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Epistemological Axiology: What Is The Value Of Knowledge?

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Eric Walter Thompson entitled "Epistemological Axiology: What Is The Value Of Knowledge?." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Philosophy.

EJ Coffman, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

John Hardwig, Richard Aquila

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

To the Graduate Council:

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EPISTEMOLOGICAL AXIOLOGY: WHAT IS
THE VALUE OF KNOWLEDGE?

A Thesis Presented for the
Master of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Eric W. Thompson

December 2010

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DEDICATION

To my wife

Malea Adamson Thompson

And my mother

Joyce Thompson

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank E.J. Coffman for all his patience and assistance with this thesis and throughout my career as a graduate student. His insights, encouragement, and advice have contributed greatly to this work. Undoubtedly he has had a great impact on my development as a student and a philosopher. Also, I would like to thank Dr. Hardwig and Dr. Aquila for serving on my committee and for their contributions to my overall education.

ABSTRACT

It is my overall aim in this work to defend the view that knowledge is no more valuable than true belief or empirically adequate belief, and thus is not the primary epistemic good. I engage predominately with Jonathan Kvanvig's work for an assessment of the value of knowledge. In turn, I assess the arguments for the value of knowledge for their ability to support the view that knowledge is uniquely valuable. First I will consider an argument which relies on a purported connection between knowledge and proper action. It will then be suggested that arguments tying knowledge to our proper action are not adequate to justify this standard view of the value of knowledge. Furthermore, I will assess an argument that appeals to the value of truth to explain the superior value of knowledge. From this it will be concluded that truth is also less valuable than typically thought, consequently resulting in an overvaluation of knowledge. Lastly, I will investigate the possibility that knowledge has its value because of its stability and resistance to irrationality. Again, I will argue that this is insufficient justification of the standard view about the value of knowledge by offering counterexamples to both the stability of knowledge and knowledge's resistance to irrationality. After this I will discuss the implications of my analysis on the value of knowledge.

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INTRODUCTION

It is my overall aim in this work to defend the view that knowledge is not of greater value than other epistemic factors. That is, it is a mistake to endorse what I will call the standard view about the value of knowledge (or “Standard View” for short). The Standard View is the view that knowledge is more valuable than other epistemic factors; particularly true belief and empirically adequate belief.

To clarify, when I say “of greater value” I intend to convey that if a subject S possessed various epistemic goods $\alpha_1, \alpha_2, \dots, \alpha_{n+1}$ and we were able to directly compare $\alpha_1, \alpha_2, \dots, \alpha_{n+1}$ we would discover that one of these (α_x) results in a greater prudential benefit than the others, where prudential benefit denotes furthering the aims, goals, well-being, or similar aspects of human existence. On the Standard View knowledge has been α_x . It is this view that I wish to show to be inadequately supported. For this, I focus on prudential value instead of other possible values (moral, epistemic, et cetera) because of the straightforward “cash value” of prudential value. If something has great prudential value then the benefits of that value can be observed in the way it contributes to human flourishing. Also, appealing to epistemic value would risk begging the question in favor of knowledge because epistemic value presupposes a certain value of truth, which will later come under scrutiny. Furthermore, this results in an easily applicable test for us to compare epistemic goods. Were I to utilize some other value (such as moral value) then additional debates and complexities would likely crop up and hinder the intended focus of this work. For these reasons prudential value will be employed in the following.

True belief is simple enough. A subject S must have a belief, and that belief must be true for S to have a true belief. Empirically adequate belief is a bit more complicated, but still fairly painless. Quoting Kvanvig, “an empirically adequate theory is one that will never be refuted by the course of experience, and one makes sense of the course of experience by developing a classification system for experiences together with a theory of explanation of how the various categories are explanatorily related” (Kvanvig J. , p. 294). So from this I’ll take an empirically adequate belief to be a belief with some epistemic support that will never be refuted by the course of experience, and that may or may not fit into an empirically adequate theory. By saying that an empirically adequate belief has some epistemic support I intend to convey that there is no undermining evidence, and there is some positive epistemic support in favor of holding that belief. Since I am concerned with the comparative value of knowledge, true belief and empirically adequate belief will serve as the points of comparison.

With this I can state my thesis as:

Knowledge is not of greater value than either true belief or empirically adequate belief, where value designates prudential value to a subject, true belief is simply a belief that is true, and empirically adequate belief is an epistemically supported belief that will not be refuted by experience.

By showing that knowledge is not of greater value than true belief or empirically adequate belief I intend to undermine a common (and often unsupported) assumption in epistemology that the Standard View is correct. Typically epistemology is narrowly defined as the study of knowledge. This includes developing theories about the nature and value of knowledge. We want to identify what exactly knowledge is (the nature of knowledge) and why we should care about gaining and studying knowledge (the value of knowledge). Much work has been done on the problem of the nature of knowledge. Less has been said about the value of knowledge. However, it is the focus of my thesis to critically evaluate the question of the value of knowledge and the corresponding Standard View that has stood in place of a complete theory of the value of knowledge. If successful, my arguments will give us warrant to reassess the privileged position epistemology has held in the philosophical tradition. This will be accomplished by arguing that the focal point of the entire discipline of epistemology is less valuable than we thought. Such a conclusion should inspire us to either abandon the epistemological enterprise, or redefine the central aims of epistemology. Pursuit of the latter option will require accepting that it is not the case that the principle task of epistemology is analyzing and theorizing about knowledge. Instead, the focus of epistemological study would have to include other epistemic values and goals that have up to now been neglected.

This project is similar to the assessment of the comparative value of knowledge by Jonathan Kvanvig in his (1998) and (2003). Kvanvig investigates the possibility that the value of knowledge is constructed from the value of its parts, and ultimately argues that the value of knowledge does not exceed that of a certain subset of its parts. Furthermore, his conclusions show that we are presently without a response to the question of why knowledge is normally considered to be of greater value than justified true belief. This leads Kvanvig to express the need for the subject matter of epistemology to be broadened to include cognitive successes that have previously been excluded; cognitive successes such as understanding, responsible inquiry, empirically adequate theories, wisdom, justified beliefs, et cetera. Similarly, I intend to bolster his project by considering an argument for the superior value of knowledge (to that of true belief and empirically adequate belief) that he doesn't consider. This

argument considers a proposed connection between knowledge and proper action which explains the purported superior value of knowledge. I will provide counterexamples to this view and also argue that such a connection would terminate in a skeptical conclusion that its proponents would find unacceptable. Additionally, I will be going further than Kvanvig by arguing that knowledge is no more valuable than true belief or empirically adequate belief (regardless of whether true *or false*), thereby giving us a stronger result than that offered by Kvanvig.

In the first chapter I will lay out three arguments for the conclusion that knowledge is of greater value than true belief or empirically adequate belief. The essence for each argument is (a) knowledge is essential for proper action (which is of great prudential value), (b) knowledge contains true belief, which makes knowledge better when it comes to acting successfully, and (c) that knowledge is better because it is more stable than mere true belief. The second chapter will criticize (a) by first considering an objection to the connection between knowledge and our practical interests, and then will argue that something epistemically weaker than knowledge can suffice for proper action. The third chapter will criticize (b) by arguing that true belief is not necessarily valuable for successful action. Chapter four will assess the plausibility of the view that knowledge is more valuable than true belief because it is more stable. In the fifth chapter the arguments will be reviewed and conclusions will be drawn.

