
IN DEFENSE OF VERITISTIC VALUE MONISM

BY

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Abstract: Recently, veritistic value monism, i.e. the idea that true belief is unique in being of fundamental epistemic value, has come under attack by pluralist philosophers arguing that it cannot account fully for the domain of epistemic value. However, the relevant arguments fail to establish any such thing. For one thing, there is a presumption of monism due to considerations about axiological parsimony. While such a presumption would be defeated by evidence that the relevant kind of monism cannot account fully for the domain of epistemic value, an examination of the most promising pluralist counterexamples casts serious doubt upon the claim that there is any such evidence.

1. Varieties of value

Most epistemologists take believing truly to be epistemically valuable.¹ However, it is far from uncontroversial whether the following thesis holds – a thesis that we may refer to as *veritistic value monism*:

(VVM) Believing truly is unique in being of fundamental epistemic value.²

The term ‘veritistic’ in ‘veritistic value monism’ is borrowed from Alvin Goldman, who talks about ‘veritistic epistemology’ as the kind of epistemology concerned with the production of true belief.³ (VVM) is sometimes termed ‘epistemic value monism.’⁴ However, since it is possible to reject (VVM) while being a monist about epistemic value in virtue of taking something other than believing truly to be the sole bearer of fundamental epistemic value (e.g. knowledge), ‘veritistic value monism’ seems a more appropriate name for the position.

In what follows, I will defend (VVM). For reasons to be discussed below (see §2), however, I will not attempt to defend (VVM) against the non-verificationist value monist who takes something other than believing truly to be the sole bearer of fundamental epistemic value. The target of the present paper is the epistemic value *pluralist*, and specifically the epistemic value pluralist who grants that believing truly is of fundamental epistemic value, but denies that true belief is unique in this respect. But before proceeding to (VVM)'s defense here, let us clarify its component notions.

First, what is *epistemic* value? Epistemic value is the kind of value that arises in contexts of inquiry, where inquiry encompasses the range of inquisitive practices concerned with posing and answering questions for the purpose of attaining true belief, knowledge, understanding, etc., about the relevant subject matters. That for the purpose of which we are posing and answering questions – i.e. true belief, knowledge, understanding, etc. – are the *goals* of inquiry.⁵ The goals of inquiry determine what activities, states, processes, practices, and so on, are epistemically valuable.⁶ If believing truly is one such goal, as has been maintained by many epistemologists,⁷ then everything that is an effective means to believing truly is of *instrumental* epistemic value. Moreover, something is of *mere* instrumental epistemic value if and only if its epistemic value is exhausted by it being an effective means thus. Believing some things truly might often be an effective means to believing other things truly, and in those cases believing truly may be of instrumental epistemic value, assuming that true belief is a goal of inquiry. However, if true belief is such a goal, being an effective means thus does not exhaust the value of believing truly. Let us refer to something as being of *non-instrumental* epistemic value if and only if it is epistemically valuable, but not of mere instrumental epistemic value.

The distinction between instrumental and non-instrumental value pertains to how value may be inherited across causal or probabilistic relations. Another way in which value may be inherited is from parts to wholes. Let us say that something is of *fundamental* value if and only if its value does *not* derive in full from the value of any of its components. By way of illustration, if (VVM) is true, then true belief is not only a goal of inquiry but *the only* goal of inquiry. However, (VVM) is compatible with knowing being of non-instrumental epistemic value in virtue of believing truly being a component of knowing.⁸ What is denied is simply that such a state – or, more generally, any state that involves true belief as a mere component – is of fundamental, as opposed to derived, non-instrumental value. While the notions of fundamental versus derived value may be applied also to instrumental values, it will in the present investigation only be applied to non-instrumental value. Consequently, any unqualified use of the terms 'fundamental' or 'derived' shall, henceforth, be understood in terms of fundamental or derived *non-instrumental* value.

It is controversial whether all bearers of non-instrumental value are *intrinsically* valuable, or valuable in themselves. For present purposes, two issues need to be addressed. The first issue is whether to understand intrinsic value as applying to objects or to states of affairs. If the former, it is easy to come up with examples involving objects identical in intrinsic properties, yet (intuitively) differing in intrinsic value.⁹ However, if we take intrinsic value to apply to states of affairs, as is common in the Moorean tradition, such examples can be accounted for, and the claim that non-instrumental and intrinsic values coincide be maintained.¹⁰ Moreover, in the context of epistemic value, it is reasonable to think that the bearers of value are states of affairs – be it states of affairs involving doxastic states, processes, virtues, practices, or what have you – rather than objects. One strong indication to this effect is that it seems odd to say that *a true belief* or *a virtuous disposition*, say, is valuable – let alone that *true belief* and *virtue* is valuable – unless this is just a different and less roundabout way of saying that instances of *someone believing truly* or *someone being of a virtuous disposition* (both of which are states of affairs) is valuable, and similarly for someone knowing, understanding, being justified, and so on. Construed thus, the notion of non-instrumental value, as understood here, may be taken to coincide with intrinsic value.

Still, the discussions below will be framed in terms of non-instrumental rather than intrinsic value. This brings us to the second issue: whether intrinsic value is to be identified with *final* value, i.e. the kind of value that pertains to that which is valuable irrespective of any considerations about conduciveness whatsoever. By way of illustration, if true belief is non-instrumentally valuable in virtue of being a goal of inquiry, then true belief is of non-instrumental *epistemic* value. Maintaining that true belief is valuable thus, however, is perfectly compatible with also claiming that instances of true belief are of non-instrumental epistemic value only in so far as the beliefs at issue are of instrumental *non-epistemic* value (e.g. practical, prudential or moral), perhaps because they pertain to questions posed by some relevant set of inquirers.¹¹ In other words, true belief being of fundamental epistemic value does not imply that true belief is valuable independently of any considerations about conduciveness whatsoever.

