

WISDOM, NOT VERITISM

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In this response to Pritchard's "In Defence of Veritism", I defend the view that it is wisdom rather than truth that is fundamental in epistemology. Given that recent philosophical discussions of the nature of wisdom may be unfamiliar to some epistemologists, a brief overview of these discussions is provided and that which is relevant for the subsequent discussion in this piece is highlighted. I explain that scholars working on the topic tend to accept that wisdom comprises at least one familiar epistemic standing and that, unlike other epistemic goods, wisdom is thought to be tied to a narrowly specified content. I clarify the philosophical question to which veritism is the proposed answer and clarify the different senses of fundamental in play in that question. As Pritchard points out, fundamentality in epistemology concern both conceptual and axiological claims. Next, I explicate Pritchard's veritism, his defence of the claim that truth is fundamental in epistemology, explaining the case made for its superiority over the considered alternatives. One alternative I consider is that there is no fundamental good in epistemology, either conceptually or axiologically. I examine whether Pritchard can reject truth equality successfully while maintaining his monism with regard to what he takes to be epistemically fundamental. Indeed, while Pritchard's appeal to the intellectually virtuous inquirer here seems appropriate, his view that this ultimately provides support to his truth monism is less convincing for reasons that will be explored. I follow up this discussion by arguing that an appeal to the intellectually virtuous agent better lends support to wisdom as epistemically fundamental, rather than Pritchard's veritism. I make the point that Pritchard's claim that the intellectually virtuous agent loves the truth is plausible but I question whether it's also plausible that the love of the intellectually virtuous agent stops at the truth. Rather, I claim that such an agent ultimately loves wisdom. In fact, wisdom seems likely to be the highest good prized by the intellectually virtuous agent – the good that they strive to attain or become better with regard to across a lifetime. In support of this claim, I point out that wisdom is the most prized of all epistemic goods.

Keywords: veritism, Pritchard, wisdom, epistemology, intellectual virtue

Мудрость, а не веритизм

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В своем ответе на статью Притчарда «В защиту веритизма» я обосновываю точку зрения, что для эпистемологии мудрость является более фундаментальным понятием, чем истина. Поскольку современные философские дискуссии по поводу мудрости не так широко известны, в начале статьи я даю небольшой обзор существующих дискуссий и отмечаю отдельные моменты, которые необходимы для дальнейшего рассуждения. Я полагаю, что исследователи, работающие над этой проблемой, склонны сужать содержание данного понятия. Я также



проясняю философский вопрос, на который веритизм призван дать ответ, и определяю, в каком смысле можно говорить о «фундаментальных» ценностях. Как объясняет Притчард, «фундаментальность» может пониматься как в концептуальном, так и в аксиологическом измерении. Далее, я формулирую, в чем состоит суть веритизма Притчарда, и показываю, почему он придает высшую эпистемическую ценность истине по сравнению с иными категориями. В качестве альтернативы я рассматриваю тезис, что не существует единого эпистемического блага, как в концептуальном, так и в аксиологическом смысле. Я задаюсь вопросом о том, может ли Притчард отказаться от тезиса, что все истины одинаково ценны, сохраняя при этом свой монизм по отношению к тому, что он считает фундаментальной эпистемической ценностью. Я привожу контрпример, который показывает, что истина может быть значимой для агента, даже если она не открывает что-то важное об устройстве Вселенной. В самом деле, его апелляция к интеллектуально добродетельному исследователю кажется более уместной, но все же недостаточной для обоснования истинностного монизма по тем причинам, которые я разбираю в статье. В этой дискуссии я занимаю позицию, что эта апелляция к интеллектуально добродетельному агенту скорее приводит к фундаментальности мудрости, чем к веритизму по версии Притчарда. Я признаю тезис Притчарда о том, что интеллектуально добродетельный агент любит истину, но я сомневаюсь, что любовь интеллектуально добродетельного агента исчерпывается истиной. Я утверждаю, что интеллектуально добродетельный агент, в конечном счете, любит мудрость. Данный подход также решает проблему ценности тривиальных истин: истины, которые нужны для обретения мудрости, определяются как более значимые. Представляется, что мудрость есть высшее интеллектуальное благо, которое ценит интеллектуально добродетельный агент, благо, которое он стремится обрести и приумножить.