I. THREE ARGUMENTS

Knowledge is commonly held to be a valuable thing. It is important to know what time your exam will be, which foods are safe to eat, and how to obey traffic signals. Each of these represents something that it is good to have true beliefs about. Without true beliefs in these cases you would likely experience unfortunate consequences for your error. From this we can see that oftentimes true belief will be at least instrumentally valuable. Since knowledge provides us with true beliefs that are more stable (and hence more instrumentally valuable) than just true belief alone, it seems reasonable to value knowledge. Furthermore, there appears to be at least some knowledge that is intrinsically valuable. Having knowledge that satisfies curiosity or makes one wise are both candidates for intrinsically valuable knowledge. This is because being wise or satisfying curiosity would likely prove worthwhile regardless of whether such knowledge would help us achieve our goals. So there do appear to be cases of knowledge being instrumentally valuable as well as cases of intrinsic value. This reinforces our everyday view of knowledge that there is something about knowledge that makes it more valuable than mere true belief or empirically adequate belief (i.e. the Standard View). But what is the significance of this? Regarding the value of knowledge, Duncan Pritchard says that “it is only if the primary focus of epistemological theorizing — i.e., knowledge — is valuable that the epistemological enterprise is itself a worthwhile undertaking” (Pritchard, 2006, p. 12). In other words, all the energy spent developing, criticizing, and refining our theories of knowledge is only justified if the subject of all that study is more important to us than other kinds of cognitive success we might study. Still, given the examples above, we do seem justified in maintaining the belief that knowledge is of supreme value. This is certainly good news for epistemologists!

Unfortunately, it is not so clear-cut that the value of knowledge is as advertised. There are instances where knowledge is not beneficial or can even be outright harmful. Imagine witnessing some criminal activity (such as a mob hit) where you and the perpetrator recognize each other. In this case your knowledge of who committed the crime might place your life in danger. Clearly this knowledge is not instrumentally valuable in any normal sense of the term. This contradicts the view that knowledge is always good on balance. There are cases where, all things considered, it is better to not have knowledge. Furthermore, if one were to sit down and memorize all the names and numbers in a telephone book that would certainly be one way to increase one’s stock of knowledge. Still, there does not seem to be any intrinsic value in this knowledge. There is nothing innately good about knowing many phone numbers just

for the sake of knowing them. This contradicts the view that knowledge is *prima facie* good. Even if other things are equal, it is not a good thing to have encyclopedic phonebook knowledge. So from these two cases we can see that the supreme value of knowledge is far from obvious. Because of this we should engage in a closer examination of our reasons for holding the Standard View.

In his (2003) Jonathan Kvanvig investigates the presupposition that knowledge is the primary epistemic good. He observes that there is a lacuna in the history of epistemological inquiry where there should be a defense of the value of knowledge. This is troubling because any account we develop of the nature of knowledge needs to be compatible with the value of knowledge. Likewise, any position on the value of knowledge should be compatible with an adequate view of the nature of knowledge. Without both of these aspects we would not be able to form a coherent understanding of knowledge. This provides motivation for this project.

To begin, a primary concern for us should be the question of whether or not knowledge has a value that is greater than true belief. If the Standard View is inaccurate then much of the motivation for developing a complete theory of knowledge is undermined. We haven't sought theories of empirically adequate belief or true belief in the same way that we have sought theories of knowledge. This suggests that knowledge is thought to be a greater epistemic good than these other epistemic states. Initially it seems obvious that knowledge provides something more substantial, and more valuable, than true belief (or empirically adequate belief). We are more impressed with the individual who knows answers that others do not than with a person who luckily guesses correct answers. On the other hand, when we do get lucky with picking out a true belief we are not usually concerned that it was gotten by luck. We are just glad that it was right and that we ended up with the result at which we were aiming. So is it knowledge that we really find to be of greater value, or is "getting it right" more valuable when we engage with the world? And if it is knowledge that we value, then what is it about knowledge that gives it an edge over true belief? These are questions that need answering. For this, let's consider some arguments for the Standard View and the related matter of the value of truth.

(A) VALUE FROM PROPER ACTION

The first argument supporting the Standard View says that knowledge is more effective than true belief or empirically adequate belief for producing proper action. The basic idea is that we need to base our decisions on our knowledge in order to be able to select the correct course of action. This argument has taken several different forms.

Fantl and McGrath defend a pragmatic condition on knowledge which says that 'S knows that p only if S is rational to act as if p (Fantl & McGrath, 2002). Likewise, Hawthorne and Stanley have proposed that we 'treat the proposition that p as a reason for acting only if you know that p' (Hawthorne & Stanley, Knowledge and Action, 2008). While endorsing different claims, we can observe in both quotes a close connection between proper action and knowledge. Intuitively we explain why we act certain ways by appealing to what we know (or do not know) at the time of deciding. I can explain that it was rational to change the oil in my Jeep since I knew that it was due for an oil change. If asked why I didn't invest in a new company before the value of their stock skyrocketed I could say that I wasn't aware that the stock would be worth so much. These are some ways that knowledge can be tied to our practical interests.

By tying knowledge to practical interests we see that the practical importance of a statement (i.e. its value to us), becomes essential to determining whether or not we know that statement. If it is practically of great importance that we know something to be the case then it would be correct to have higher demands on our justification of our knowledge. On such a view the nature of knowledge would be intimately connected to the value of knowledge. Furthermore, if correct, this view seems to make explicit the value of knowledge for selecting actions. By valuing the achievement of certain goals we also value the means of attaining those goals. In most cases knowledge is one of the primary means of achieving our goals, which explains why we would value knowledge so highly.

Presented more formally:

1. Proper action is of great prudential value (for achieving goals, avoiding harms, etc). (obvious)
2. If proper action is of great prudential value, then the means of attaining proper action are of great prudential value. (premise)
3. The means of attaining proper action are of great prudential value. (1, 2)
4. Knowledge is an epistemic good which is an essential means of achieving proper action. (premise)
5. Knowledge is an epistemic good that is of unique prudential value. (3, 4)
6. Knowledge is of greater value than true belief and empirically adequate belief. (5)

This supports the Standard View because the conclusion that knowledge is valuable derives from its ability to achieve our goals. Since (4) represents a common conception that knowledge is an especially reliable means of attaining the results we desire, then

it seems reasonable to think that knowledge will be more valuable than true belief or empirically adequate belief. This is the primary insight of (a)'s support for the Standard View.

(B) VALUE FROM TRUE BELIEF

The second argument for the Standard View appeals to the value of true belief to explain why knowledge is thought to be of greater value than empirically adequate false belief. Since it is universally held that true belief is a component of knowledge, it is likely that true belief contributes much of the value that knowledge enjoys. If you consider why the things you know could be intrinsically valuable you will realize that it is because your knowledge provides you with true beliefs about the world. It is your beliefs that you act upon, and when those beliefs are true you are in a better position to succeed in your actions. In this picture knowledge is a vessel by which you gain true beliefs. What really contains the most value are these true beliefs, meaning that the value of knowledge derives from the value of our true beliefs. What gives knowledge greater value than empirically adequate belief is that knowledge provides us true belief. This is particularly tenable given that truth is often held to be sacrosanct. With such value attributed to truth there is good reason to suppose that the value of knowledge is derivative from its immutable union with truth.

