

## P RITCHARD'S CASE FOR VERITISM

**John Greco** – PhD, McDevitt  
Chair in Philosophy.  
Georgetown University.  
37th and O Streets,  
N.W. Washington, D.C.  
20057, USA;  
e-mail: [john.greco@georgetown.edu](mailto:john.greco@georgetown.edu)

In his “In Defense of Veritism”, Duncan Pritchard reconsiders the case for epistemic value truth monism, or the thesis that truth is the sole fundamental epistemic good. I begin by clarifying Pritchard’s thesis, and then turn to an evaluation of Pritchard’s defense. By way of clarification, Pritchard understands “fundamental” value to be non-instrumental value. Accordingly, Pritchard’s veritism turns out to be the thesis that truth is the sole epistemic good with non-instrumental epistemic value, all other epistemic goods being valuable in virtue of their instrumental relation to truth. By way of evaluation, I argue that the case for veritism has not been made. The central point is this: Even if all epistemic value involves some or other relation to the truth, there are multiple relations to truth in addition to instrumental relations. Moreover, some of these seem capable of grounding further, fundamental (i.e., non-instrumental) epistemic goods. For example, knowledge has a constitutive relation to truth, and knowledge seems to be epistemically valuable for its own sake. Likewise, justified belief has an intentional relation to truth, and justified belief seems to be epistemically valuable for its own sake. Finally, I argue that, contra Pritchard, this central point seems confirmed rather than undermined by looking to the notion of an intellectually virtuous inquirer. Plausibly, a virtuous inquirer values such goods as justified belief and knowledge for their own sake *qua* epistemic goods, and not merely for their instrumental value for attaining truth.

**Keywords:** epistemic value, Pritchard, truth value monism, value of knowledge, veritism

## ВЕРИТИЗМ В ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИИ Д. ПРИТЧАРДА

**Джон Греко** – доктор  
философии, профессор.  
Джорджтаунский  
университет.  
37th and O Streets, N.W.  
Вашингтон, 20057 США;  
e-mail: [john.greco@georgetown.edu](mailto:john.greco@georgetown.edu)

В статье «В защиту веритизма» Данкан Притчард пересматривает аргументы в пользу веритического монизма, или тезиса о том, что истина является единственным фундаментальным эпистемическим благом. В этой реплике я начну с разъяснения тезиса Притчарда, а затем перейду к оценке его аргументации. Притчард понимает «фундаментальную» ценность как «неинструментальную». Соответственно, веритизм Притчарда оказывается тезисом о том, что истина является единственным эпистемическим благом с неинструментальной эпистемической ценностью, а все остальные эпистемические блага ценны в силу их инструментального отношения к истине. Я утверждаю, что аргументы в пользу веритизма не были приведены Д. Притчардом. Центральный аргумент статьи заключается в следующем: даже если допустить, что любая эпистемическая ценность включает в себя то или иное отношение к истине, то помимо инструментального отношения существует множество вариантов того, как соотносятся эпистемическая ценность и истина. Более того, некоторые из них, похоже, указывают на фундаментальный (т.е. неинструментальный) характер иных эпистемических благ. Например, истина является



составной частью определения знания, и знание представляется эпистемически ценным в силу его конститутивного отношения к истине. Таким образом, знание является эпистемически ценным, но не в силу инструментального отношения к истине. Аналогичным образом, обоснованное убеждение имеет интенциональное отношение к истине, и оно также представляется эпистемически ценным само по себе. То же самое, как утверждает Л. Загзевски, касается ценности мотивов, которые направляют интеллектуальный поиск. Их ценность не находится в инструментальном отношении к ценности его результатов. Поэтому обоснованное убеждение может иметь эпистемическую ценность уже в силу наличия отношения мотивационной направленности на достижение истины. Наконец, в отличие от Притчарда, я утверждаю, что обращение к понятию интеллектуально добродетельного исследователя скорее подрывает веритический монизм в пользу плюрализма эпистемических благ. В частности, вполне допустимо, что интеллектуально добродетельный исследователь любит не только истину ради нее самой, но и множество других эпистемических благ ради них самих. Иными словами, представимо, что для интеллектуально добродетельного исследователя такие блага будут обладать неинструментальной эпистемической ценностью. Примерами таких благ могут быть знание, понимание, мудрость и разумное убеждение.