Ключевые слова: веритизм, Притчард, мудрость, эпистемология, интеллектуальная добродетель

1. Wisdom I. While there is acceptance in the literature that the wise person is doing well epistemically in some way, there is a question about the way in which she is doing well epistemically [Whitcomb, 2011; Sharon Ryan, 2012; Baehr, 2012; Grimm, 2015; Shane Ryan, 2016]. Nevertheless, wisdom is thought by scholars to be partly comprised of at least one familiar epistemic standing. Does the wise person, for example, have understanding [Shane Ryan, 2016], knowledge [Grimm, 2015], or justified beliefs [Sharon Ryan, 2012]? Wisdom, unlike other epistemic goods, is also agreed by scholars to have a narrowly specified content. The question that arises with regard to this content is what is the wise person doing well in epistemically. Here there have been two standard answers. At the beginning of the recent discussion on wisdom, the predominant view, supported by theorists such as Denis Whitcomb [2011], Sharon Ryan [2012], and Jason Baehr [2012], was that the domain of wisdom includes, roughly, valuable academic subjects and how to live well. More recently



Stephen Grimm [2015] and I [Shane Ryan, 2016] argue that doing well epistemically with regard to valuable academic subjects is not necessarily in the epistemic domain of wisdom. I [Shane Ryan, 2016] make the case that while it is plausible that a person could have been wise prior to the scientific revolution and, contra Whitcomb [2011], if we imagine two agents doing equally well epistemically with regard to how to live well but the second is doing better in, say, chemistry, there's no intuitive push to say that the second is wiser. Nevertheless, Grimm [2015] conceives of various domain specific forms of wisdom, although it is wise as a person that is central to the concept of wisdom. This leaves open the possibility for Grimm to defend the position that we can make sense of the idea that someone is wise as a scientist, just as we can make sense of the idea that someone can be wise as a politician, as a general, as a teacher, and so on, although these concepts of wise are derivative of wise as a person¹. Both Sharon Ryan [2012] and I [Shane Ryan, 2016] also defend a further, minor epistemic requirement. Although the requirements differ slightly, both hold that the wise person has a high degree of epistemic justification. In my account that gets cashed out as "in very few cases does the wise person not believe as it is epistemically appropriate" to do so; when it is epistemically appropriate to believe p , they believe p , and so on [ibid., p. 250]. The motivation for the requirement is that the wise person is a good epistemic agent and that this is reflected in the way they form their beliefs. They are not agents who are luckily doing well in one sphere, while being terrible epistemic agents in other spheres.

Finally Sharon Ryan [2012] and I [Shane Ryan, 2016] both defend the view that the wise person is committed to doing better epistemically and practically with regard to the domain of wisdom. For me, for example, this means being committed to doing better epistemically with regard to living well and actually living well. The thought here is that it is a feature of the wise person that they won't be an agent such that what is epistemically crucial in making them wise is compartmentalised from how they live. In fact, we expect wise people to make a better fist of living well than most people.

2. Veritism I. The reader might be wondering what all this has to do with what is fundamental in epistemology and Pritchard's defence of veritism. Before we get to that, let's examine the philosophical issue at hand and then turn to Pritchard's proposed solution. Attributions of fundamentality in epistemology concern both conceptual and axiological claims [Pritchard, 2021, p. 23]. Conceptual fundamentality in epistemology is what is basic to epistemology such that it facilitates a delineation of the epistemic from the non-epistemic.

¹ For quite a different approach to wisdom, with some of those differences highlighted, see Shane Ryan and Karyn Lai [2021].



Pritchard of course defends veritism and so defends the claim that truth is fundamental in epistemology. It's on this basis that he claims that whether something is epistemic depends on "its relationship to the truth" [Pritchard, 2021, p. 23]. On this view, for example, doxastic justification being truth conducive implies the presence of an epistemic property, given that there is a propensity for justified beliefs to be true beliefs. The axiological claim concerns the fundamental good of epistemic appraisal. Of course Pritchard's claim is that it is truth (and only truth) that is fundamental in the axiological sense, and therefore he holds that epistemic goodness is determined by truth and any other epistemological good will only be instrumentally epistemically good in so far as it gets us truth. Pritchard's veritism is the view that truth is both conceptually and axiologically fundamental in epistemology.

