

## IN DEFENCE OF VERITISM

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It used to be taken as a given in epistemology that the fundamental good from a purely epistemic point of view is truth. Such *veritism* is a given no longer, with some commentators advocating epistemic value pluralism, whereby truth is at most one of several irreducible epistemic goods, while others are attracted to an epistemic value monism that is centred on something other than truth, such as knowledge or understanding. It is claimed that it was premature to reject veritism. In particular, it is argued that the kinds of motivations that are offered for rejecting this proposal are weak on closer inspection, as they trade on a dubious reading of veritism that is independently implausible. The attraction of this implausible way of thinking about veritism lies in the difficulty of offering any coherent alternative. A solution to this conundrum is proposed, whereby we unpack the veritist proposal in terms of the explanatorily prior notion of an intellectually virtuous inquirer.

**Keywords:** epistemology, epistemic value, inquiry, reliabilism, truth, veritism, virtue epistemology

## В ЗАЩИТУ ВЕРИТИЗМА

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Раньше в эпистемологии считалось само собой разумеющимся, что фундаментальным благом с чисто эпистемической точки зрения является истина. Такой веритизм больше не является данностью, поскольку некоторые философы выступают за плюрализм эпистемических ценностей, согласно которому истина является, по меньшей мере, одним из нескольких нередуцируемых эпистемических благ. Других авторов привлекает монизм эпистемических ценностей, в центре которого находится нечто иное, чем истина, например знание или понимание. Утверждается, что отвергать веритизм было бы преждевременно. Возражение от цели познания утверждает, что помимо достижения истины у познания могут быть иные цели: знание, понимание и т.д. В ответ на это утверждается, что названные цели не являются автономными по отношению к достижению истины. Возражение от средств познания утверждает, что в познании ценным являются не только результаты, но и то, каким образом они получены. В ответ на это отмечается, что средства познания могут иметь не-эпистемическую ценность, но их познавательная ценность связана с приближением к истине. Еще одно возражение связано с проблемой придания ценности любым тривиальным истинам, что, по-видимому, вытекает из веритизма. Сюда же относится сходное возражение, что из веритизма вытекает, что исследователь должен стремиться к достижению как можно большего количества тривиальных истин. Подобные возражения основаны на предпосылке, что согласно веритизму все истины одинаково ценны. Некоторые веритисты, в частности А. Голдман, согласны с тем, что веритизм предполагает максимизацию истинных убеждений. Однако в статье утверждается, что те, кто ценит



истину, вполне могут придавать каким-то истинам (например, научным) большую ценность, чем другим. Таким образом, показывается, что те мотивы, которые предлагаются для отказа от веритизма, при ближайшем рассмотрении оказываются слабыми, поскольку они опираются на сомнительную интерпретацию веритизма. В статье обосновывается положение, что в споре об эпистемических ценностях в качестве концептуально первичного понятия следует рассматривать не понятие эпистемического блага, а понятие интеллектуально добродетельного исследователя. Определение того, что есть фундаментальное эпистемическое благо, должно следовать из определения интеллектуально добродетельного исследователя, а не наоборот. Подобное утверждение совместимо с аксиологическим тезисом веритизма (фундаментальным эпистемическим благом признается истина) и одновременно избавляет нас от необходимости максимизации тривиальных истин.

**Ключевые слова:** эпистемология, эпистемическая ценность, исследование, релейбилизм, истина, веритизм, эпистемология добродетелей

1. It used to be taken as obvious that truth is central to epistemology. The kind of centrality in question is a form of fundamentality that is both conceptual and axiological. The former, in that we understand what it is for something to be epistemic in terms of its relationship to the truth. So what makes doxastic justification an *epistemic* property of a belief, for example, is because it is truth-conducive. Justified beliefs have a propensity to be true (in contrast to unjustified beliefs), and thereby stand in a positive relationship to the truth, even when the token belief is false. The latter, in the sense that the truth is the fundamental good of epistemic appraisal, in the way that the beautiful might be thought to be the fundamental good of aesthetic appraisal. So the goodness of all epistemic goods is understood instrumentally with regard to whether they promote truth<sup>1</sup>. This axiological claim is intertwined with the conceptual point. What makes epistemic justification epistemic is that it is truth-conducive, which is also what makes epistemic justification valuable, from a purely epistemic point of view.