**Ключевые слова:** эпистемическая ценность, Притчард, веритический монизм, ценность знания, веритизм

In previous work, Duncan Pritchard has made outstanding contributions to our understanding of epistemic value and related issues, such as the Value Problem and the Swamping Problem<sup>1</sup>. His latest contribution, in this volume, is a welcome addition to his important work in these areas. Here Pritchard reconsiders the case for “veritism”, otherwise known as “epistemic value truth monism”. As Pritchard explains, the latter label well captures the idea that veritism “is essentially a monistic thesis about epistemic value”. In sum, truth is the sole fundamental epistemic good. All other epistemic goods are so in virtue of their relation to truth.

I will begin this short commentary by clarifying veritism’s thesis in several ways. I will then turn to Pritchard’s case for veritism, and I will argue that the case has not been made. The essential point is this: By way of clarification, veritism is the thesis that truth is the sole epistemic good with non-instrumental epistemic value, all other epistemic goods being so in virtue of their instrumental relation to truth. But there are multiple relations to truth in addition to instrumental relations, and some of these seem capable of grounding further, fundamental epistemic goods. Finally, contra Pritchard, this point seems confirmed rather than undermined by

<sup>1</sup> See especially, his “Knowledge and Understanding,” in: Duncan Pritchard, Alan Millar and Adrian Haddock, *The Nature and Value of Knowledge: Three Investigations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).



looking to the notion of an intellectually virtuous inquirer. Plausibly, a virtuous inquirer values such goods as justified belief, knowledge and understanding for their own sake *qua* epistemic goods, and not merely for their instrumental value for attaining truth.

## What is Veritism?

According to veritism, truth is “the fundamental good from a purely epistemic point of view”. This fundamentality, Pritchard suggests, is both conceptual and axiological. Conceptually, “we understand what it is for something to be epistemic in terms of its relationship to the truth”. Axiologically, “truth is the fundamental good of epistemic appraisal”. Fundamentality in this axiological sense is to be understood in terms of non-instrumental value: A good has fundamental epistemic value just in case it has non-instrumental epistemic value; that is, just in case its epistemic value is not exhausted by its instrumental value for achieving other epistemic goods<sup>2</sup>.

Elsewhere, Pritchard further clarifies the notion of fundamental epistemic value by distinguishing it from the notion of final value [Pritchard, 2010, p. 12]. Essentially, final value is non-instrumental value *simpliciter*. That is, a good has final value just insofar as it is valuable for its own sake, as opposed to valuable merely as a means to something else. Fundamental value, by contrast, is non-instrumental value *relative to a domain*. Pritchard writes, “while a fundamental epistemic good can act as the terminus of the instrumental regress of epistemic value, this is entirely compatible with that good not being finally valuable *simpliciter*. After all, it could be that the value of the fundamental epistemic good in question is only instrumental value relative to some further non-epistemic goods (e.g., practical goods)” [ibid.]. Here we may invoke Sosa’s analogy to other domains of evaluation, such as the “coffee domain”, organized by the fundamental good of delicious coffee, or the “gun domain”, organized by the fundamental good of the good shot. As Sosa points out, something can have fundamental value *relative to a domain* even if it has no final value *per se*. In this regard, Sosa writes, “Paradoxically, one can be an adept critic within such a domain even while discerning in it no

<sup>2</sup> This is consistent with Pritchard (2010): “Call a fundamental epistemic good any epistemic good whose epistemic value is at least sometimes not simply instrumental value relative to a further *epistemic* good. That is, such an epistemic good is at least sometimes epistemically valuable entirely for its own sake. Call a non-fundamental epistemic good any good which is not a fundamental epistemic good – i.e. any good whose epistemic value is always instrumental value relative to a further epistemic good (and which is thus never epistemically valuable entirely for its own sake)” [Pritchard, 2010, pp. 11–12].



domain-transcendent value... Critical domains can be viewed as thus *insulated*, in ways suggested by our example” [Sosa, 2007, pp. 33–34].

In effect, the conceptual claim made by veritism regards how we are to understand or define “the epistemic”, including distinctively epistemic value. The axiological claim regards how epistemic value is structured. One way to deny this structural claim is to affirm epistemic value pluralism, or the thesis that there is a plurality of fundamental epistemic goods. Another way is to affirm a different version of epistemic value monism, now positing some alternative to truth as the fundamental epistemic value.