So the argumentation for (b) is essentially:

1. True belief is of great prudential value. (premise)
2. The value of the whole of knowledge is a sum of its parts. (premise)
3. True belief is a component of knowledge. (obvious)
4. True belief makes a significant contribution to the value of knowledge. (1, 3)
5. True belief, plus whatever value the additional components add, makes knowledge of unique prudential value. (2, 4)
6. Knowledge is of greater value than empirically adequate belief. (5)

This is different from (a) since the primary value comes from true belief instead of knowledge. Above I did not distinguish the values of the constituent parts of knowledge. This leaves open the possibility that there is something about knowledge other than, or in addition to, true belief that gives it its primary value. Here the focus is explicitly on true belief as the origin of the value that knowledge possesses. While the other factors of knowledge (whatever they turn out to be) may stabilize true belief, they don't make as significant of a contribution to the overall value of knowledge as true belief does. This is compatible with our tendency to appreciate "getting it right"

or being satisfied that “everything worked out”. It seems that ordinary people are okay with having beliefs that are true even if they may not satisfy criteria for knowledge. Given this, (b) provides one possible explanation of why we value knowledge; even though it may not be a popular view with those who have exerted much energy arguing that knowledge is of much greater value than mere true belief.

(C) VALUE FROM X

The third argument supporting the Standard View results from the fact that an essential component of knowledge is true belief. Since true belief is valuable for successful action, and knowledge gives us true belief, then knowledge is valuable for bringing about successful action. But knowledge is not only valuable due to its having true belief. It is that the ability of knowledge to provide us with true beliefs *along with its possession of additional factors* that makes it more valuable than true belief alone. This is similar to what Plato describes in the Meno (96d–100b) when he describes knowledge as the tethering of true belief. It seems obvious that true belief is valuable for attaining our daily objectives. Having a true belief about which road will get you to a restaurant is critical to actually arriving at the restaurant. Likewise, a true belief about when your flight is departing is important for arriving at the correct time to catch your flight. Of course it is possible to just get lucky sometimes and take the right road or show up at the right time, but this is much less likely to happen. When we know which road to take or when the flight is leaving we are much less likely to be wrong about these things. So it is the fact that knowledge contains true belief, and contains it in such a way that more often results in achieving our objectives, that makes knowledge valuable. An influential defender of this view is Timothy Williamson. He says:

Present knowledge is less vulnerable than mere present true belief to *rational* undermining by future evidence. ...If your cognitive faculties are in good order, the probability of your believing p tomorrow is greater conditional on your knowing p today than on your merely believing p truly today. ...Consequently, the probability of your believing p tomorrow is greater conditional on your knowing p today than on your believing p truly today. (Williamson, 2000, p. 79)

So what Williamson finds valuable about knowledge is its propensity for persisting across time. If we have a true belief today, then it is valuable to also have that true belief tomorrow. This stability is what knowledge gives us, thereby creating a greater value for knowledge than just true belief.

The argumentation for (c) is essentially:

1. True belief is of great instrumental value. (Premise)
2. The means of gaining and maintaining true beliefs are of great instrumental value.
3. True belief is a component of knowledge.
4. Other aspects of knowledge (i.e. stability, resistance to irrationality, etc.) are a means of gaining and maintaining true beliefs, and thus increase the overall value of knowledge as much, or more than, true belief.
5. The value of knowledge is greater than that of mere true belief or empirically adequate belief.

INTRINSIC VALUE?

Now we have considered the three arguments that will dominate the rest of this work. Yet to this point little has been said about knowledge having intrinsic value. The three arguments that I will focus on are all related to the instrumental value of knowledge. This mainly results from the thesis that is being defended. By focusing on prudential value, that sidesteps talk about intrinsic value. However, one might object that this ignores what is truly valuable about knowledge, namely knowledge for its own sake. This is a fair objection. However, at this point I will say something about why I have chosen not give the possibility of intrinsic value any more than a cursory treatment.

First, it is difficult to find compelling arguments for knowledge being intrinsically valuable. Beyond statements describing what a good feeling it is to have knowledge there is little in the way of any actual *argument* to engage. Furthermore, these statements are largely made by intellectuals who build careers gathering and disseminating knowledge of various sorts. Since the strength of these sentiments is not shared by everyone it seems reasonable to suppose that these intellectuals are biased to a significant degree.

The second difficulty with claiming knowledge to be intrinsically valuable is that such a supposition is inconsistent with how we normally go about explaining the value of knowledge. If an ordinary person were asked why knowledge is desirable it would be a somewhat odd reply if that person said that we just seek knowledge exclusively for the sake of knowing. Even if someone were to make such a claim, upon further reflection it seems plausible to think that we stockpile knowledge because of the possibility that it will become useful later on. So knowledge seems to be different from other intrinsically valuable goods, such as happiness. We think it strange to even be asked

why we value happiness. That is just something that we strive toward. Knowledge is typically not like this. When asked why we value knowledge there are many answers that could legitimately be given, most of which deal with instrumental reasons. Still, earlier I suggested that wisdom or curiosity might be reason to think knowledge to be intrinsically valuable. However, it is not obvious that wisdom is the same thing as knowledge. It could be that one acts wisely (or has wisdom) without having knowledge. Additionally, even in cases where we just want to satisfy our curiosity there is little reason to think that knowledge is any more valuable than just true belief or empirically adequate beliefs (whether true or false). And a difference between knowledge and true belief (or empirically adequate false belief) is precisely what we need to demonstrate in order to satisfactorily explain why we value knowledge so highly.

With this I feel safe in placing the burden of proof on those who think knowledge is intrinsically valuable to show that knowledge actually has intrinsic value. Furthermore, they would need to show what makes knowledge more valuable than mere true belief or empirically adequate false belief. If a compelling argument could be presented then we should be willing to step back and reconsider the appropriateness of my approach here. Lacking any such argument the following should not be troubled by claims to the intrinsic value of knowledge. Now let us engage in a critical assessment of the first argument supporting the Standard View.

II. (A)

It is now time to critically assess how well (a) supports the Standard View. In essence, (a) says that knowledge is of greater value than true belief or empirically adequate belief because knowledge is essential for proper action. The argument can be represented as follows:

1. Proper action is of great prudential value (for achieving goals, avoiding harms, etc). (obvious)
2. If proper action is of great prudential value, then the means of attaining proper action are of great prudential value. (premise)
3. The means of attaining proper action are of great prudential value. (1, 2)
4. Knowledge is an epistemic good which is an essential means of achieving proper action. (premise)
5. Knowledge is an epistemic good that is of unique prudential value. (3, 4)
6. Knowledge is of greater value than true belief and empirically adequate belief. (5)

In response to this, I will offer two arguments against the position that the Standard View is supported by knowledge's ability to produce proper action. The first objection to (a) is intended to show that knowledge is not always required for proper action. Counterexamples will be offered which will undermine the view that knowledge has any unique instrumental value for producing proper action. These will show that other, weaker, epistemic goods may be equally useful for producing proper action. The second objection to (a) will be an objection directed against Pragmatic Encroachment. Pragmatic Encroachment ties our practical interests to knowledge attributions, so this view opens up the doorway for knowledge to be directly influenced by its value to us. But finding the value of knowledge in this way also results in a highly implausible skeptical position that even its advocates would surely not want to embrace. Once presented with these objections, it seems the Standard View would have to come from some other source than knowledge's ability to produce proper action.