A different way to put this point is as follows: Unlike bearers of final value, not all bearers of non-instrumental value are non-instrumentally valuable *without qualification* (such as ‘epistemic,’ ‘moral,’ or ‘practical’). For reasons that will be discussed at greater length in §5, it is important to note that it also does not follow from something being non-instrumentally valuable without qualification that it is non-instrumentally valuable on *every* qualification. By way of illustration, assume that undergoing an episode of pleasure is non-instrumentally valuable *simpliciter*. Even so, it does not follow that pleasure is of non-instrumental *epistemic* value, for the simple reason that pleasure is not an epistemic value in the first place.

Consequently, if intrinsic value is to be identified with final value, then the intrinsically valuable is *not* to be identified with the non-instrumentally valuable, as understood here.

2. *The objective*

Having clarified the concepts that go into the formulation of (VVM), we may now state the objective of our subsequent investigations. Since my present target is pluralism, I will – with one brief exception in §4 – not consider the prospects for defending a kind of monism that takes something other than true belief to be the proper goal of inquiry. As I have argued at length elsewhere, it is not clear that an argument can be given for taking true belief to be the *only* goal of inquiry, if one's interlocutor does not even take it to be *a* goal of inquiry.¹² For this reason, the task of the present paper is *not* to convert the non-veritistic monist to veritistic value monism, but to address the many pluralists of late who object to veritistic value monism, while accepting the following:

- (1) Some instances of true belief are of fundamental epistemic value.

After all, as the pluralist will remind us, the fact that some true beliefs are of fundamental epistemic value does not imply that they are *unique* in this respect. In order to get from (1) to (VVM), we need to make plausible the following:

- (2) Nothing is of non-instrumental epistemic value, unless it is so in virtue of the fundamental epistemic value of believing truly.

If some instances of true belief are of fundamental epistemic value, and nothing is of non-instrumental epistemic value unless it is so in virtue of the fundamental epistemic value of believing truly, then believing truly is unique in being of fundamental epistemic value – which, of course, is exactly what (VVM) states.

Again, since my present target is pluralism, I will consider (1) common ground and focus on defending (2) from some of the most prominent pluralist counterexamples of late. It should be noted right at the outset, however, that there is a presumption in favor of conjoining (1) with (2), rather than conjoining (1) with a claim leaving room for a multitude of fundamental epistemic values. The presumption can be motivated with reference to the general meta-ontological thesis that we should prefer ontologies with fewer rather than more existential commitments, *ceteris paribus*.¹³ In axiology, this thesis finds its expression in a principle of axiological parsimony, according to which we should postulate as few

goals of inquiry as possible, and then infer all other values from such a minimal set of goals. In light of this principle, the relevant presumption favors axiologies that explain all judgments regarding absolute as well as comparative epistemic value by assuming one as opposed to several bearers of fundamental value, for example in the manner in which the combination of (1) and (2) does.

It should be stressed that this does not beg the question against the pluralist, who might accept that there is such a presumption without thereby compromising her pluralism. After all, both monists and pluralists may want to (and perhaps even *should* want to) honor the reasonable intuition that non-instrumental value is not something we bestow upon value-bearers for free; it is a title they have to earn by doing explanatory work (e.g. by explaining the value of all things conducive to or constituted by it). What the pluralist would argue, however, is that the presumption for conjoining (1) with (2) is defeated by evidence to the effect that we cannot account fully for the domain of epistemic value in monistic terms – which is exactly the kind of charge that we will be concerned with below. Still, the presumption provides us with reason to prefer conjoining (1) with (2) in the *absence* of any convincing evidence for such an inability, and it is the objective of the present paper to argue that there is no such evidence.

What constitutes relevant evidence here? (2) is equivalent to the universal claim that, for every x , if x is of non-instrumental epistemic value, then it is so in virtue of the value of believing truly. Given the obvious difficulty of defending a universal claim, I will restrict my attention to what, judging by recent work in epistemological axiology, are the most prominent counterexamples to (2). The counterexamples in question are formulated in terms of three candidates for fundamental epistemic values, i.e. *knowing*, *being justified*, and *understanding*, to be discussed in §§3, 4, and 5, respectively. As we shall see, these candidates are typically taken to be backed up by strong and widespread intuitions. This suggests that, if *any* candidate constitutes a challenge to (2), it will be found among these three. Consequently, if it can be shown that *none* of them poses such a challenge, we may conclude that there is no convincing evidence against (2), and that the presumption in favor of (VVM) still stands.¹⁴

3. *On the (alleged) surplus value of knowledge*

What reason do we have for thinking that knowing is non-instrumentally valuable?¹⁵ One reason is that knowledge is factive.¹⁶ If some instances of true belief are non-instrumentally valuable, and knowledge implies truth, some instances of knowing may, thereby, be of derived non-instrumental value in virtue of being factive. The problem, however, is that many philosophers have wanted to claim that knowing is *more* valuable than

believing truly. For example, Ward Jones writes that ‘I want all of my beliefs to be true – otherwise I would not believe them – but I would also rather they be known beliefs than mere true beliefs.’¹⁷ And Jones is by no means alone. Duncan Pritchard starts out an overview of recent discussions on the value of knowledge by stating what he, correctly, takes to be an assumption shared by virtually everyone involved in the debate, namely that ‘we clearly do value knowledge more than mere true belief.’¹⁸ Moreover, some have argued that this idea can be found already in Plato’s *Meno*.¹⁹

Presently, we will be concerned with a particular interpretation of these claims about the surplus value of knowledge, namely the following:

- (K) Knowing is more *epistemically* valuable than merely believing truly.

After all, there might be many respects in which knowing is superior to mere true belief, including moral or practical. But unless the surplus value in question is of a specifically *epistemic* kind, it would not speak to (VVM), which is a thesis exclusively about epistemic value.