In principle, at least, one could endorse the axiological claim without thereby endorsing the conceptual claim, and *vice versa*. But it is hard to see what the motivation for such a detachment of these twin theses could be. How could truth be the fundamental epistemic good without it being at the same time conceptually fundamental to the epistemic realm as well? Conversely, why would one hold that truth is conceptually fundamental to the epistemic realm if one didn't also maintain that truth is the fundamental epistemic good? Accordingly, in what follows we will treat these two theses as being two sides of the same coin.

<sup>1</sup> Note that it doesn't follow from the fact that truth is the fundamental epistemic good, and so non-instrumentally valuable from an epistemic point of view, that truth is good *simpliciter*.



Elsewhere I have called this classical position regarding the fundamentality of truth to epistemology *epistemic value truth monism*<sup>2</sup>. This captures the idea that the classical position is essentially a monistic thesis about epistemic value, whereby truth is the overarching epistemic good. This terminology is a bit of a mouthful, however, so let us instead opt for a simpler name: *veritism*. Note, however, that this name is sometimes used to describe a specific way of understanding epistemic value truth monism, rather than to describe the general thesis we have just articulated, so the reader should keep in mind that our usage of the term picks out the general thesis and not the more specific unpacking (we will return to this point). What is important for our present purposes is that veritism, generally construed, was once so commonplace that one would struggle to find prominent epistemologists who explicitly disagreed with it<sup>3</sup>.

But this orthodoxy is no more. Instead we find that epistemologists these days tend to take it for granted that truth cannot play this fundamental role<sup>4</sup>. Two alternative conceptions of epistemic axiology are now dominant. According to one, there is a plurality of epistemic goods, with truth at most one epistemic good among others, and perhaps not even that. In particular, these other epistemic goods are not reducible to the epistemic good of truth<sup>5</sup>. Alternatively, one might stick with a monistic view about epistemic value, but treat the fundamental epistemic good as something other than truth, such as knowledge or understanding<sup>6</sup>. Either way, veritism is rejected and, with it, the centrality of truth to epistemology.

2. Note that there are *modest* and *radical* ways of rejecting veritism. On the modest construal, truth is still very important to the epistemological enterprise, but simply not as central as veritism would entail. Suppose,

<sup>2</sup> See Pritchard, Millar & Haddock [2010, ch. 1] and Pritchard [2011; 2014*b*; 2016*a*; 2016*c*; 2021*d*; 2021*c*]. For further general discussion of the topic of epistemic value, see Pritchard [2007] and Carter, Pritchard & Turri [2018].

<sup>3</sup> See David [2001, pp. 151–152] for a long list of quotations illustrating how widely held this view once was in epistemology. The list of contemporary epistemologists that he quotes includes William Alston, Laurence Bonjour, Roderick Chisholm, Richard Foley, Alvin Goldman, Keith Lehrer, Paul Moser, Alvin Plantinga, and Ernest Sosa (though I think it is clear from more recent work that Sosa at least should no longer be thought of as endorsing veritism see, for example, Sosa [2003; 2020, *passim*]). See also Elgin [2017, p. 10], who in addition to Alston, Bonjour, Goldman, and Lehrer also credits veritism to William James.

<sup>4</sup> For a fairly representative sample of recent detractors when it comes to the idea that truth is the fundamental epistemic good, see Williamson [2000, *passim*], Kvanvig [2003, *passim*], Sosa [2003], Millar [2011], Kelp [2014], and Elgin [2017, *passim*]. See also the exchange between David [2013] and Kvanvig [2013].

<sup>5</sup> See Kvanvig [2003] for an influential defence of an epistemic value pluralism of this kind.

<sup>6</sup> For some recent defences of (versions of) the idea that knowledge is the fundamental good, for example, see Williamson [2000], Millar [2011], and Kelp [2014; 2021]. For a defence of the centrality of understanding in this regard, see Elgin [2017].



for example, that one opts for the monism route and treats knowledge as the fundamental epistemic good. Since knowledge is factive, it follows that truth is still there in the picture, it's just that we are now focused on our apprehension of the truth rather than truth itself. Similarly, one could imagine versions of the pluralism option whereby truth is still important to the epistemological enterprise, it is just that other, non-reducible, epistemic goods are also part of the picture.