OBJECTION 1: PROPER ACTION AND EVIDENTIALLY SUPPORTED BELIEF

EVIDENCE, BELIEF, AND KNOWLEDGE

It seems to be a common view that knowledge is valuable for guiding action. However, determining the specific conditions under which a proposition constitutes a piece of

knowledge has proven difficult for epistemologists. Despite this difficulty, one facet of knowledge that seems plausible on most accounts is that the term “knowledge” represents the strength of our epistemic position relative to a proposition. Granted this, we can then say that “know” simply reflects our strength of epistemic position. This allows us to see that if knowledge is valuable for guiding action, and “know” is a reflection of our epistemic position, then our epistemic position is valuable for guiding action. But it is possible for our epistemic position to be comprised of various parts of knowledge (true belief, reliable belief formation, causal connections, etc), and yet fail to be knowledge. This point is made particularly evident in Gettier cases. A Gettier case begins with a scenario where the subject would normally have knowledge, but then the nature of the case makes the subject’s belief lucky in some relevant manner that prevents that subject from having knowledge. Take Goldman’s Fake Barns Case:

Suppose there is a county in the Midwest with the following peculiar feature. The landscape next to the road leading through that county is peppered with barn-façades: structures that from the road look exactly like barns. Observation from any other viewpoint would immediately reveal these structures to be fakes. Now, unaware of the unusual nature of this county, Henry is traveling in Barn Façade County with his son. As they pass various objects Henry identifies them for his son’s edification. “That’s a cow,” “That’s a tractor,” and “That’s a barn,” Henry says to his son. Henry has no doubt about the identities of the objects he names; including that the last object was a barn. As it turns out, Henry happened to be looking at the only actual barn (non barn-façade) in the entire county. Still, if Henry would have been looking at a fake barn he would have mistaken it for a real barn. Since the truth of Henry’s belief is the result of luck, it is exceedingly plausible to judge that Henry’s belief is not an instance of knowledge.

So with this case what we see is that Henry’s epistemic position appears to be comprised of various parts of knowledge (particularly true belief), but Henry does not have knowledge. Going even further, his epistemic position appears to justify his acting as if there is a barn in front of him, even though he lacks knowledge in this case. To see this, imagine reprimanding Henry for asserting “That’s a barn” to his son. It would certainly be odd to chastise Henry for acting as if there was a barn in this way. So, while knowledge can justify action, it also seems likely that a (less-than knowledge) epistemic position can also justify action.

What I wish to suggest here is that knowledge is actually superfluous to what really interests us in epistemology. Having just given some reason to think that our epistemic position is valuable for guiding action, there is now the potential for

epistemic factors to justify action without us actually having knowledge. In the following section this possibility will be made explicit.

EVIDENCE, BELIEF, AND PROPER ACTION

I begin with the observation that it seems plausible that all our actions are influenced to varying degrees by our practical interests. It's only appropriate that our evidential standards for rational action would reflect the importance of our practical interests. Practical interests set our goals, and evidence allows us to achieve these goals. Depending on how important the goal is to us, then the evidential demands can increase or decrease accordingly. Normally, if it's really important that a belief is true, more evidence will be required to justify acting on that belief. On the other hand, some scenarios will demand a decrease in evidence for action because of the subject's need to act based on the practical interests involved. For example, if I need to deposit a check in order to pay my bills on time, it will be very important for me to know when the bank will be open. The influence of my practical interests in such a case will require me to satisfy greater evidential requirements in order to have knowledge. So, if it is important that I deposit my paycheck then I need more evidence in order to act on the belief that the bank will be open. This increase in evidential demands tends to represent the typical trend with practical interests. We are inclined to want more than normal evidence to support our actions. But are there cases where high stakes can actually *lower* the standards? The following case answers this question affirmatively:

Twin Trouble

Mary Kate and Ashley are identical twins who share a very tight bond. In fact, they are so close that sometimes one will have an intuition about what the other is up to, and these intuitions tend to be correct (but are not infallible). Now let us suppose that Mary Kate has gotten into some trouble and is at risk of serious physical injury. At this time Ashley is close by and intuits that Mary Kate is in a grave predicament. Ashley has no reason besides this intuition to think Mary Kate is in trouble, yet she still feels strongly compelled to check on her sister.

Here we can see that some situations can demand lower evidential standards in order to satisfy some important practical interest. Because the well-being of Mary Kate means a lot to Ashley, no better evidence than a fallible intuition is necessary to warrant action. The practical interests in cases like this actually act to lower the evidential requirement for action. This allows for us to act on evidence that would normally be inadequate for proper action. If practical interests did not influence action

in this way, we would expect for Ashley to be unjustified in her compulsion to check on Mary Kate. Yet this is counterintuitive. Normally, if we have any reason to believe that someone we care about is in trouble, then we take some action based on that possibility. These are 'just in case' actions, where our practical interests lower our evidential demands for action.

Another case that is of interest is the following:

Art's Assertion

Art is an art critic who spends his days viewing exhibitions and writing reviews. He is known for being particularly meticulous in his professional evaluations. One day, upon arriving home from delivering an especially thorough critique of a young aspiring artist, he is confronted by his five year old daughter who proudly shows him a water color painting that she just finished. Art takes the painting in his hand and without hesitation sincerely asserts that it is a wonderful work of art that deserves to be displayed immediately on the refrigerator.

This case represents a scenario where our epistemic interests are trumped by our practical interests. Previously with Twin Trouble we saw that it is sometimes correct that our practical interests can lower the evidential demands for justified action. Similarly, Art does not require much evidence supporting the merit of his daughter's painting before pronouncing a positive assessment. Instead, it is very appropriate for him to encourage her interest in art and boost her self-esteem. This runs contrary to claims made by proponents¹ of the view that we should only assert what we know. For example, the 'knowledge account of assertion' (KAA) states that 'one must (assert p only if one knows p)'. The rationale for the KAA is that when a speaker S asserts a proposition p, S has in fact implicitly advertised that they know it to be the case that p. However, what Art's Assertion suggests is that there are instances where it is proper to assert something without having knowledge. Actually, not only is it acceptable to assert something that is not known, but it appears to sometimes even be proper to state something with little or no supporting evidence because of the influence of our practical interests.

So Twin Trouble and Art's Assertion both give us reason to believe that our practical interests can have a substantial influence on our justification for either action or assertion. Twin Trouble presents a scenario where it does not appear that knowledge

¹ Proponents of a knowledge condition for assertion include Timothy Williamson (2000), Keith DeRose (2002), and John Hawthorne (2004).

is required for proper action. There is nothing inappropriate with Ashley acting as if Mary Kate is in trouble “just in case” she actually is in trouble. Upon reflection, cases similar to this abound. We don’t sell the lottery ticket for a penny “just in case” it’s the winning ticket. Often we make sure to tell loved ones goodbye and remind them that we love them before a trip “just in case” something bad happens to them. And some people still observe superstitions “just in case” those superstitions are true. The upshot of these cases is that oftentimes we are acting properly even though we lack knowledge in numerous situations. With this, we can see that knowledge is not the exclusive epistemic good for producing proper action; true belief or empirically adequate belief could suffice.