Could someone committed to (VVM) account for (K)? As already noted, (K) cannot be accounted for in terms of the non-instrumental value that derives from the factivity of knowing. Moreover, arguing that the non-factive component of knowledge contributes an additional instrumental value since instantiating that component is conducive to believing truly raises a problem of its own. More specifically, while both truth and truth-conduciveness are good things, it is not clear that a true belief will be any *more* worth having for also being formed by way of truth-conducive process. As Jonathan Kvanvig puts the point, the presence of truth ‘swamps’ the epistemic value of truth-conduciveness.²⁰ While this does not mean that a defender of (VVM) cannot account for knowledge being valuable, it throws doubt upon her ability to account for (K).

In response to this, some monists have gone on the defensive, and argued that they can account for (K).²¹ But the monist may also go on the offensive by calling (K) into question, which is the strategy to be pursued here.²² More specifically, it will be argued that any monistic attempt to account for (K) grants the defender of the swamping argument too much, since we lack any strong, *theory-independent reasons* – roughly, reasons generated in a manner that do not presuppose the acceptance of any particular substantive epistemological theory – for accepting (K) in the first place. If we lack such reasons, there is no longer any pressure to surrender (VVM) for the purpose of accounting for (K) with reference to some fundamental value distinct from that of true belief – or so it will be argued. Let us spell out the case for the conditional first, and then turn to the case for the antecedent.

What counts as theory-*dependent* reasons here? Any reason that is generated as follows: Theory *T*, which is a substantive epistemological theory, implies that *p*; hence, we have reason to believe that *p*. By way of example, consider the fact that several recent analyses of knowledge, including virtue-theoretic accounts, have been motivated on the ground that they imply and, thereby, can account for (K).²³ Focusing on theory-independent reasons amounts to excluding reasons flowing from such implications. This is not to beg the question against the defender of (K). To the contrary, disqualifying theory-dependent reasons is in the interest of both parties of the debate, since the dialectical deck can be stacked either way. In particular, allowing for theory-dependent reasons to motivate or discredit (K) opens up for a very simple reply by the monist: Taken together, reliabilism and aforementioned swamping considerations imply that (K) does not hold; consequently, we have reason to believe that it does not. No one has pursued this strategy and the reason is simple: Those involved in the debate assume that (K) amounts to a constraint on *any* theory of knowledge, and acknowledge that reasons flowing from particular theories of knowledge carry no cross-theoretical force. The present focus on theory-independent reasons stays true to this dialectic.

So, what exactly counts as a theory-*independent* reason here? Any reason that is not theory-dependent in the above sense, and as such does not presuppose the acceptance of any particular epistemological theory, e.g., regarding the nature of knowledge. For example, consider one of the earliest contributions to the contemporary debate regarding the value of knowledge, i.e. that of Jones, which also is one of the few contributions that actually attempts to give some arguments for (as opposed to mere statements of) (K). According to Jones, one possible motivation for (K) is that it constitutes the best explanation of why so many philosophers have concerned themselves with analyzing knowledge:

Surely it is the high value we place on knowledge which has motivated the extraordinary volume of philosophical work which has gone into setting out the conditions for knowledge as opposed to true belief.²⁴

The fact that philosophers have spent a remarkable amount of time analyzing the conditions for knowing seems hard to deny. Moreover, the suggestion that this fact may be explained with reference to (K) does not presuppose any particular substantive epistemological theory, e.g., about the nature of knowledge. So, Jones is providing the right *kind* of reason. But is it a *good* reason? No, it is not. The problem with Jones' line of reasoning can be brought out by considering the fact that what any particular philosopher shows great interest in is a function of a whole host of factors that need not be sensitive to axiological facts, including what her colleagues, advisors, and philosophical predecessors happen(ed) to take

great interest in. This is not to suggest that philosophical *inquiry* is in no way sensitive to axiological facts, or that we should take a skeptical attitude towards the *content* of axiological theories, i.e. to axiologists' claims about *what* they are investigating. The relevant claim is merely that facts about *whether* axiologists are investigating *this* phenomenon rather than *that* – i.e. facts not about the contents of theories but about comparative *interests* – is not sufficient for establishing facts about comparative value, since what philosophers take great interest in is partly a function of a great many *sociological* facts that cannot be assumed to track relevant axiological facts about what degrees of value happen to apply to what states.

Jones might grant this, of course, while holding that philosopher's interest in knowledge still provides *a* reason – albeit not necessarily a *conclusive* one – for accepting (K), particularly in combination with further reasons. So, consider Jones' second motivation for (K), which may be gleaned from the fact that knowledge tends to be highly regarded in common discourse:

Even more telling than philosophical infatuation is our unwillingness to endorse or applaud those who succeed in guessing. What is more, those who repeatedly guess tend to gain our disapproval, even though they may succeed at guessing. At the very least, we lose trust in their reliability as informants. Even more than valuing others' knowledge, we value ourselves as knowers. For most (if not all) of my factual beliefs, I take it to be important that they are knowledge and not lucky guesses. I want all of my beliefs to be true – otherwise I would not believe them – but I would also rather they be known beliefs than mere true beliefs.²⁵

To see the problem with this line of reasoning, we need to distinguish between two targets of evaluation, i.e. *what* is believed and the *way* in which someone comes to believe something. With this distinction in mind, consider, first, the fact that we do not applaud guessing. Construed as a way of coming to believe, this could be explained with reference to the unreliability, irrationality, or irresponsibility – pick your favorite normative term – of guessing, and how the way in which the subject goes about her epistemic business, hence, is of disvalue. But what about the beliefs ensuing from guessing? Anyone who accepts that true belief is *a* goal of inquiry will take it that a lucky guess amounts to something of fundamental value, i.e. a true belief, which, furthermore, explains why we value lucky over unlucky guesses, *ceteris paribus*. Notice, however, that it makes little sense to talk about *lucky* guessing as a way of coming to believe something – e.g. as a process, disposition, strategy, or what have you – as opposed to one of guessing *simpliciter*. After all, what would such a way of forming belief involve? Surely, it would not involve consistently getting things right; in that case, it would no longer be plausible to refer to the relevant way of forming beliefs as involving guessing, as opposed to some sub-personal sensitivity that (save for its reliability) might resemble guess-

ing in not being preceded by any conscious deliberation. Indeed, as with any form of guessing, the relevant way of forming beliefs would have to be one that is generally unreliable, irrational, or irresponsible (again, pick your favorite normative term) and, as such, one that we have little reason to value.