3. A Worry. One might be sceptical of this whole discussion. One might suppose that there is no fundamental good in epistemology, either conceptually or axiologically, and question why it would be otherwise. More specifically, why should we believe that it turns out in the end that familiar concepts that are used in epistemology, and that are considered epistemological concepts, are epistemological in virtue of their truth relatedness? Furthermore, why think that these familiar concepts are epistemologically good in virtue of their truth relatedness? This scepticism shouldn't be confused with pluralism, which Pritchard addresses. If one thinks that the answer to these questions is that there are a number of goods that play the conceptual and axiological role that Pritchard describes, not just truth, then one is a pluralist rather than a sceptic about fundamentalism in epistemology. To put the matter differently, the pluralist accepts that it makes sense to talk about fundamentality in epistemology, but disagrees with Pritchard's monistic answer. The sceptic, however, questions the view that there is a sort of inner logic within epistemology that produces a structure such that there is a fundamental in epistemology.

Perhaps there is no more than a sociological explanation for what gets called "epistemic" by epistemologists with different epistemological interests, working in different parts of the world. It's not that some of them may be wrong about their use of "epistemic", or indeed their understanding about ultimately whether something is an epistemic concept, because there is this single thing that has its own independent structure and a part of that structure that is fundamental, whether practitioners of the discipline realise it or not.

Pritchard, of course, is not proposing veritism in isolation, he is responding to an ongoing debate in which it is accepted that there is a fundamental good in epistemology. Nevertheless, epistemology is no longer the discipline it was in the post-Gettier era. Epistemology is much expanded. There are theorists who explicitly reject traditional epistemology, one can imagine some resisting a clarion call of "back to orthodoxy", but



at the same time regard their own work as epistemology². If Pritchard's veritism is correct, however, then there are obvious implications for what is properly epistemic and so what falls within the domain of epistemology, as well as the epistemic value of that which epistemologists are studying. Of course it may simply be the case that Pritchard is correct and that truth, or something else, is fundamental in epistemology. Nevertheless, as well as having a defence of the fundamental in epistemology, it would be good to know more about why we should even think there is a fundamental good (or goods) in epistemology.

4. Veritism II. Let's park the worry articulated above and engage with Pritchard's argument for truth as fundamental in epistemology. Pritchard motivates his veritism by criticism of alternatives on his two flanks. On one flank is the position that something other than truth is fundamental in epistemology, either in the form of pluralism or non-truth monism, on the other flank is what might be called simple truth monism. Addressing the challenge from the first flank, in particular the intuitive force of higher epistemic goods, such as knowledge, as rivals to truth as fundamental in epistemology, Pritchard sets out the distinction between the value of an epistemic good and epistemic value [Pritchard, 2021, p. 25]. Briefly, the idea is that epistemic goods, such as knowledge and understanding, maybe valuable in ways other than epistemically valuable. So, for example, although knowledge is an epistemic good, it has been defended as valuable as an achievement [Greco, 2010]. As such, other things being equal, it has the same sort of value as other achievements, many of which are not epistemic. What follows is goods like knowledge and understanding are still only epistemically valuable in so far as they get the truth but they may still be worth seeking ahead of mere true belief because of their extra-epistemic value³.

Pritchard also seeks to persuade the reader that his version of veritism avoids worries to which simple veritism is subject [Pritchard, 2021, p. 25–31]. One worry concerns trivial truths. It may seem that if one holds truth to be the fundamental good in epistemology, then one should hold that every truth is equally epistemically valuable; for example, important truths about the nature of the universe and trivial truths about the number of blades of grass in a garden are equally valuable. Trivial truths, however, surely are less epistemically valuable than important truths about the nature of the universe. Pritchard, responding to the intuitive challenge from such cases, argues that veritism needn't be committed to truth equally [ibid.]. He makes the case that purely on grounds of truth, that truths about the nature of the universe are more epistemically

² For a discussion of the rejection of traditional epistemology within virtue epistemology, see Baehr [2008] and his discussion of "Radical Autonomous VE" in particular.

³ This is assuming a conception of understanding such that understanding is factive or is at least instrumentally valuable for truth.



valuable than trivial truths. His explanation is that truth about the nature of the universe is more valuable in terms of truth in that it “offers one much more of a grip on the nature of things that it’s trivial counterpart”⁴.