In the next section, I will consider and reject Pritchard’s case for veritism. Specifically, I will argue, there is good reason to reject veritism’s axiological thesis in favor of epistemic value pluralism. Here is another way to put my thesis: Even if we accept veritism’s conceptual thesis, defining the epistemic in terms of appropriate relation to truth, there remains good reason to accept a plurality of fundamental epistemic goods, i.e. goods that are *epistemically valuable for their own sake*. In short, this is because there are various relations to truth other than instrumental relations, and some of these seem capable of generating additional fundamental epistemic goods. For example, knowledge has a *constitutive* relation to truth, and knowledge seems to be epistemically valuable for its own sake. Likewise, justified belief has an *intentional* relation to truth, and justified belief seems to be epistemically valuable for its own sake. Finally, this general line of thought is confirmed rather than undermined by considering Pritchard’s notion of an intellectually virtuous inquirer. Intuitively, a virtuous inquirer values truth for its own sake, but also values such goods as knowledge and justified belief for their own sake.

## The Case for Veritism

Adopting veritism’s conceptual claim, let us define a good as *epistemic* just in case it is (appropriately) related to truth<sup>3</sup>. We have to include the qualifier “appropriate” because everything is in some way related to everything else, and so everything is in some way related to truth. But we don’t want to say that everything is thereby epistemic<sup>4</sup>. For present

<sup>3</sup> We adopt this thesis for the sake of argument. The argument of this section is that, even if we adopt veritism’s claim regarding how we should define or understand the epistemic, we need not adopt veritism’s axiological claim that truth is the sole fundamental epistemic good.

<sup>4</sup> Suppose that a valuable prize (\$100) is given out to the person who guesses correctly about the number of marbles in a jar. The \$100 prize is related to truth, since it is given to the person whose guess is true. But the \$100 is not thereby epistemically valuable.



purposes, we may leave open which relations to truth are appropriate in the relevant sense. I will suggest some plausible candidates below.

We might then say that a good has distinctively *epistemic value* just in case a) it is valuable, and b) it is appropriately related to truth. This seems weaker than veritism intends, however. Here is a better interpretation: A good has distinctively *epistemic value* just in case it is valuable *in virtue of* being appropriately related to truth.

Adopting this language, we may now state veritism's axiological claim this way: Truth is the sole fundamental epistemic good, i.e. the sole good that is epistemically valuable, but *not in virtue of* an instrumental relation to truth. To deny truth monism is to say that there are *other* goods that are epistemically valuable, but not in virtue of an instrumental relation to truth. And this is to say that there are other goods that are epistemically valuable, but in virtue of *non-instrumental* relations to truth.

What might these non-instrumental relations be? I have already suggested that one such relation is constitution. Most notably, knowledge is commonly understood as being (partially) constituted by truth. That plausibly makes the value of knowledge epistemic: knowledge is epistemically valuable *in virtue of* its constitutive relation to truth. If so, that same relation suffices to make knowledge *fundamentally* epistemically valuable: Knowledge is epistemically valuable, but *not in virtue of* an instrumental relation to truth.

Similar considerations apply to intentional relations. Thus, plausibly, justified belief is epistemically valuable at least partly in virtue of being aimed at truth. This position is open to externalists and internalists alike. For whether or not justification is understood in terms of reliability or some other external relation to truth, justified belief is plausibly characterized by an intentional relation to truth. In this regard, Linda Zagzebski writes, "If true belief is good, whether good as a final end or as a means to some other good, cognitive activity might derive value from being intentionally aimed at true belief. This is different from the consequentialist approach for the same reason that evaluating an act according to whether it aims at utility is different from evaluating an act according to whether it leads to utility" [Zagzebski, 2003, pp. 141–142]. If justified belief does "derive value from being intentionally aimed at true belief", then we have found another relation that grounds epistemic value. And because this relation is non-instrumental, it grounds fundamental epistemic value.

Finally, distinguishing between intentions and motives, Zagzebski argues that "motives can add to the value of the acts that they motivate" [ibid., p. 146] In particular, she argues, "the love of truth has a kind of value that is capable of conferring additional value on the acts it motivates..." [ibid., p. 147]. Here Zagzebski invokes an analogy with compassion.

Acts motivated by compassion are better than acts arising from just any reliable process or faculty for relieving suffering. For example, suppose



that suffering persons were helped just by being around other people and hearing them talk, that the sound of the human voice eased their pain. And suppose also that people were not aware of that connection. Talking when around a suffering person would have consequential value, but we would not evaluate it the same way we would evaluate an act with the same consequence that is motivated by compassion. An act motivated by compassion is better than an act that merely has the consequence that the suffering of another is relieved [Zagzebski, 2003, pp. 147–148].