Next, turn to the claim that we value ourselves as knowers, which can be accounted for with reference to the factivity of knowing. The same holds if we construe the claim as being about how we value engaging in processes, practices, activities, etc., that involve us coming to know things. Consider, next, the comparative claim that we value knowledge more than we value lucky guesses. On a what-is-believed reading, it is not clear that this claim is true. Imagine two scenarios. In one scenario, you make a guess and form a true belief as a result. In the second scenario, you make a reliable, rational, or responsible inference and, as a result, form a true belief that amounts to knowledge. Now, consider the comparative value *not* of the way in which you formed the relevant beliefs but merely of the two resulting belief states. Is one really more valuable from an epistemic point of view than the other? It is not clear that it is, given that they both involve true belief.²⁶ In so far as we intuit a difference here, it is likely that the intuition involved tracks what *does* seem clear, namely that the *ways* in which the respective beliefs were arrived at are not equally valuable. The procedure utilized in the first scenario is of instrumental disvalue in virtue of being unreliable, irrational, or irresponsible, while that of the former is of instrumental value in virtue of being reliable, rational, or responsible.

This brings us to the final claim of Jones', i.e. that 'I would also rather [my beliefs] be known beliefs than mere true belief.'²⁷ This is simply a restatement of (K), i.e. the very claim for which we are seeking a motivation. If it were the case that the preceding claims could only be accounted for by assuming (K), we could have considered the statement a hypothesis, needed to account for the truth of the relevant axiological claims. But what we have just seen is that it is perfectly possible to account for those claims *without* assuming (K), in the manner outlined above. Consequently, Jones' assertion of (K) amounts not to an explanatory hypothesis necessary for explaining the axiological data mentioned in the lead-up to it, but simply to the statement of a preference. This is certainly not to call into question the sincerity of Jones' remark; it is simply to ask whether a single, reported preference is sufficient to warrant acceptance of (K).

However, this brings us to the third potential motivation for (K), gleaned from the observation that Jones' preference is *widespread*. At the same time, it is questionable whether this provides any *theory-independent* reason for accepting (K) which, as discussed above, is the kind of reason that needs to be provided. For one thing, we would need evidence to the effect that the intuition in question is not merely a function of previous theoretical commitments. This is not to defend some general form of

skepticism regarding the evidentiary force of intuitions in philosophy. It is merely to suggest that intuitions have to be bolstered by supporting considerations – in exactly the manner in which Jones to his credit is trying to do – to the extent that they (a) pertain to subtle philosophical matters and (b) are leveled against reputable philosophical theories. Since matters of comparative epistemic value are subtle, and (VVM) is a reputable theory (which is something that has to be granted even by those who take it to be false), a question arises: Is the intuition that knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief prior to and independent of the having of a theory that satisfies this intuition, or is it the having of a theory on which knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief that provides the impetus for the intuition? The absence of any arguments ruling out the latter should give us pause before accepting (K) as a well-motivated constraint – as in: a constraint motivated by strong, theory-independent reasons – on investigations into the value of knowledge.

4. *On the value of justification*

Recently, Jason Baehr has argued that it is implausible to believe that, ‘when we think of knowledge as more valuable than true belief at the relevant intuitive level, we are thinking of it *purely* in the abstract, without any (even implicit) reference to any of the features *in virtue of which* it is apparently more valuable.’²⁸ This highlights a possibility ignored in the previous section, namely that the intuition behind (K) does not concern the surplus value of knowledge directly, but rather the value of some *component* of knowledge, that, when combined with the value of the factivity of knowledge, amounts to knowledge being more valuable than mere true belief.

What are the candidates for such a component? Clearly, truth is not one of them, nor is mere belief. Consider, instead, justification. After all, the last couple of years has generated several accounts of justification, including virtue-theoretic accounts, that stand a good chance of escaping the swamping problem and, thereby, accounting for (K).²⁹ At the same time, it needs to be remembered that what we are after here are theory-independent reasons for at all seeking to account for (K) in the first place. As stressed above, simply providing a theory that implies that (K) holds, without providing any reasons as for why theories *should* imply (K), would be in the interest of neither party of the debate.

This, of course, does not rule out the possibility called attention to a moment ago about the intuition captured by (K) being an intuition about the fundamental value of some component of knowledge that, when combined with the value of the factivity of knowledge, amounts to knowledge

being more valuable than mere true belief. More specifically, consider the following claim:

(J) Being justified is non-instrumentally valuable.

Given that justification is non-factive, the non-instrumental value in question cannot be derived from that of true belief, as in the case of knowledge and other factive states. Consequently, the relevant non-instrumental value would have to be considered fundamental. This would not only provide indirect support for (K) but also constitute a direct challenge to (2), i.e. the idea that nothing is of non-instrumental epistemic value unless it is so in virtue of the fundamental epistemic value of believing truly.