Similarly, Art’s Assertion demonstrates that knowledge need not be required for proper assertion. Like Henry in the Fake Barns Case, Art asserts something that he does not know. Still, any criticism of his assertion would certainly be unfounded given Art’s practical interests in the situation. This case is interesting to us because the truth of the KAA would promise some insight into the importance of knowledge relative to proper action. If knowledge is required for proper assertion, and no other epistemic good can replace knowledge, then no other epistemic good would be as valuable for proper assertion (which is itself quite valuable, being one of the main ways we influence others’ beliefs). So by offering a counterexample to KAA I have undermined the support for the value of knowledge that would come from such a connection to proper assertion. This leaves open the possibility that other epistemic goods are on equal footing with knowledge in regards to assertion.

Still, if one is to retain the view that proper action requires knowledge, this would naturally lead to the view that knowledge is influenced by our practical interests. Recently such a view has come into vogue and it calls for some attention. In the following section I present an objection to this view and ultimately conclude that the allegedly superior value of knowledge (according to the Standard View) is not to be found in a connection to our practical interests.

OBJECTION 2: KNOWLEDGE AND PROPER ACTION

Simply stated, Pragmatic Encroachment is the view that the practical interests of a person can influence whether that person’s true belief constitutes knowledge. My primary objective in this section is to show that Pragmatic Encroachment entails external world skepticism. By doing so I intend to undermine the view that proper action requires knowledge, thereby giving us reason to doubt that the alleged superior value of knowledge is found in its aiding us in achieving our practical interests.

Toward this end, I'll first introduce a basic version of Pragmatic Encroachment (PE). Then I'll introduce a sample skeptical hypothesis (SK) to the framework. From this I will show that it is extremely important to us that the phenomenally equivalent skeptical scenarios generated by SK are actually false. We'll then see that by combining PE and SK, the effect will be to place *extremely* high demands upon knowledge-enabling evidence for \sim SK. It will finally be observed that, while we may have *good* evidence for \sim SK, we do not have *extremely strong* evidence for \sim SK. This supports my conclusion that any standard version of Pragmatic Encroachment ultimately entails external world skepticism. If successful, my conclusion will critically undermine the current view that Pragmatic Encroachment is actually a skeptically resistant position, thus severing a link between proper action and the value of knowledge.

PRAGMATIC ENCROACHMENT

One line of support for PE depends on certain intuitions that arise when considering whether a subject is said to know something. Proponents of PE explain these intuitions by appealing to the relationship between knowledge and action. Considering that knowledge often provides a reason for action, or justification for choosing a given action, this interplay provides *prima facie* evidence that knowledge is linked to practical reasoning in a fundamental way.

Here's a pair of scenarios first presented by Keith DeRose in his (1992) which are commonly employed by proponents of PE:

Case 1: It is payday and I plan on depositing my paycheck this evening, but there is no particular need to have the check deposited right away. Unfortunately, I arrive at the bank to find that the lines are out the door and are moving very slowly. Recalling that the bank has been open on Saturday in the past, and not wishing to queue for a ridiculous amount of time, I decide that it will be better to stop by on Saturday. I return to the bank Saturday and deposit my check.

Case 2: It is payday and I plan on depositing my paycheck this evening. Now, it is the end of the month and, as usual, there is very little in my account. Rent is due on Monday, and I also need to be sure that I can cover the checks for my credit card bill and utilities. Unfortunately, I arrive at the bank to find that the lines are out the door and are moving very slowly. Recalling that the bank has been open on Saturday in the past, and not wishing to queue for a ridiculous amount of time, I decide that it will be better to stop by on Saturday. I return to the bank Saturday and deposit my check.

Many find their intuitions about knowledge vary across these two cases. It is fairly easy to accept the claim that I know on Friday that the bank will be open in Case 1. On the other hand, in Case 2 it also seems correct to deny that I know on Friday that the bank will be open. This occurs despite the fact that the individuals in both cases share the same evidence that the bank will be open on Saturday (that the bank has been open on Saturday in the recent past), both believe that the bank will be open on Saturday, and so on. Proponents of PE argue that there is some additional factor that accounts for these dueling intuitions about Cases 1 and 2, namely practical interests. Because the costs of being wrong in the second case are much more severe than in the first, the practical interests of the subject appear to influence whether the subject has knowledge. So the greater the subject's practical investment in the truth of the belief, the stronger the evidence must be to make that belief knowledge.

Along the same lines, the relationship between knowledge and action is also used to support PE. It is claimed that part of the value of knowledge is that it serves as both a basis for action and as justification for action. Knowledge is a basis for action when it provides reasons for acting one way instead of another. Similarly, knowledge acts as justification when it is used to defend choosing one action over another. An example of knowledge serving as a basis for action includes such mundane things as choosing one store instead of another since you know that the item you want is carried by the first store and you have no such knowledge about the second store. A way that knowledge can serve as justification for action is if someone questions your choice of action. An example of this would include defending your decision to turn left at an intersection because you knew that that would take you to your destination. When challenged you would cite your knowledge as a reason for making that decision, which in turn justifies your acting on that belief. The important point is that knowledge does appear to serve as an important guide for action. This will become important shortly.

SK

The second element of my overall argument is the introduction of a Phenomenally Equivalent Skeptical Scenario. For present purposes I will be drawing from what Richard Feldman (2003, p.141) has called "The Alternative Hypothesis Argument" for my skeptical scenario of choice. Briefly stated, the Alternative Hypothesis Argument says that the evidence that we have for our beliefs does not support our common sense explanations any more than it supports various skeptical alternatives. For example, our evidence about the external world could be caused by i) interaction with an actual external world (as we normally believe), ii) an evil demon (such as Descartes

postulates in his first meditation), iii) a super-computer stimulating a Brain-In-a-Vat (BIV), or iv) dream experiences. While any of these alternative explanations could be used equally well, I will formulate SK as follows:

SK—You *are* a deceived Brain-In-a-Vat (BIV) being fed misleading computer-generated experiences.

Plausibly, if SK were true, then you'd have exactly the same evidence for the existence of the external world that you currently have, which means your evidence does not really favor one of these explanations over another. In other words, given your evidence, it is as likely you are a deceived BIV as that your circumstances are normal.

This is troubling because it is *maximally important* to us that the denial of SK is true. Intuitively this importance is can be seen the following way. Consider the possibility that video gaming systems will become so sophisticated that they will create a believable virtual reality (a sort of Sims on steroids if you will). It is not much of a stretch to think that there would be some individuals so enraptured with virtual reality gaming that they would live the majority of their lives in this virtual reality world. In this scenario it's unlikely that we would hold the virtual actions and achievements of these individuals in as high esteem as we do those actions that occur outside of a virtual reality world. Even if these people found rewarding virtual careers, satisfying platonic and romantic virtual relationships, and so forth, we would not be moved to hear about these virtual events like we would actual events. This is true whether or not these individuals themselves get to the point where they blur the line between reality and virtual reality. This indicates that there is something about interacting with an actual world that we value. In a similar manner living our lives in a skeptical scenario would erode much, if not all, of the value we attribute to our practical interests². In a nutshell, the meaningfulness of our lives requires that SK is false, so it is *maximally important* to us that the denial of SK is true.

Furthermore, assuming Pragmatic Encroachment, if it can be shown that we are not in a position to know \sim SK (as I intend to do), then with the application of a very plausible "closure" principle it can be argued that we are not in a position to know anything that entails \sim SK. Closure can be stated as follows:

Closure: If you're positioned to know p and you know p entails q, then you're positioned to know q.