Suppose that Zagzebski is right that the motivation of compassion adds value, and that she is right about the analogy to love of truth. If so, we have identified yet another relation to truth that can ground epistemic value. And because that relation is non-instrumental, it grounds fundamental epistemic value.

At this point, Pritchard might reply that the present line of argument confuses “epistemic value” and “the value of the epistemic”. That is, it confuses questions about distinctively epistemic value with questions about other kinds of value that epistemic goods such as knowledge and justified belief might have. Thus, Pritchard writes,

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). 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.

The distinction is a valid one. But present considerations survive close attention to the distinction. For the relevant point is that non-instrumental relations such as constitution, intentional aiming and proper motivation ground distinctively epistemic value. Accordingly, we can state things this way: Plausibly, knowledge is distinctively epistemically valuable *in virtue of* its constitutive relation to truth; Justified belief is distinctively epistemically valuable *in virtue of* its being aimed at truth; Justified belief is distinctively epistemically valuable *in virtue of* its being motivated by a love of truth. Moreover, since the epistemic value in question is in each case non-instrumental, each of these relations plausibly ground fundamental epistemic value.

These conclusions are further supported by consideration of Cartesian demon scenarios. Intuitively, the beliefs of victims of Descartes’ *malin génie* need not be devoid of epistemic value, and this is so even where the victims’ beliefs are both false and unreliably formed. This suggests that epistemic value is not exhausted by the fundamental value of truth and instrumental value for attaining truth. A plausible diagnosis is that such victims’ beliefs enjoy a different kind of fundamental epistemic value, grounded in truth-related intentions and/or motives.



Finally, it is worth noting that the analogy to other domains of value, such as the coffee domain, might mislead here. Within the coffee domain, it does seem odd to think that there are other fundamental goods in addition to good coffee. That being the case, it would seem that the non-instrumental value of coffee grinders, coffee machines, coffee cups, etc., would have to be understood as the “value of coffee-related things” rather than “distinctive coffee value”. For example, such coffee things might have monetary value or aesthetic value. But here is where the analogy to the epistemic domain breaks down, precisely because, at least plausibly, good coffee is not itself finally or intrinsically valuable. By contrast, the good of truth is more like a moral good, or perhaps is a kind of moral good. Here, intentional, motivational and constitutive relations do seem to generate additional final and intrinsic (and hence non-instrumental) goods. I take it that this is in keeping with Zagzebski’s points above about intentions and motivations adding non-instrumental moral value. Presumably, Zagzebski does not think that just any intention or motivation adds non-instrumental moral value. Rather, her point is that *morally good* intentions and motivations do. Insofar as truth is a moral good or like a moral good, truth-related intentions and motivations can do the same; that is, they can add fundamental epistemic value.

## Virtuous Inquirers

I end by considering Pritchard’s contention that veritism, and especially its axiological claim, is supported by the notion of an intellectually virtuous inquirer. Pritchard makes this contention in the context of a persistent objection to veritism – the “trivial truths problem”. In essence, the objection claims that a consequence of veritism is that all truths should be considered equal, giving rise to the absurd conclusion that there is nothing epistemically wrong with amassing only trivial truths, or with preferring trivial truths to serious ones. In response, Pritchard argues that veritism need not be committed to the idea that all truths are of equal value. To make the case, Pritchard suggests that we make the idea of a virtuous inquirer explanatorily prior to the notion of epistemic good.

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).



(...) 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.

Importantly, an intellectually virtuous inquirer desires the truth for its own sake. Moreover,

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... 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.

As Pritchard concedes, the challenge for veritism is to understand the notion of "love for the truth" in such a way as to *explain why* veritism is not committed to valuing all truths equally from an epistemic point of view. So far, I don't see a way to do that. But that is not the point that I want to press here. Rather, I end by suggesting that the notion of a virtuous inquirer plausibly serves to undermine veritism in favor of epistemic value pluralism. Specifically, it is intuitively plausible that the intellectually virtuous inquirer not only loves truth for its own sake, but loves a host of other epistemic goods for their own sake as well. That is, intuitively, the virtuous inquirer loves such goods for their own sake *from an epistemic point of view*. Examples of such goods would be knowledge, understanding, wisdom, and reasonable belief.

If this is right, then turning to the prior notion of an intellectually virtuous inquirer undermines veritism rather than supports it. This is so even if Pritchard is right that the notion can help solve veritism's trivial truths problem.

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