At the same time, it is fairly hard to find takers for the idea that justification is non-instrumentally valuable. The most plausible candidate for a philosopher who has actually defended the idea in print is Michael DePaul. More specifically, consider the following:

What we are after, epistemically and as cognitive beings, is not mere true belief, but knowledge. True belief is part of what we are after, sure enough. And false belief is inimical to our goal. But truth and the absence of falsehood are not all that we are after. For knowledge is not a matter of succeeding at something, i.e. believing the truth, and succeeding at it in a way that can be counted on to produce success. Rather, knowledge is a matter of simultaneously achieving two goals. It essentially involves two distinct goods coming together. One of the goods is truth; the other is warrant. There is no necessary connection between these goods, but as epistemic or cognitive beings we do want them both. [. . .] Or perhaps I should say that we want to attain one, i.e. truth, by way of attaining the other, i.e. warrant. [. . .] For I believe the interaction between truth and warrant that constitute knowledge may be more complex than mere conjunction, so that knowledge might best be thought of as a sort of organic unity, the good of which exceeds the sum of the goods of warranted belief and true belief.³⁰

A quick clarification: DePaul talks about warrant here, by which he means that which turns true belief into knowledge.³¹ However, since DePaul in subsequent writings has maintained that ‘the superior value of knowledge is to be explained in terms of the value that justification adds to true belief,’³² I will in what follows speak in terms of justification, not warrant.

Does the idea that what we are after as cognitive beings is the ‘organic unity’ of true belief and justification, i.e. knowledge, imply that justification is non-instrumentally valuable? DePaul himself seems to think that it does.³³ However, it is not obvious that DePaul’s theory supports such an implication.³⁴ On DePaul’s picture, justification is valuable as a component of an ‘organic unity.’ What does being valuable thus entail? It is somewhat hard to say, but consider two options. On the first option, we return to a point made in §1 above, about how wholes may inherit the value of one of their components, as in case of the derived non-instrumental value that knowledge may have in virtue of its factivity. In light of this, it might be

argued that the inheritance may also run the other way, i.e. from wholes to parts. More specifically, perhaps it can be argued that, (a) assuming (for the sake of the argument) that knowledge is of non-instrumental epistemic value in virtue of being a goal of inquiry, and (b) justification is a necessary condition on knowledge, it follows that (c) justification, too, is of non-instrumental epistemic value. However, it is easy to see why this does *not* follow: On the traditional account of knowledge, knowledge is justified true belief (Gettier problems aside). On the above line of reasoning, it would follow that mere belief – being a necessary condition on knowledge – is of non-instrumental epistemic value. That is clearly not right.

On the second option, we may consider an analogy that DePaul himself uses to illustrate the idea: The goal of bull riding is not simply to stay on the bull for eight seconds, but to do so with style.³⁵ Moreover, some of the things that will give you a higher score on style, such as spurring the bull, might actually decrease your chances of staying on the bull for eight seconds. In other words, style is not valuable as a mere means to staying on the bull. According to DePaul, justification is like riding the bull with style, true belief like staying on the bull for eight seconds, and knowledge like staying on the bull for eight seconds *with* style, in the sense that, while justification clearly is valuable, it is not valuable as a mere means to true belief. That, however, does not establish that justification is non-instrumentally valuable, i.e. that its value is not exhausted by it being an effective means to *any* further good. In fact, if we return to DePaul's own analogy, it seems that staying on the bull and riding the bull with style, respectively, are merely valuable as means to winning, i.e. to staying on the bull with style, at least in the following sense: *ceteris paribus*, staying on the bull makes it more likely that you will win, and the same goes for riding the bull with style. If successful bull riding and knowing are analogous in the manner in which DePaul maintains, it would thereby also seem right to say that believing justifiably is valuable as a mere means to knowing, in the sense that believing with justification makes it more likely that you also know, *ceteris paribus*. In other words, if the analogy supports the rejection of anything it is of the idea that justification is valuable as a mere means to true belief, but not of the idea that justification is valuable independently of its conduciveness to any *other* epistemic good, such as knowledge. As such, DePaul's line of reasoning does not establish (J), i.e. that justification is of non-instrumental epistemic value.

This is certainly not to suggest that DePaul's theory of epistemic value is compatible with (VVM). After all, he takes knowledge – not true belief – to be the goal of inquiry, and consequently holds that knowledge is of fundamental epistemic value. Even setting aside the fact that this amounts to a rejection of (1), i.e. the idea that true belief is *among* the fundamental epistemic goods, this is as incompatible with (VVM) as (J) is. So what reasons do we have for accepting DePaul's claim about knowledge being

a fundamental epistemic value? As before, we are concerned with theory-independent reasons. And as it turns out, DePaul's argument for the idea that attaining the 'organic whole' that is knowledge is the goal of inquiry is that it 'makes clear why warranted true beliefs are so much more valuable than true beliefs.'³⁶ However, as argued at length in §3, it is not clear that this is an intuition that we have strong theory-independent reasons to account for in the first place. As such, we may conclude that we still lack relevant reasons to consider either knowledge or justification to be of fundamental epistemic value.

5. *The trials and achievements of understanding*

To recapitulate, it has been argued that we lack strong theory-independent reason for taking knowing to be of greater epistemic value than merely believing truly, or to consider being justified non-instrumentally valuable. The present section considers the third and final candidate for a bearer of fundamental epistemic value: understanding. Two recent accounts of understanding will be discussed, the first one due to Kvanvig, and the second one due to Pritchard.³⁷

Kvanvig is concerned with what he refers to as *objectual* understanding, i.e. the kind of understanding ascribed with respect to an object (as opposed to a proposition), as when we talk about someone understanding politics or the presidency.³⁸ According to Kvanvig, such understanding is *factive*,³⁹ and requires the satisfaction of a *coherentist* condition, consisting in 'an internal grasping or appreciation of how the various elements in a body of information are related to each other in terms of explanatory, logical, probabilistic, and other kinds of relations that coherentists have thought constitutive of justification.'⁴⁰ In order to determine whether what Kvanvig has to say about understanding gives us any reason to reject (VVM), however, we need to remember something that has been stressed repeatedly above, namely that it is one thing to construct a theory implying that *p*, and quite another to provide theory-independent reasons as for why we *should* want our theory to imply that *p* in the first place. According to Kvanvig, 'there is at least as much intuitive support for the idea that understanding has value beyond that of its subparts as there is for the idea that knowledge has such value.'⁴¹ In light of what has been argued above, this statement might be less comforting than Kvanvig probably intended it – a problem that is exacerbated by the fact that Kvanvig provides no *additional* theory-independent support for such value in the case of understanding, beyond that which he assumes already exists for knowing.