² This is very similar to Nozick's "Experience Machine" where a machine can simulate experiences for us. (Nozick, 1974, pp. 42-45)

So, by “closure”, if we are not positioned to know \sim SK then we are not positioned to know anything that we know entails \sim SK. For example, we know that “I have hands” entails that SK is false (since SK entails that we lack hands). But, as I’m about to argue, assuming Pragmatic Encroachment we are not positioned to know that SK is false. This means, by Closure, that we are not in a position to know that “I have hands” is true! Going further, if we accept both Pragmatic Encroachment and Closure, then we would not even have very basic external world knowledge! Given these troubling implications that would follow from not being able to know the denial of SK, it would again seem *maximally important* to know \sim SK. In this way the importance of \sim SK comes from two distinct, yet related, issues. First, the falsity of SK is important by itself. Intuitively it is a bad thing to be in a skeptical scenario. Second, if we were unable to determine that SK is false, then (due to Closure) that would threaten numerous other propositions that we take to be obvious instances of knowledge. So, due to the threat to our other knowledge claims it is maximally important that SK is false. Now this will be used to show that by combining PE and SK, we face *extremely* high demands upon knowledge-enabling evidence for \sim SK.

PRAGMATIC ENCROACHMENT AND EVIDENCE

In the first part of this section I stated that, on standard versions of PE, the greater the subject’s practical investment in a belief (i.e. the more important it is to the subject that the belief be true), the stronger the evidence must be in order to know that belief is true. Following this explanation of PE, in the second part I raised the possibility of a skeptical hypothesis that threatens to undermine all the knowledge that we currently think we possess about the external world. When these two elements are combined, the strength of evidence demanded by PE is raised to the degree that SK threatens our practical interests. As the previous part concluded, it would seem that it is maximally important for us that the denial of SK is true. So according to PE, this means that *very strong* evidence would be required in order for anyone to know the denial of SK.

This is similar to the bank cases that were discussed earlier. In Case 1 it was not very important that I deposit my paycheck. Due to the fact that I had very little practical interest in whether or not the check was deposited before Monday, it was very easy for me to know that the bank would be open on Saturday. This also made it appropriate for me to act as if the bank would be open, thereby justifying my decision to wait until later to deposit the check. Contrast this to Case 2 where I did have a significant practical interest in whether or not the check was deposited on time. Here we find that my practical interests influence the amount of evidence needed to know that the bank

will be open. Consequently, the evidence was not sufficient to meet this increased evidential demand on knowledge; accordingly, I did not know that the bank would be open on Saturday. This also means that it was inappropriate for me to act as if the bank was going to be open.

The above examples show how practical interests can influence the demands on knowledge. Additionally, it appears that the strength of evidence required is somehow proportionate to the degree of practical interest of the knower. This is supported by our varying intuition about knowledge across the two cases despite the exact same evidence. If there is a proportionate relationship between practical interests and required evidential support, then the practical importance of having a true belief will correlate to the amount of evidence needed to support that belief. This seems to be the result that the proponent of PE was looking for by adding practical interests to truth-conducive factors (e.g. evidence, reliability, proper function) in the conditions for knowledge. However, let us now apply this proportional relationship between practical interests and strength of evidential support to the skeptical hypothesis from section 2. When considering SK through the eyes of PE, the result is that the practical importance of SK being false is so great that only *extremely strong* evidence could yield knowledge of the denial of SK.

PRAGMATIC ENCROACHMENT, EVIDENCE, AND SKEPTICISM

To this point it has been argued that the combination of PE and the importance of SK's falsity requires extremely strong evidence that SK is false in order to know that SK is false. Now here's the rub. Given the immense importance of SK's being false, the demand on our strength of evidence for knowledge made by PE prevents our knowing that SK is false. Even if we have good evidence that SK is false, it is not the case that we have the PE-mandated *extremely strong evidence* needed to know that SK is false. Allow me to elaborate.

It was said previously that on PE the strength of evidence required for knowledge is proportional to the practical importance of the belief's being true. When the issue at stake is extremely important, such as the justificatory status of your typical acts, then those stakes demand an exorbitantly high level of evidence.

Undoubtedly the proponent of PE will find this conclusion hard to swallow. That is to be expected, so allow me to briefly pursue another approach. Since PE is supposed to be a theory about the nature of the knowledge relation, it should be possible to couple PE with any of the more traditional views of evidence and justification. For present

purposes, I will combine PE with a common view of evidence and ask whether this combination allows us sufficient evidence to know the denial of SK.

The account of evidence that will be referred to here will be an evidentialist view given by Richard Feldman and Earl Conee in their (2008). According to evidentialism, epistemic justification is determined by the quality of the evidence one has supporting a given belief. On this combination of PE and Evidentialism, knowledge requires adequate evidential support. Further, the envisioned combination allows practical interests to “set the bar” concerning how much evidence is required in order to know a belief is true. To illustrate, recall the bank cases that were discussed earlier. Proponents of PE would claim the practical interests of the subject in each of the two cases caused the evidential “bar” to be set at different levels. Conversely, whenever it came to judging whether the subject knew whether the bank would be open, the only pertinent factor was the evidence, which was that the subject remembered the bank being open on Saturday in the past. In this way evidentialism was utilized since the only factor conferring epistemic justification was the evidence. So a simple way of understanding the relationship between PE and evidentialism is by seeing the role of evidentialism as providing a theory of evidence for a belief, and the role of PE as determining how much evidence is needed for a belief to be justified.

We can now see the critical question for the envisioned combination—assuming PE, do we meet the evidential requirements our practical interests set for knowing the denial of SK? Arguably, no. Keith DeRose has offered a nice explanation of why not in his (2000). He argues that there is a problem with using most (and maybe all) of our evidence to attempt a refutation of SK. The problem is that the body of evidence that we use to support a belief is determined by the issue that is being discussed. DeRose uses an example where he hears a single radio broadcast reporting the scores of recent baseball games. When the issue being discussed concerns which team won a game the previous day, then it is appropriate to use this radio broadcast as evidence supporting which team won the game. However, if the issue being questioned is the veracity of that particular radio broadcast, then it is clearly inappropriate to include that radio broadcast as evidence supporting itself. The same is true when we are discussing SK. When we attempt to disprove SK, the only body of evidence we have is the evidence that is being called into question. Because of this, all the evidence that we have is extremely limited in its ability to support either SK or \sim SK. This limitation on the available evidence severely inhibits our ability to justify the belief that SK is false. Nonetheless, even if we do allow that our evidence supports the “real world hypothesis” to some extent, there is still no good reason to think that anything about our evidence makes it strong enough to conclusively deny SK. The best that we can

hope for based purely on our evidence is a narrow victory of the real world hypothesis over SK via an appeal to a “best explanation” or some similar criteria.

Returning to the focus of this section, there is little reason to think that anyone has the kind of evidence required by PE to know that SK is false given \sim SK’s great importance to us. It seems that any evidence that can be used to support the denial of SK is also fully compatible with SK being true. At best, it may be possible to give some reasons to reject SK based on our evidence, but this still leaves us far from the goal of having the extremely strong evidence that is demanded by PE. So it seems that, on PE, our evidence is not sufficient for us to know the denial of SK. Furthermore, by adding Closure, we are not positioned to have even very basic external world knowledge. Thus we can see that, contrary to what its leading defenders claim, PE is a position with some very troubling skeptical results.