But there is also a more radical way of rejecting veritism. Consider Catherine's Elgin's [1996; 2004; 2017] influential treatment of the importance of understanding, for example. She regards the fundamental epistemic good as being understanding, and so pursues a monistic route. Crucially, however, she doesn't think that understanding is a factive notion like knowledge, or even that it is approximately factive (in the sense that it is paradigmatically factive, but not universally factive)<sup>7</sup>. Instead, she maintains that falsehoods can be fundamentally important to promoting understanding, such that, for example, scientific progress quite rightly depends upon them. As such she takes epistemologists to task for, as she puts it, "valorizing truth" [Elgin, 2017, 1], and hence explicitly attacks veritism. She is thus proposing a fairly dramatic dethroning of the status of truth in epistemology. One could imagine pluralistic lines of argument that take a similar tack. If the value of such an elevated epistemic standing as understanding can be accounted for without essential appeal to truth, then there is surely scope to do the same with other epistemic standings. Accordingly, there is no reason why an epistemic value pluralism should treat truth as particularly important to epistemology.

3. I think that the contemporary rejection of veritism is premature, as many of the objections to it are at least inconclusive on closer inspection. For example, one source of scepticism about veritism turns on a failure to properly distinguish between two disambiguations of the notion of epistemic value. On its most straightforward construal, this concerns a kind of value that is distinctively epistemic. This is the notion of epistemic value that is operative in our account of veritism above. But there is another disambiguation of epistemic value which concerns the *value of the epistemic* – i.e., whether an epistemic standing, like knowledge, is valuable. Here the value in question needn't be specifically epistemic at all, but can be any kind of value, such as practical, ethical, aesthetic, and so on<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> For more on this specific point, see Elgin [2009].

<sup>8</sup> Compare Geach's [1956] distinction regarding predicative and attributive adjectives. Where 'epistemic value' concerns the value of the epistemic, the adjective is being used in a predicative fashion, like 'red fly', to use Geach's example, which refers to something that is both red and a fly. In contrast, where 'epistemic value' concerns a specific kind of value that is epistemic, the adjective is being used in an attributive fashion, like 'big fly', which doesn't refer to something that is both big and a fly, but rather something that is big *for a fly*.



Familiar debates about the value of a specific epistemic standing, like knowledge or understanding, naturally gloss over this distinction. If one is posed the so-called *Meno problem* of explaining why knowledge is more valuable than (corresponding instances of) true belief, then it isn't immediately clear exactly which disambiguation of epistemic value is at issue. Is the challenge to explain why knowledge is more *epistemically* valuable than mere true belief, or is it rather to explain why knowledge is more valuable *simpliciter* than mere true belief? Clearly these are not equivalent questions, and hence it's important to keep them apart.

If one takes one's cue in this regard from the discussion in the *Meno* itself, then it seems that it is the greater value of knowledge *simpliciter* that is at issue (and thus the value of the epistemic rather than epistemic value). If this were not so, then it wouldn't be clear why appealing to the practical value of knowledge as a 'tethered' true belief, unlike mere true belief that is untethered (like the untethered statues of Daedalus, to use Socrates's analogy, which are apt to run away), would be a potential response to that problem.

Interestingly, however, the *Meno* problem is often run together with the so-called *swamping problem*, and yet here it does seem to explicitly be epistemic value that is at issue rather than the value of the epistemic<sup>10</sup>. Indeed, while the swamping problem is often posed as being a problem for reliabilist epistemologies, as I've argued elsewhere it is really a challenge to a certain conception of epistemic value that is broadly veritistic<sup>11</sup>. The swamping problem turns on the point that if one only cares about something as a means to something else, then the instrumental good of the former disappears, or is 'swamped', by the presence of the latter. Suppose, as is plausible, that one only cares about good coffee-making machines because one cares about good coffee. If one is then faced with two completely identical cups of coffee, it shouldn't matter which one of them is produced by a good coffee-making machine and which one was produced by a poor coffee-making machine (albeit one that happened to produce excellent coffee on this occasion). All that should matter is the quality of the coffee, which is, *ex hypothesi*, identical.