Instead, Kvanvig proceeds to argue that this alleged surplus value of understanding can be accounted for. Since the account provided is a highly intriguing one, let us make an exception and waive the above requirement

to provide theory-independent support, if only for the sake of the argument. More specifically, let us grant Kvanvig the following dialectical advantage: If the account he provides makes it plausible that,

- (U) understanding is more epistemically valuable than merely believing truly,

then we have good reason to believe that we have found a counterexample to (2). After all, in analogy with what was said about (K) above, (U) could neither be accounted for with reference to the factivity of understanding, nor in terms of instrumental connections to true belief on part of any components of understanding (on pain of falling prey to a swamping problem). Consequently, the most plausible inference to draw from (U) would be that the surplus value of understanding over mere true belief has to be accounted for in terms of a fundamental value, distinct from that of true belief, which would contradict (2). On the other hand, if the account provided by Kvanvig does *not* make it plausible that (U) holds – and I will argue that it does not – then (2) remains unchallenged.

According to Kvanvig, the value relevant to (U) is that associated with the satisfaction of the coherentist condition. In order to avoid the swamping problem, Kvanvig takes the relevant kind of value to be non-instrumental.⁴² In explicating the relevant kind of value, Kvanvig makes a distinction between intentional and effective means to goals, such as the goal of believing truly.⁴³ Effective means are instrumentally valuable in so far as they raise the likelihood of securing the relevant ends. Intentional means are also valuable, according to Kvanvig, but not because they raise the likelihood of securing the goals in question. Such means are involved in *trying* to attain goals, and account for the value of such attempts even if they fail to raise the likelihood of attaining the goals in question as a result of trying. It is in this kind of value that we find the surplus value of understanding over mere true belief. More specifically, satisfying the coherentist condition is ‘valuable because it is constituted by adopting intentional means to the goal of truth.’⁴⁴

Why is merely *trying* to attain true belief valuable, even if so doing goes no lengths whatsoever toward actually attaining true belief? This is what Kvanvig has to say:

Truth is not a property that is always reflectively accessible [. . .] and so we must adopt some means for identifying beliefs to hold in order to achieve the indirect goal of believing a claim if and only if it is true. So we should try to have, or value, beliefs with some other property, one that we can tell directly and immediately whether a belief has.⁴⁵

The internal grasping of how various elements in a body of information are related is one such property – a ‘mark of truth,’⁴⁶ as Kvanvig calls it.

Moreover, according to Kvanvig, the value associated with adopting such a grasp as an intentional means toward believing truly is exactly what accounts for (U). More specifically, what is supposed to account for the value of adopting intentional means to true belief is not opting for just *any* reflectively acceptable surrogate, but opting for some *particular* intentional means, including the kind of grasp involved in understanding. But what *kind* of value does opting for such a grasp yield? At the very end of his book, Kvanvig writes about the grasping of explanatory relationships that is involved in understanding that:

[. . .] to have mastered such explanatory relationships is valuable not only because it involves the finding of new truths but also because finding such relationships organizes and systematizes our thinking on a subject matter in a way beyond the mere addition of more true beliefs or even justified true beliefs. Such organization is pragmatically useful because it allows us to reason from one bit of information to other related information that is useful as a basis for action, where unorganized thinking provides no such basis for inference. Moreover, such organized elements of thought provide intrinsically satisfying closure to the process of inquiry, yielding a sense or feeling of completeness to our grasp of a particular subject matter. In sum, understanding is valuable because it is constituted by subjectively justified true belief across an appropriately individuated body of information that is systematized and organized in the process of achieving understanding, and subjectively justified true belief that is systematized in this way is valuable.⁴⁷

In other words, there are three potential sources for the value of understanding. The first one is that the relevant grasp may lead to new truths being found. However, considering that the value in question would be *instrumental*, it could not account for (U), due to aforementioned swamping problem. The second source is that understanding brings systematicity to our thinking. That may be a good thing, either as yet another instrumental value, or as a *pragmatic* value, as Kvanvig himself suggests. In either case, however, it cannot be relevant to the surplus value postulated by way of (U) – in the former case on account of swamping, and in the latter case on account of not being relevant to specifically *epistemic* value. The third source is that understanding brings a feeling of closure and completeness. Such a feeling may be pleasurable and, hence, *prudentially* valuable. However, as such, it does not seem relevant to epistemic value. What would be relevant to epistemic value is closure and completeness, rather than a mere *feeling* thereof – unless, of course, having such a feeling somehow tracked actual closure and completeness. However, as has been argued at length by J. D. Trout, the relevant feeling rarely tracks understanding (as opposed to apparent understanding); instead, the former tends to be a mere consequence of a combination of overconfidence and hindsight on part of the person having the relevant feeling.⁴⁸

Consequently, even waiving the requirement to provide theory-independent support for (U), we still lack reason to believe that the value

of understanding is not exhausted by the non-instrumental value derived from its factivity, and the instrumental value it may have as an effective means to truth. As such, Kvanvig's notion of understanding poses no challenge to (VVM).

There are, of course, other types of understanding besides objectual understanding. More recently, Pritchard has defended a view about *understanding-why*, i.e. the kind of understanding that is involved in understanding why such-and-such is the case.⁴⁹ Pritchard's account is meant to account for what he refers to as the *distinctive* value of such understanding. To be of distinctive value is both a matter of degree and kind.⁵⁰ More specifically, while Pritchard takes understanding-why (henceforth, simply 'understanding') to be factive,⁵¹ he does not take the value of understanding to be exhausted by the value that it has in virtue of its factivity. For understanding to be of distinctive value is for understanding to be both *more* valuable than anything that falls short of understanding, including true belief, and for that surplus value to be due to understanding being of *fundamental* epistemic value. A fundamental epistemic good is an 'epistemic good whose epistemic value is at least sometimes not simply [an] instrumental value relative to a further *epistemic* good.'⁵² More specifically, Pritchard takes the defining feature of fundamental epistemic value to be that it can 'act as the terminus for the instrumental regress of epistemic value.'⁵³ In other words, Pritchard's conception of a fundamental epistemic good is the same as the one we have been working with in the above. After all, any good whose non-instrumental epistemic value derives from the value of one of its components can not act as the relevant kind of terminus, since any question about why *that* good is of non-instrumental epistemic value would have to be answered with reference to a *further* epistemic good, i.e. the epistemic good of the component in question.