KNOWLEDGE AND PROPER ACTION?

Contrary to what the leading proponents of PE have suggested, the introduction of practical interests to knowledge ascriptions directly increases our susceptibility to external world skepticism. PE claims that practical interests can influence whether a subject knows a proposition and also that knowledge is important for action. A skeptical hypothesis threatens all our knowledge (and thereby threatens our reasons for action). From this it follows that it is extremely important that such a hypothesis is false. Given PE, this places *extremely* demanding evidential requirements on our knowing the denial of the skeptical hypothesis. Finally, it was observed that we may have some evidence, or maybe even *good* evidence for \sim SK, but we do not have *extremely strong* evidence for \sim SK. Therefore, far from being anti-skeptical, standard versions of PE are instead unable to avoid accepting external world skepticism. Since PE leads to a highly implausible skeptical position (i.e. external world skepticism), we should deny that proper action requires knowledge. If the connection between proper action and knowledge can be severed in this way, then knowledge has again lost a proposed advantage in value over other epistemic goods (particularly true belief and empirically adequate belief).

But is there a way out for those who are unwilling to concede the importance that SK is false? Well, we tend to hold truth in high regard. If you hold a correspondence theory of truth then the objection to PE presented in this chapter is likely to seem intuitively plausible. However, if a pragmatic theory of truth appeals to you, then you will probably find the possibility of SK being true to be of less (maybe little) practical interest. After all, as far as our experiences are concerned it is stipulated by SK that

what we experience is phenomenally equivalent to \sim SK. Now an objector will most likely take this route to resist the extreme importance that SK is false. But note that there are two distinct claims that one could interpret regarding the importance of \sim SK. The first is that it is extremely important to us that SK is false, regardless of whether we know it or not. Let's call this view the Peircean view. The second claim is that it is extremely important to us that we know SK to be false. This will be the Jamesian view³. To this point I have been relying on the Peircean view to establish my conclusion. However, the truth of either of these claims should prove sufficient to present the worry for PE that I have developed here.

The Peircean view of truth holds that true means that "the proposition, belief, or theory p is true iff p is held at the end of inquiry" (Talissee & Aikin, 2008). Given the nature of SK, it is impossible for us to gain evidence sufficient for knowledge of the truth of SK. All the evidence we can ever acquire will support \sim SK, which leaves us with the possibility that we are in a phenomenally equivalent skeptical scenario (i.e. SK is true) and \sim SK is true (since we would still hold \sim SK at the end of inquiry). So it seems that on Peirce's view we get a meaning of truth that directly conflicts with the fact of the matter. This differs significantly from what we normally mean when we say something is true. Such a result appears to generate problems for the attractiveness of this version of the pragmatic notion of truth.

Even so, on the Peircean view I would argue that it is extremely important that SK is false. The importance of this claim does not depend on whether or not we know its truth. Instead, it is important by virtue of its comprehensive influence in the meaning we find in our lives. Intuitively it would be disheartening to discover that all the relationships you have cultivated, all the achievements for which you have worked, and all the experiences you have had were part of some systematic delusion. Of course, on the Peircean view we are not talking about knowing \sim SK but we are discussing SK's being held at the end of inquiry. Still, it seems like our other practical interests are derivative from the assumption that the world is the way we think it is. Otherwise, winning the lottery or depositing a check on time would not possess the same significance if it were all an illusion. Going further, at least part of the value we find in

³ I use these terms because "James and Peirce view truth in terms of its consequences, but their focus is different. Peircean positivism focuses on the difference of observable consequences between the true or falsity of a belief, on how experience would be different if p is true or if p is false. James's theory is focused on the consequences of whether the belief is held or not—how experience is different if you believe or do not believe p." (Talissee & Aikin, 2008, p. 66) So as the prominent figures for each view of truth it seems fitting to label the views after them.

our actions is their influence on the lives of other actually existing people and objects. In the same way that we pity the person who becomes disconnected from reality due to dissociative disorders, it is probable that we would be similarly disconcerted by our own disengagement from reality. So, irrespective of whether or not we can ever know that SK is false, it appears unpromising for the objector to argue that we do not really care about whether the things we value actually exist or are illusory. Instead, it seems to be in virtue of SK being false that our having practical interests can be as important as we hold them to be.

The Jamesian view focuses on whether or not we know SK to be false. However, the Jamesian view is not promising for the same reasons that the Peircean view does not dissuade us from finding the denial of SK to be very important. If SK were true our lives would be robbed of much of the meaning we normally attribute to our actions. In addition to the fact that this value would be lost if SK were true, even if SK were false it would still be important that we believe SK is false. Otherwise the objector would have to give up any standard version of PE since our practical interests are fundamentally tied to the truth or falsity of SK. So on both pragmatic views it is of substantial importance to us that SK is false.

Another strategy may be to question why it is important to know whether we are in a phenomenally equivalent skeptical scenario. This line of reasoning keys off of the fact that it would be impossible for us to differentiate between a real experience and a skeptical experience. If we couldn't tell the difference between the real experience of eating a steak and having a phenomenally equivalent skeptical experience of eating a steak, then what does it matter? Typically we seek true beliefs about the world that we can hold with a high degree of certainty. By accepting as unproblematic the possibility that everything we think we know to be true is really an illusion, that challenges the importance of "getting it right". Instead of seeking true beliefs about the world we would instead be happy so long as our beliefs do not generate problematic conflicts with the world. This response, however, requires that we accept my conclusion that knowledge is not as valuable as we normally think. In fact, this approach would essentially replace the importance of knowledge for proper action with empirically adequate belief. What we would have are empirically adequate beliefs that we are eating a steak, depositing checks, et cetera. So, by taking this line an objector would be accepting that knowledge is not of greater value than empirically adequate belief.

These two objections in this chapter both suggest that the Standard View is not to be found between knowledge and proper action. Let us now analyze (b) to see if it fares any better than (a).

III. (B)

(B) argues that the alleged superiority of knowledge to empirically adequate belief comes from the fact that true belief is an essential component of knowledge. When we look at why we find knowledge to be instrumentally valuable, it would seem that knowledge is valuable because it is partially composed of true belief. Previously this point was argued thusly:

1. True belief is of great instrumental value. (premise)
2. The value of the whole of knowledge is a sum of its parts. (premise)
3. True belief is a component of knowledge. (obvious)
4. True belief makes a significant contribution to the value of knowledge. (1, 3)
5. True belief, plus whatever value the additional components add, makes knowledge of unique instrumental value. (2, 4)
6. Knowledge is of greater value than empirically adequate belief. (5)

But why is true belief better than false belief? It certainly seems important to maximize our true beliefs and minimize our false beliefs. But it is not clear that this is always desirable. What is it about truth that we value?

One obvious response is that true belief allows us to function in such a way that we are able to accomplish those things which we desire. For example, we can balance the checkbook because of true beliefs about addition and subtraction. We can land men on the moon because of true beliefs about forces, trajectories, chemical reactions, and so forth. In contrast, false beliefs often cause us to err in ways that prevent us from achieving our objectives. We get lost because we are mistaken about which direction to go. Or we run out of gas because we have the false belief that we have enough to get to the next gas station. From these cases it appears that truth is of great importance to us. Since knowledge essentially includes true belief, then it is easy to see how the value of true belief could be the major contributing factor in the Standard View.