<sup>9</sup> Kvanvig [2003] is generally credited for bringing the *Meno* problem back to the forefront of contemporary epistemological discussion. See also Jones [1997].

<sup>10</sup> For some of the key statements of the swamping problem, see Jones [1997], Riggs [2002a; 2002b], Kvanvig [2003; 2010], and Zagzebski [2003]. Many of these treatments e.g., Kvanvig [2003] run together the *Meno* problem and the swamping problem. For further defence of my claim that they should be kept apart, see Pritchard, Millar & Haddock [2010, ch. 1] and Pritchard [2011].

<sup>11</sup> For an influential statement of the swamping problem as primarily targeting reliabilism, see Zagzebski [2003]. I make the point that the swamping problem is really an issue for veritism more generally in several places, but see especially Pritchard [2011].



What goes for coffee and coffee-making machines appears to go for truth and epistemic standings as well, at least if veritism is correct. On this view one cares about having, for example, justified beliefs because one cares about having true beliefs. But doesn't it therefore follow, by parity of reasoning, that one should be indifferent about whether one's true belief is justified or unjustified, such that any instrumental epistemic value that justification can offer is swamped by the non-instrumental value of truth? This is held to be a *reductio* of the view, however, in that clearly we should prefer justified true beliefs (and thus knowledge) over mere true beliefs.

The plausibility of this putative *reductio* really depends on two further claims, however, neither of which is credible. The first is the idea that our assessment of epistemic value in this case should be entirely restricted to the token true belief in question. So construed, veritism would indeed entail that a justified true belief is no better, from a purely epistemic point of view, than a mere true belief. But why would we be so restricted in the scope of our evaluation? Having a justified true belief that  $p$  entails not only that one has a true belief that  $p$ , but also that one has other true beliefs that support the justification. (In this sense the analogy between true belief and good coffee breaks down, as picking the reliably produced good coffee doesn't deliver additional cups of good coffee). The same is true, *a fortiori*, of other, more elevated, epistemic standings, like knowledge or understanding. But this is not the case when it comes to merely having a mere true belief that  $p$ . So clearly a veritist would prefer to have justified true belief (and knowledge, etc.) over mere true belief, and prefer this precisely because she cares about the truth.

Moreover, notice that once we distinguish between epistemic value and the value of the epistemic, then it's not clear why the putative *reductio* is thought to be problematic anyway. After all, to say that this token unjustified true belief is no more valuable from a purely epistemic point of view than its justified counterpart does not entail that they are of equal value *simpliciter*. Suppose, for example, that the justified true belief amounts to knowledge. Many theorists have argued for the greater practical value of knowledge over mere true belief, and even that it might have a broadly ethical value (of a kind that accrues to achievements more generally, perhaps)<sup>12</sup>. If such views are correct, then knowledge that  $p$  can be of more value than a mere true belief that  $p$  even if the former is not epistemically more valuable than the latter. Given that point, however, why is it thought to be so paradoxical to hold that there is an equal level of epistemic value in play (especially when

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Greco's [2010] influential virtue-theoretic account of knowledge that incorporates an account of the value of knowledge that turns on its status as a kind of cognitive achievement, whereby it inherits the broadly ethical value of achievements more generally.



this claim is accompanied by the further point just noted that the scope of our epistemic evaluation is in any case being unnecessarily restricted here)<sup>15</sup>

4. Here is another problem that is often posed for veritism. Plausibly, if veritism is correct, then the goal of a well-conducted inquiry ought to be truth. After all, if truth is the fundamental epistemic good, then surely this is what we should be aiming for in inquiry? But wait a minute, says our critic, if truth is what inquiry is aiming at, then surely a well-conducted inquiry should cease as soon as truth is attained, regardless of whether one's true belief is justified, known, understood, and so on. And that doesn't seem right. *Ergo*, truth is not the goal of inquiry, and hence truth cannot be the fundamental epistemic good. Call this the *goal of inquiry* objection<sup>14</sup>.