According to Pritchard, '[t]he intuition that understanding is distinctively valuable is surely even stronger than the intuition that knowledge is distinctively valuable.'⁵⁴ If what has been argued above is correct, it better be. But since Pritchard does not elaborate on the claim, let us simply grant him an advantage analogous to that granted to Kvanvig above, and waive the requirement on theory-independent support; all that is required for Pritchard's theory of understanding to amount to a challenge to (2) is that it makes plausible that understanding is of a non-instrumental value that does not derive from its factivity. Pritchard's argument for this claim utilizes a distinction between fundamental and *final* value, where final value pertains to that which is of non-instrumental value *simpliciter* in the sense that its value holds independently of any considerations about conduciveness whatsoever. As noted in §1, assuming that at least some instances of true belief are of fundamental epistemic value is compatible with maintaining that (those) instances are only valuable thus in so far as they pertain to questions posed by some relevant set of inquirers. In other

words, maintaining that some instances of true belief are of fundamental (non-instrumental) *epistemic* value is compatible with maintaining that those instances are valuable thus only in so far as they are of instrumental non-epistemic value, and, hence, not of non-instrumental value *simpliciter*. So, again, fundamental epistemic value does not imply final value.

However, according to Pritchard, 'final value *simpliciter* does entail fundamental epistemic value.' 'After all,' he writes, 'if an epistemic good has a value which is not an instrumental value then, *a fortiori*, it has a value which is not an instrumental epistemic value either.'⁵⁵ That seems right. But surely it does not go to show that final value implies non-instrumental epistemic value. There are more ways of *not* being of instrumental epistemic value than to be of non-instrumental epistemic value, including not to be of any epistemic value at all. Again, there are plausible candidates for finally valuable goods – such as the value that pertains to undergoing an episode of pleasure – that, clearly, are *not* thereby of epistemic value, let alone of non-instrumental epistemic value.

This presents a problem for Pritchard, since he rests his case for the value of understanding on this alleged implication. More specifically, he argues that the reason that such understanding is of non-instrumental epistemic value is that it involves a cognitive *achievement*, where an achievement is a success that is creditable to the exercise of the agent's abilities. Moreover, according to Pritchard, such achievements are finally valuable. How so? Pritchard asks us to imagine the following scenario:

Imagine [. . .] that you are about to undertake a course of action designed to attain a certain outcome and that you are given the choice between merely being successful in what you set out to do, and being successful in such a way that you exhibit an achievement. Suppose further that it is stipulated in advance that there are no practical costs or benefits to choosing either way. Even so, wouldn't you prefer to exhibit an achievement? And wouldn't you be right to do so? If that's correct, then this is strong evidence for the final value of achievements.⁵⁶

Combining Pritchard's points about understanding and cognitive achievements, his case for the non-instrumental epistemic value of understanding can be reconstructed thus:

- (P1) Cognitive achievements are finally valuable.
- (P2) All finally valuable goods are of non-instrumental epistemic value.
- (P3) Hence, cognitive achievements are of non-instrumental epistemic value.
- (P4) Understanding is a cognitive achievement.
- (C) Hence, understanding is of non-instrumental epistemic value.

While valid, this argument is unsound, and for two reasons. First, as called attention to above, all finally valuable goods are *not* of non-instrumental

epistemic value, since some finally valuable goods are of no epistemic value at all. This undermines (P2).

Second, even setting this concern aside, (P1) is independently questionable. If we grant Pritchard's claim that we would prefer exhibiting a cognitive achievement in the scenario imagined (as opposed to, perhaps, having no preference either way), we have some reason to rule out exhibiting an achievement being of instrumental *practical* value. However, this establishes neither that (a) exhibiting an achievement is of *non-instrumental* practical value (since there are more ways of not being of instrumental practical value than to be of non-instrumental practical value, including to not be of any practical value at all), nor that (b) exhibiting an achievement is not of some non-instrumental *qualified* value. As for the latter, it might, for example, be that there is something intrinsically pleasing about exhibiting an achievement, and that such achievements, hence, may be of non-instrumental *prudential* value. However, none of this serves to establish the far stronger claim that cognitive achievements are of final value, i.e. of non-instrumental value *without qualification*.

By way of conclusion, Pritchard's account of understanding does not successfully support the claim that such understanding is of non-instrumental epistemic value, even if we waive the requirement to provide theory-independent support. For all we are being told, the value of understanding is exhausted by the non-instrumental value that derives from its factivity, and whatever value is associated with understanding being a cognitive achievement. However, contrary to what Pritchard argues, it is not clear that the latter kind of value is final. Moreover, even if it is granted that cognitive achievements are finally valuable, and that understanding is a form of cognitive achievement, this does not imply that understanding is of non-instrumental *epistemic* value. As such, we may conclude that Pritchard's account of understanding poses no problem for (2), nor consequently for (VVM).

6. Conclusion

Recently, veritistic value monism has come under attack by pluralist philosophers arguing that it cannot account fully for the domain of epistemic value. As we have seen, however, the relevant arguments fail to establish any such thing. For one thing, there is a presumption of monism due to considerations about axiological parsimony. While such a presumption would be defeated by evidence to the effect that the relevant kind of monism makes us unable to fully account for the domain of epistemic value, a proper examination of the most promising counterexamples to

monism casts serious doubt upon the claim that there is any such evidence. Consequently, veritistic value monism still stands.⁵⁷

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NOTES

¹ See David (2001, pp. 151–169), for an overview, and Stich (1990) for a dissenting voice.

