every member of  $A$  can be paired with a unique member of  $B$ , such that the members in each pair have identical overall cognitive states.

epistemic state:  $E$  is an epistemic state iff  $E$  is identical to belief, withholding, or the conjunction of belief with one or more elements of the set of the knowledge-constitutive goods and their negations.

epistemic virtue: One's faculty  $v$  is an epistemic virtue for one iff for some knowledge-constitutive good  $G$ ,  $v$  in *some relevant sense* tends for one to form a surplus of  $G$  belief to non- $G$  belief.

explanatory curiosity theory of epistemic significance:

1. Proposition  $P$  is epistemically significant for one iff either
  - (a)  $P$  answers some question one is or immediately was curious about, or
  - (b)  $P$  plays some role in explaining the truth of some proposition that answers some question one is or immediately was curious about.
2. The more one is or immediately was curious about a question, the more its answers are significant for one.

3. The stronger the explanatory connections a proposition bears to other propositions that answer questions one is or immediately was curious about, the more significant is that proposition for one.

knowledge-constitutive good: G is a knowledge-constitutive good iff G is a necessary condition on knowledge but not a necessary condition on belief.

knowledge theory of curiosity: The conjunction of the following two claims.

1. It is *questions* as opposed to propositions that we are curious about. That is to say, curiosity stands to questions as belief stands to propositions. In this sense, curiosity is an attitude aimed at questions as opposed to propositions.
2. Curiosity is genuinely satisfied just if one comes to know the answer to the question at which that curiosity aims. In this sense, the relationship between curiosity and knowledge is analogous to the relationship between hunger and nutritive fulfillment.

mere belief: Belief that does not instantiate any of the knowledge-constitutive goods.

of fundamental value: x is of fundamental value in domain D iff X is of value in D but its status as such is not explained by anything.

of derivative value: x is of derivative value in D iff x is of non-fundamental value in D.

overall cognitive state: One's overall cognitive state is the set of one's beliefs and withholdings. That is to say, two persons R and S have the same overall cognitive state iff: for all propositions P, R believes P iff S believes P, and R withholds on P iff S withholds on P.

true belief monism: The view that true belief is the unique thing of fundamental epistemic value.

## 2. List of principles

### A. Principles about particular beliefs

#### 1. Knowledge-constitutive goods are epistemic ends

Whenever one belief instantiates more of the knowledge-constitutive goods than another, the former is better than the latter, epistemically as an end, *ceteris paribus*.

(Belief  $B_1$  instantiates “more” of the knowledge-constitutive goods than does belief  $B_2$  iff: the logically strongest knowledge-constitutive good instantiated by  $B_1$  is logically stronger than the logically strongest knowledge-constitutive good instantiated by  $B_2$ .)

#### 2. Withholding is the neutral end

Whenever an agent withholds on a proposition, that withholding is (a) better epistemically as an end than every belief that is disvaluable epistemically as an end, and (b) worse epistemically as an end than every belief that is valuable epistemically as an end, *ceteris paribus*.

#### 3. Virtues improve epistemic ends

Whenever a belief instantiates a knowledge-constitutive good through an epistemic virtue, and another belief instantiates that same knowledge-constitutive good but not through any epistemic virtue, the first belief is epistemically better as an end than the second, *ceteris paribus*.

#### 4. Degrees improve epistemic ends

- If  $G$  is a knowledge-constitutive good, then if  $B_1$  instantiates a higher degree of  $G$  than does  $B_2$ ,  $B_1$  is epistemically better as an end than  $B_2$ , *ceteris paribus*.
- If  $G$  is a knowledge-constitutive good instantiated by  $B_1$  and  $B_2$ , then if for some epistemic virtue  $v$ , the degree to which  $B_1$ 's  $G$  is due to  $v$  is greater than the degree to which  $B_2$ 's  $G$  is due to  $v$ ,  $B_1$  is epistemically better as an end than  $B_2$ , *ceteris paribus*.

#### 5. Epistemic states can be epistemic means

If an epistemic state  $e$  tends *in some relevant sense* to bring about some other epistemic state  $e^*$  for one, and  $e^*$  is epistemically good as an end, then  $e$  is epistemically good as a means for one.

#### 6. Significance amplifies epistemic value

Suppose that  $A$  and  $B$  are token beliefs such that the proposition at which  $A$  aims is more significant (for the person who holds  $A$ ) than is the proposition at which  $B$  aims (for the person who holds  $B$ ). Then,

- If principles 1-5 render A of equal epistemic standing (as an end) as B and that standing is *positive*, then A is epistemically better as an end than B.
- If principles 1-5 render A of equal epistemic standing (as an end) as B and that standing is *negative*, then A is epistemically worse epistemically as an end than B.

## B. Principles about bodies of belief

### 7. Belief-body optimality

Let  $Cr$  and  $Cs$  be the overall cognitive states of persons  $R$  and  $S$ . Suppose there is a bijection  $f: Cr \rightarrow Cs$  such that for some  $x \in Cr$ ,  $x >_{ee} f(x)$ , and for no  $x \in Cr$  is  $x <_{ee} f(x)$ . Then,  $Cr >_{ee} Cs$ .

### 8. More goods are better and more bads are worse

Suppose that two overall cognitive states  $A$  and  $B$  are as similar as they could possibly be, save that  $A$  contains more belief than does  $B$ . Then,

- If that additional belief is according to the *other* principles epistemically good as an end, then  $A$  is better epistemically as an end than  $B$ .
- If that additional belief is according to the *other* principles epistemically *bad* as an end, then  $A$  is *worse* epistemically as an end than  $B$ .

## C. Principles about distributions of belief across people

### 9. Social optimality

Let  $D$  and  $D^*$  be any distributions of belief across the same number of persons. If  $D^*$  is obtainable from  $D$  by making the overall cognitive state of some member of  $D$  better epistemically as an end while making no overall cognitive state of any member of  $D$  worse epistemically as an end, then  $D^* >_{ee} D$ .

### 10. Social proportionality

Let  $D$  and  $D^*$  be distributions of belief across people such that  $D$  is a proper subset of  $D^*$ . Let  $P$  be any proposition. Let  $n$  and  $n^*$  be the proportions of people in  $D$  and  $D^*$  whose doxastic states concerning  $P$  are positive. If  $n^* > n$ , then  $D^* >_{ee} D$ , *ceteris paribus*. Furthermore, if  $n > n^*$ , then  $D^* <_{ee} D$ , *ceteris paribus*.

### 11. Social breadth

Let  $D$  and  $D^*$  be distributions of belief across persons such that the persons in  $D$  and  $D^*$  are pairwise identical in both the number and the epistemic value as an end of each of their token doxastic states that is positively epistemically valuable as an end. If there are more distinctions in content across these tokens in  $D^*$  than there are in  $D$ , then  $D^* >_{ee} D$ , *ceteris paribus*.

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