While I would concede that this is an initially plausible train of reasoning, it doesn't stand up to closer scrutiny. An analogy will help. Consider a chef whose goal is to produce delicious food. But wait a minute, says our critic, if the chef's goal is really just to produce delicious food, then surely her cooking activities should cease as soon as the delicious food is produced. In particular, so long as the delicious food is produced, then it shouldn't matter to the chef whether the food is tasted. But that doesn't seem right; the cook should be tasting the food she is cooking to determine how tasty it is. *Ergo*, producing delicious food is not the chef's goal at all, but rather the tasting of the delicious food that she has produced.

Clearly something has gone wrong in this reasoning. The mistake is to imagine that the tasting of the deliciousness of the food is somehow a separable goal from that of producing delicious food, as opposed to being merely a way of determining that delicious food has been produced. The chef wants to taste the food precisely because she cares about producing delicious food, and not because her real goal is the tasting of delicious food.

I think something similar is the case with regard to the truth goal. Yes, we want to not only get to the truth but also to know it, to understand it, and so forth. But that's not to introduce additional epistemic goals. Indeed, once we put matters this way the point can seem rather obvious. For don't we care about knowing the truth, understanding the truth, and so on, precisely *because* we care about the truth? That is, our concern for the truth extends to knowing it and understanding it because this is how

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<sup>15</sup> I explore these points regarding the swamping problem in more detail in Pritchard [2011; 2014a; 2016a].

<sup>14</sup> For example, drawing on Williamson [2000], in recent work Millar [2011] and Kelp [2014] have used this objection to motivate the idea that knowledge is the goal of inquiry, since it is what legitimately closes inquiry. See Pritchard [2016b] for a critical discussion of this claim. See also Kelp [2021], which defends the idea that inquiry aims at understanding while contending that this is compatible with treating knowledge as the goal of inquiry.



one ‘tastes’ the truth and thereby ensures that the truth has been gained, and not because we care about these epistemic standings as opposed to the truth<sup>15</sup>.

5. This last objection to veritism has a sibling in the literature. According to the sibling objection, we don’t just care about getting the truth, but also the manner in which we get to the truth. *Ergo*, it isn’t just getting the truth that we care about. Call this the *ways and means objection*. There are various ways of fleshing out this objection. If the claim is just that we don’t simply want to get to the truth, but also to know and understand it, then it doesn’t add anything to the objection just raised. But one can imagine the critic insisting that there is more to the objection than this. Regardless of whether we end up knowing or understanding the truth, don’t we want to get to the truth in a skillful way rather than through guesswork? The analogy with the chef might seem to work against veritism here. The chef wants to *produce* delicious food via her culinary skills after all – it seems that she wouldn’t have attained her goal if the delicious food just appeared by magic.

It will be useful to think about the culinary analogy a bit more. For an objection to trade on this analogy it will be important that the culinary domain of evaluation is structured along analogous lines to the epistemic domain as veritism understands it (this is evidently not an obvious claim to make, and the point we made earlier regarding the goal of inquiry objection didn’t presuppose it). So we would have to imagine that there is a single fundamental culinary good in the form, for example, of delicious food. Nonetheless, the idea would be that the point still holds that within this domain of evaluation we also care about how the delicious food is produced, and in particular that it is skillfully produced by the agent.

Notice, however, that there are two axes of evaluation in play here. On the one hand, we might care about culinary skills because we care about what such skills produce: delicious food. On the other hand, we might care about culinary skills because we care about skills in general, and thus care about the achievements that skills can generate (i.e., roughly, successes that are attributable to one’s manifestation of relevant skill or ability). The first kind of evaluation is a culinary evaluation, while the second kind of evaluation is not; indeed, the second kind of evaluation would apply to *any* activity where skill is involved. Relatedly, the first kind of evaluation is, *ex hypothesi*, relative to the culinary good of delicious food, while the second kind of evaluation is relative to a non-culinary good of a different kind.

<sup>15</sup> Moreover, we should also bear in mind the point made earlier that knowledge or understanding of the truth (or even simply justified true belief) will involve further true beliefs anyway, and hence can be accommodated in terms of a desire for the truth. I explore the goal of inquiry problem in more detail in Pritchard [2014a; 2016a; 2021d].