² Recent proponents of veritistic value monism include Alvin Goldman (1999); Marian David (2005); and Erik J. Olsson (2007).

³ See Goldman (1999, p. 5).

⁴ See, e.g., Zagzebski (2004).

⁵ Could we take just *anything* to be a goal of inquiry, beyond the paradigmatic candidates of true belief, knowledge, understanding, and so on? As I have argued at length elsewhere, the answer is ‘no.’ See Ahlstrom-Vij (forthcoming a).

⁶ As this characterization makes clear, I will take a broadly *consequentialist* approach to epistemic evaluation. For prominent alternatives, see the virtue-theoretic approach of Linda Zagzebski (1996) and the deontological approach of Clifford (1866).

⁷ For some representative statements, see Lynch (2009, pp. 76–77); Alston (2005, p. 30); Haack (1993, p. 199); and BonJour (1985, pp. 83–84).

⁸ The components in question correspond to the conditions included in a correct analysis of the state in question. If a state has no analysis – as Williamson (2000) has argued is the case for knowledge – it has no components, but may still be of fundamental value.

⁹ To borrow an example from Shelly Kagan (1998), the pen used by Abraham Lincoln to sign the emancipation declaration might be of greater intrinsic value than an intrinsically identical pen never used by Lincoln. See also Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen (2000); and Korsgaard (1983).

¹⁰ See Bradley (2006).

¹¹ See, e.g., Goldman (1999, pp. 94–96).

¹² See Ahlstrom-Vij (forthcoming a).

¹³ Invoking this principle does not commit us to taking simplicity to be of fundamental epistemic value, as opposed to of instrumental epistemic value (e.g., pursuing simplicity in theorizing is conducive to attaining a goal of inquiry), or non-epistemic value (e.g., simplicity brings tractability, which is pragmatically valuable). However, see Sober, 2001, for a skeptical take on the possibility of understanding the value of simplicity in terms of other values.

¹⁴ A fourth candidate for a fundamental epistemic value that has figured in recent discussions about the viability of veritistic value monism is that of *significance*, e.g., as discussed by Dennis Whitcomb (2007); and Michael DePaul (1993). However, see Ahlstrom-Vij and Grimm (forthcoming), for an argument to the effect that the value of significance poses no problem for the veritistic value monist.

¹⁵ Here and henceforth, any unqualified statement about value concerns *epistemic* value.

¹⁶ On one understanding of what knowledge is, knowledge just *is* true belief. I will not be concerned with this *weak* notion of knowledge here, but see Goldman and Olsson (2009); as well as Sartwell (1992).

¹⁷ Jones (1997, p. 424).

¹⁸ Pritchard (2007, p. 85).

¹⁹ See, e.g., Kvanvig (2003, pp. 3–4). However, see also Ahlstrom-Vij, ‘Meno and the Monist’ (forthcoming b) for some reasons to believe that what Plato says in the *Meno* is fully compatible with veritistic value monism.

²⁰ See Kvanvig (2003). Similar points have been made by, among others, Linda Zagzebski (2003); Ernest Sosa (2003); Richard Swinburne (1999); Ward Jones (1997); and Michael DePaul (1993).

²¹ See, e.g., Goldman and Olsson (2009).

²² (K) has received some scrutiny in recent debates, but not in a manner amounting to a rejection. Jason Baehr (2009) raises doubt about whether the intuition typically reported in the form of (K) really concerns *all* instances of knowledge, but seems to accept (K) as a rough generalization. John Greco (2009) questions the idea that there is widespread intuitive support for the further idea that knowledge is more valuable than any subset of its constituents, while accepting (K). Jonathan Kvanvig (2003) denies that knowledge is more valuable than any subset of its constituents, but accepts that (K) holds in virtue of the surplus value of justified true belief over mere true belief. Duncan Pritchard (2010) initially rejects (K), but re-establishes it with reference to the value of understanding, arguing that knowledge typically goes hand-in-hand with understanding.

²³ See Pritchard (2007) for an overview.

²⁴ Jones (1997, pp. 423–424).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 424.

²⁶ Here, I’m siding with Kvanvig (2003, p. 148).

²⁷ Jones (1997, p. 424).

²⁸ Baehr (2009, p. 51).

²⁹ See, e.g., Ernest Sosa (2007); and Greco (2010).

³⁰ DePaul (1993, pp. 77–78).

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³² DePaul (2001, p. 178).

³³ For one thing, when Kvanvig (2003, p. 53) reads DePaul as suggesting that justification is intrinsically valuable, DePaul does not protest – rather, he goes on to argue that Kvanvig’s arguments against the idea that justification is valuable thus are no good. See DePaul and Grimm (2007, pp. 504–508).

³⁴ The following argument has been developed in collaboration with Stephen Grimm.

³⁵ DePaul and Grimm (2007, p. 504).

³⁶ DePaul (1993, p. 79).

³⁷ Since I have discussed it at length elsewhere (see Ahlstrom-Vij and Grimm, forthcoming), I will presently not consider the question of how the veritistic value monist may accommodate recent accounts of understanding as non-propositional knowledge of causes. See, e.g., Grimm (forthcoming).

³⁸ Kvanvig (2003, p. 191).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 192–193.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 200.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 63–64.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 65–66.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

⁴⁸ See Trout (2002).

⁴⁹ See Pritchard (2010).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁵⁷ Many thanks to Duncan Pritchard, Hilary Kornblith, Stephen Grimm, Alvin Goldman, Klemens Kappel, Erik Olsson, Mikkel Gerken, Nikolaj Jang Lee Linding Pedersen, Wayne Riggs, Jonathan Vogel, and an anonymous reviewer for *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* for valuable comments on previous versions of this paper.

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