Suppose someone acquired the truth that they were adopted after decades of thinking otherwise. The truth that they were adopted doesn’t seem the sort of truth that gives one a particularly strong grasp on the nature of reality. Still, it seems more important epistemically than a mere trivial truth. Having some very abstract scientific true belief about the nature of the universe, however, doesn’t seem obviously more important epistemically than the true belief that one was adopted. We’re left with uncertainty as to how to differentiate the epistemic value of different truths.

Pritchard motivates his veritism that denies truth equality by an appeal to the intellectually virtuous inquirer. While such a move promises to aid understanding of epistemological fundamentalism by seeking to understand the epistemologically exemplary agent, stating that such an agent has a love of truth seems far from the end of the story⁵. We’re told that their concern for “the truth manifests itself in a desire for a rich grasp of the nature of things” [Pritchard, 2021, p. 34]. Here though we might wonder why gaining epistemic goods that provide “a rich grasp of the nature of things” is not the fundamental epistemic good. Pritchard [ibid.] concedes that there is a need “to flesh out the operative notion of a love for the truth that is inherent to the intellectually virtuous inquirer”.

5. Wisdom II. In what follows I flag how consideration of the intellectually virtuous agent better supports wisdom than truth as the fundamental good and how wisdom as that good accounts for truth inequality. Indeed, while it is plausible that the intellectually virtuous agent loves the truth, it seems implausible that their love stops there. As an intellectually virtuous agent they surely love wisdom too. In fact, wisdom seems likely to be the highest good prized by the intellectually virtuous agent – the good that they strive to attain or become better with regard to across a lifetime⁶.

⁴ While Pritchard focuses on the above contrast, it’s unclear whether he thinks his veritism commits him to the claim that all truths have some epistemic value and whether it’s only the substantial truths of the sort described can have more value than trivial truths.

⁵ In his defence here of veritism, Pritchard doesn’t discuss the claim that falsity has negative value. If falsity, or false belief, is treated as neutral, rather than negatively valuable, then the result is that someone with many and only true beliefs is doing less well epistemically than someone who has one additional true belief and many false beliefs. Even if Pritchard ultimately will defend a sort of truth holism according to which the overall truth rather than individual truths that matters, having an incomplete picture rather than a somewhat false picture of reality will seem preferable.

⁶ While it’s also plausible that the intellectually virtuous agent would value knowledge and understanding, the case that the intellectually virtuous agent would value wisdom even more is supported by pre-theoretical intuitions as to the most valuable epistemic good.



Of course, depending on the particular account of wisdom in play, specifically with regard to the domain of wisdom, certain truths will be directly or instrumentally valuable for wisdom. This gives us a basis for denying truth equality. Truths that are directly or instrumentally valuable for wisdom are more epistemically valuable than trivial truths, assuming that wisdom is the fundamental epistemic good. Pritchard's intuition that "weighty" or "significant" truth is more valuable epistemically than the trivial truth is vindicated. Of course, on this approach, any ordering of truths with respect to epistemic value will depend on how those truths stand in relation to the domain of wisdom.

None of this implies that truths that are neither directly nor instrumentally valuable are unvaluable. Accounts of wisdom, as we have seen, may have requirements regarding how beliefs are held in general. An account may hold, for example, that in very few cases does the wise person not believe as it is appropriate for them to believe. This would provide one with a basis for assessing the value of beliefs unrelated to the domain of wisdom.

Obviously the view that wisdom is the fundamental good in epistemology is an unusual position to defend. In fact, despite wisdom being strongly intuitively the most prized epistemic good, wisdom has been relatively neglected by epistemologists. Nevertheless, considering wisdom as the fundamental good in epistemology promises to send epistemology in an important and interesting new direction. Such an epistemology will build on work in virtue epistemology and value theory, not only to answer questions about our most prized epistemic good but also to give us a basis for distinguishing the epistemic worth of various endeavours and individual epistemic standings. It's not that the traditional projects of epistemology should be discarded, it's rather that the biggest, most profound epistemological topic, wisdom, should no longer be ignored in the pursuit of those projects. This is all the more so if it's accepted that wisdom is fundamental in epistemology.

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