Going back to the epistemic case, we can now see how the veritist should respond to the ways and means objection. We need to recall our distinction from earlier regarding epistemic value proper *versus* the value of the epistemic. Manifestations of cognitive skill are valuable from an epistemic point of view, and so epistemically valuable, but that's because they are ways of getting to the truth, and the truth is the fundamental epistemic good. Manifestations of cognitive skill are also valuable from a more general point of view, simply as manifestations of skill. Cognitive achievements are valuable in this sense, for example, just as achievements more generally are valuable<sup>16</sup>. But this is not a further kind of epistemic value, of a kind that is unrelated to the truth, but rather a value that isn't specifically epistemic at all – we have now switched to talking about the value of the epistemic rather than epistemic value. So long as we are clear about what kind of evaluation is in play, then the ways and means objection poses no difficulty for veritism.

6. This brings us to an objection to veritism that I think has probably been the most pervasive one in the literature. This is the idea that to make truth the fundamental epistemic good must entail caring about trivial truths like the number of blades of grass on the lawn or the items listed on a random café menu board<sup>17</sup>. We can bring this concern into sharp relief by imagining two doors, where behind each lies a single true proposition. Crucially, however, while one of these propositions concerns a deep and important truth about, say, the nature of the universe, the other proposition concerns an entirely trivial truth, such as the twelfth item on that café menu. If one endorses veritism, then isn't one obliged to be indifferent about which of these doors one chooses, and thus which truth one acquires in the process? After all, from the perspective of seeking the truth both doors offer the very same thing: a single true proposition. And yet it seems that we clearly would prefer to open the door that has the deep and important truth behind it. *Ergo*, claim the critics of veritism, it cannot really only be truth that we care about. Call this the *trivial truths* objection<sup>18</sup>.

What is especially interesting about this objection is that a moment's reflection reveals that it cannot possibly be a *reductio* of veritism in general, as opposed to a particular rendition of veritism. After all, one natural explanation of why one would prefer the door with the deep and important truth behind it is surely that one cares about the truth. Isn't preferring this door precisely what someone who cares about the truth would opt

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<sup>16</sup> For further discussion of the value of achievements, including cognitive achievements, see Pritchard [2010] and Bradford [2015].

<sup>17</sup> E.g., Sosa [2000, p. 49].

<sup>18</sup> There are lots of presentations of this general problem for veritism in the literature, but for a clear articulation of the problem, see DePaul [2001, §2]. For an influential statement of the issue that urges a virtue-theoretic response, see Sosa [2003]. For a recent discussion of this problem, see Treanor [2018].



for? In particular, the substantial truth offers one much more of a grip on the nature of things than its trivial counterpart, and hence would be preferred by someone who cares about getting to the truth. Accordingly, the proper moral to extract shouldn't be that veritism *simpliciter* should be rejected, but rather that something has gone wrong here in terms of how we are conceiving of veritism.

The trivial truths objection works by investing veritism with the idea that insofar as one cares about the truth, then one must care about all truths equally from an epistemic point of view, whether trivial or substantial. But that entailment, while admittedly superficially appealing, is clearly not credible on closer inspection. For as we have just noted, someone who cares about the truth would clearly care about the substantial truth more. In particular, she would care for it more than the trivial truth precisely *because* she cares about the truth (i.e., and not because she is being sensitive to some further epistemic value that is independent of the truth). The entailment doesn't hold for the simple reason that clearly not all truths are equal. Some truths offer one a fundamental grip on the nature of reality, while others don't, and in this sense the first kind of truth is more important, from the perspective of caring about the truth, than the second kind of truth.

Unpacking this idea is notoriously difficult, however. For example, one might be tempted to suppose that one could make sense of this claim by appealing to the further truths that one can extract from the target proposition. As a general rule, this looks right. A weighty scientific truth, for example, would be expected to generate lots of further truths in a way that a trivial truth about, say, blades of grass will not. But I don't think this is the right way to think about what is going on here. This is because there isn't any inherent reason why a truth that is weighty in the relevant sense should be guaranteed to generate more truths than a trivial counterpart. Accordingly, while the weighty truths might well usually generate more truths than a trivial counterpart, there are bound to be cases peripheral no doubt, but cases nonetheless where this is not the case. And yet the point would remain that one should prefer the weighty truth, and prefer it precisely because one cares about the truth.

7. Once we understand that veritism should not be construed as committed to the claim that all truths are equally valuable, then this also explains where a sibling objection to the trivial truths problem goes awry. While the trivial truths problem makes its point by focusing on a particular pairing of weighty and trivial truths, the sibling objection to veritism considers instead a pairing of trivial and weighty inquiries. According to this argument, if one cares about the truth, then one should set aside serious inquiry, which may well be unsuccessful, and focus instead on forming as many trivial truths as one can. This latter strategy, after all, is surely more likely to lead to a greater number of true beliefs. Clearly, however, one should prefer the serious inquiry with modest



prospects of success over the trivial inquiry that guarantees lots of success. *Ergo*, it is not just the truth that we care about. Call this the *trivial inquiry problem*<sup>19</sup>.

As with the trivial truths problem, however, that this isn't really a problem for veritism *simpliciter* but rather for a particular rendition of veritism. This becomes clear once one reflects that preferring the serious inquiry over the trivial one is precisely what the person who cares about the truth would do. Now that we have rejected the idea that veritism is committed to treating all truths as equally valuable from an epistemic point of view we can see what has gone wrong here. The objection is presupposing that veritism must be committed to the idea that agents should be true belief maximisers, regardless of the content of those beliefs. But if all truths are not equally epistemically valuable, then clearly such a commitment would be unsound. Indeed, the very case offered by the objection illustrates why, as there can be trivial lines of inquiry that maximize true beliefs but do so in a way that no-one who cares about the truth as veritism demands would pursue them.

8. To be fair to the critics of veritism, I think it is entirely natural to construe it as demanding true belief maximization, not least because some commentators have explicitly understood the position in this fashion. In particular, in influential work articulating his reliabilist epistemology, Alvin Goldman [e.g., 1999, *passim*; 2002; 2015] has defended a position that he calls 'veritism' which is explicitly cast along true belief maximization lines (and which thus presupposes that all truths are equally valuable from an epistemic point of view). Accordingly, while Goldman might be able to resist some of the other objections that we have set out, he seems committed to biting the bullet on the trivial truths and trivial inquiry problems<sup>20</sup>.

Moreover, it is not surprising that Goldman should take this route. After all, opting for this reading enables one to give a precise, if ultimately implausible, specification of what veritism amounts to. In a nutshell, the truth goal amounts in practice to simply counting true beliefs and aiming to have as many as possible. (Though the simplicity here is highly deceptive. For example, it is notoriously hard to even individuate one's beliefs, and yet that would be required for one to even begin the process of counting them). In contrast, how is one to make the notion that valuing the truth means valuing those truths that give one a grip on the nature of things precise? In particular, how is one to make sense of that

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<sup>19</sup> For a particularly clear statement of this problem in the recent literature, see Elgin [2017, p. 10].

<sup>20</sup> I've argued that Goldman should resist the swamping problem in the manner outlined here in Pritchard [2016c], in contrast to his preferred solution, as set out in Goldman & Olsson [2009]. See Goldman [2016] for his (unconvinced) response.



idea without in the process appealing to a further epistemic value other than truth?

9. I agree that offering a precise rendering of this notion – certainly one as precise as a Goldman-style reading of veritism anyway – would be a chimeric endeavor (though I would claim that the ‘precision’ of Goldman-style veritism is also chimerical on closer inspection). Nonetheless, I think there is a way that the veritist can proceed on this front, and so I will conclude by giving a brief outline of what I have in mind. My proposal is that we should treat the notion of an intellectually virtuous inquirer as primary and work back from there. That is, rather than understanding the goals of the intellectually virtuous inquirer in terms of an account of the fundamental epistemic good (which would be to treat the notion of the fundamental epistemic good as primary), we should instead understand the fundamental epistemic good in terms of the goals of the intellectually virtuous inquirer (and thereby treat the notion of an intellectually virtuous inquirer as primary).

Interestingly, such an approach to these questions is already implicit in the objections to veritism that we have looked at. For example, recall that the trivial truths problem was largely motivated by appealing to claims about what a good inquirer would seek (i.e., that they would prefer the weighty truth over the trivial truth). Similarly the swamping problem implicitly appealed to the idea that a good inquirer would prefer knowledge (or justified true belief, etc.) over mere true belief, and the goal of inquiry problem appealed to the idea that a good inquirer would keep inquiring even after truth was attained. It is thus already in the background here and hence accepted even by critics of veritism that we have an independent grip on the notion of a good inquirer. Accordingly, it should not be problematic in this context to make such an appeal on behalf of veritism. Significantly, however, we have already seen that in fact this implicit appeal to a good inquirer, at least once made explicit, actually favours veritism. In particular, it offers us a way of thinking about veritism that distinguishes it from the implausible reading that has us counting up true beliefs.

I propose that we should understand the notion of a good inquirer that is in play here as being an intellectually virtuous inquirer. Indeed, I suggest that this equivalence is the natural one to adopt. What the latter adds to the former is to appeal to the notion of an intellectually virtuous character, which means the set of intellectually virtuous character traits that make up such a character. Moreover, it also entails the distinctive motivational states that are associated with these character traits<sup>21</sup>. This last point is crucial

<sup>21</sup> The conception of the intellectual virtues that I have in mind is broadly neo-Aristotelian, in line with Zagzebski’s [1996, *passim*] influential work in this regard. For more on the notion of an intellectual virtue more generally, see Battaly [2014]. See also Baehr [2011]. Note that in claiming that we should understand veritism in terms of the notion of an intellectually virtuous inquirer, one is not thereby endorsing the



because this motivational state is understood as being a love for the truth, in the sense of a desire for accuracy in one's beliefs and an aversion to inaccuracy. It is cast as a love for the truth in that it is non-instrumental in nature. For example, the intellectually virtuous subject might well recognize, and thus value, the practical utility of the truths that she acquires, but she also desires the truth for its own sake, independently of any instrumental value that it might possess. Such motivational states might not be shared by an inquirer who is merely good *qua* inquirer, but who lacks the intellectual virtues, as she might well be expert at seeking the truth for purely strategic reasons without having any genuine love for accuracy.

As we've noted above, non-instrumentally valuing the truth does not mean that the intellectually virtuous person non-instrumentally values all truths equally. Instead, their concern for the truth manifests itself in a desire for a rich grasp of the nature of things, and hence when given the choice they will target the deep and important truths that offer such a grasp over the trivial ones that don't. In particular, they will do so precisely *because* they care about the truth, as opposed to there being a further epistemic good in play that they are being sensitive to, either in addition to the truth or instead of it. That is, caring about the truth entails caring about truths that offer one a rich grasp of the nature of things as opposed to merely caring about all truths equally, regardless of what they offer in this regard.

The challenge for veritism is thus to flesh out the operative notion of a love for the truth that is inherent to the intellectually virtuous inquirer. This will explain why veritism isn't committed to valuing all truths equally from an epistemic point of view, much less to a crude true belief maximization. I maintain that putting this way of thinking about veritism together with the kinds of dialectical moves noted above such as distinguishing between epistemic value and the value of the epistemic, or resisting artificial restrictions being imposed on the scope of epistemic evaluation – is key to putting veritism back on to a firm footing<sup>22</sup>. My rallying cry (which I grant is somewhat uncool) is thus: back to orthodoxy!<sup>23</sup>

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wider epistemological story that the intellectual virtues belong to. For example, one is not obliged to claim that all knowledge is the product of manifestations of intellectual virtue, so construed.

<sup>22</sup> I've offered at least some preliminary remarks on how to understand the intellectually virtuous desire for the truth in Pritchard [2021c], though there is a lot more to be said, not least in terms of how this all relates to some other issues for veritism that I have not had the space to cover here. These include more general question about how to formulate the truth goal as discussed, for example, in Sosa [2000; 2003] and David [2001] – as well as, relatedly, whether the truth goal is in fact comprised of two distinct directives (i.e., towards truth and away from falsehood) that might in practice be in conflict with each other [e.g., Riggs, 2003]. There is also the challenge of relating veritism to an account of ignorance, *qua* the corresponding fundamental epistemic ill [Pritchard, 2021a].

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