This, however, presupposes that truth is actually of great value. What we now need to do is determine whether it is correct to hold true belief to be of great instrumental value. If it is correct to hold true belief to be of great instrumental value, then it is very plausible that much of the value of knowledge results from the value of true belief. On the other hand, if we find that true belief is not as valuable as we might think, then that discovery will also have some impact on the value of knowledge. This is especially the case since it seems very plausible that the value of knowledge is only as great as

the sum of the value of its parts. If the value of knowledge is made up of the sum of the value of its parts, and true belief is not as valuable as we have traditionally thought, then knowledge would be less valuable than we have traditionally thought. By showing that knowledge is less valuable than traditionally thought, that opens up the possibility that other epistemic goods (in particular true belief and empirically adequate belief) are of equal or greater value. Given this, we should see how well truth holds up to a critical assessment of its value.

THE VALUE OF TRUTH

For this task I will first introduce what I take to be the best attempted justification of the view that truth is always a prima facie good. Afterwards, reasons to think that true belief is instrumentally valuable will be offered. Then I will appeal to the work of Friedrich Nietzsche to offer us a competing view that will effectively undermine the best argument for the prima facie goodness of truth and for the instrumental value of truth. From this it will be concluded that true belief is not as universally valuable as is typically thought. This will serve to undermine the key premise in (b) for the superior value of knowledge.

I should note at the outset that Nietzsche talks about furthering life and power instead of achieving practical interests. However, we should be able to use these terms interchangeably without difficulty since the competing argument for the value of true belief also accepts the inherent value of flourishing human life. This will allow us to focus on where they disagree over the role filled by true and false beliefs in such a life. Also, Nietzsche predominately discusses truth as an absolute good, or good all things considered. This is because he is attacking truth as an ideal that pursued regardless of the consequences. Today there are not many who would revere truth to such an extreme degree. Theorists like Jonathan Kvanvig and Michael Lynch espouse a view that for any truth, under normal circumstances, it is better to believe that truth than not believe it. This more popular view of the value of truth is obviously weaker than the strong view attacked by Nietzsche. Still, what Nietzsche says concerning truth remains pertinent to my inquiry into the value of knowledge because Nietzsche is also rejecting the weaker view held by Kvanvig and Lynch.

That said, let us now attempt to understand how some justify the view that truth is of prima facie value. Proponents of the prima facie good of truth appeal to our curiosity as an instantiation of our natural desire for the truth. For example, Kvanvig says that “the goal of curiosity is to find the truth” (2003, p. 145). Our desire to discover and understand our surroundings results from a deep desire to unearth the truth, that is,

we possess a will to truth. Michael Lynch shares Kvanvig's view of our natural desire to gain true beliefs. Lynch says that "we care about the truth for more than just the benefits it brings us...there are times in our lives when we simply want to know for no other reason than the knowing itself. Curiosity is not always motivated by practical interests" (2004, pp. 15–16). It is important for this view that we are not always motivated by practical interests when seeking truth. By seeking truth in this way there seems to be something about just having true beliefs that we value. From this we see that support for the prima facie good of true belief comes from the fact that we seek out true belief, even in the absence of any foreseeable benefit. From here proponents will add the claim that discovering truth is a part of the successful and flourishing human life. It is accepted that a flourishing human life is of intrinsic value, and as a prima facie good, having true beliefs adds something of import to a flourishing human life. That is, the main argument here relies on descriptive claims about our motivation for seeking truth to establish the conclusion that truth is a prima facie good.

Speaking to the instrumental value of truth, Paul Horwich says that

Because when I want a given thing and believe that a certain action will result in my getting it, then, very often, I will perform that action. And in that case, if my belief is true, this desire will be satisfied; whereas if it isn't true no such result is ensured. So true beliefs of the directly action-guiding form will indeed tend to benefit me. And the more such true beliefs I have the broader the spectrum of desires that will be easy for me to satisfy in this way. Moreover, these special beliefs are the results of inferences that tend to preserve truth; so it will benefit me for the premises of those inferences to be true. And there is no proposition that might not someday serve as such a premise. Therefore it will indeed be good for me—at least, that's what it's reasonable for me to suppose—if I believe every true proposition and if every proposition I believe is true. (Horwich, 2006, p. 350)

Having true beliefs is instrumentally valuable for acting in a way that realizes our desires.

As one of the first philosophers to question the value of truth, Nietzsche highlights the value of false belief for the flourishing of human life. First of all, it is apparent that Nietzsche is skeptical of anything like the prima facie good of truth. He says

For all the value that the true, the truthful, the selfless may deserve, it would still be possible that a higher and more fundamental value for life might have to be ascribed to deception, selfishness, and lust. It might even be possible that what constitutes the value of these good and revered things is precisely that they are insidiously related,

tied to, and involved with these wicked, seemingly opposite things—maybe even one with them in essence. Maybe! (BG, S.2)

In the above passage we can see that Nietzsche does not hold truth to be of intrinsic value. Not only that, but he also makes the claim that truth may not always be instrumentally valuable. Contrary to much of what has been presupposed by philosophy, Nietzsche recognizes that holding truth as an absolute good (i.e. a good thing in all situations regardless of cost) has gone largely unsupported. Moreover, Nietzsche holds our will to truth (that is, our drive to attain the truth) to be what he calls an ascetic ideal; an ideal that we pursue to our own detriment. It is precisely this attitude toward the importance of truth and true belief that he wishes to critique. This point is made explicit in the following:

Consider on this question both the earliest and most recent philosophers: they are all oblivious of how much the will to truth itself first requires justification; here there is a lacuna in every philosophy—how did this come about? Because the ascetic ideal has hitherto dominated all philosophy, because truth was posited as being, as God, as the highest court of appeal—because truth was not permitted to be a problem at all. Is this ‘permitted’ understood?—From the moment faith in the God of the ascetic ideal is denied, a new problem arises: that of the value of truth.

The will to truth requires a critique—let us thus define our won task—the value of truth must for once be experimentally called into question. (GM III S.24)

Nietzsche would have us experimentally test our true beliefs for usefulness in advancing life and power. If a given belief promotes life and power then it passes the test, if it does not then it fails. He also incites us to avoid cultivating anything as ascetic as the will to truth. We should not pursue true belief as relentlessly as we often do without some prior justification for seeking true belief to this degree. Even so, it seems likely that truth is on the whole very beneficial for furthering life and power. Having a true belief about how to get to a location that I need to reach, how to influence those around me, and so forth, all seem to be very valuable. Likewise, truth also appears to have contributed to the continued survival of humanity as a whole. It has allowed us to treat diseases, produce more food, and develop numerous advantageous technologies. In light of such constructive byproducts of seeking truth, it may still be tempting to hold truth as an absolute value which we should pursue to the exclusion of other values. But Nietzsche would have us resist this temptation. In discussing what he terms the “will to truth”, he says that:

This unconditional will to truth—what is it? Is it the will NOT TO ALLOW ONESELF TO BE DECEIVED? Or is it the will NOT TO DECEIVE? For the will to truth could be interpreted in the second way, too—if only the special case "I do not want to deceive myself" is subsumed under the generalization "I do not want to deceive." But why not deceive? But why not allow oneself to be deceived?

Note that the reasons for the former principle belong to an altogether different realm from those for the second. One does not want to allow oneself to be deceived because one assumes it is harmful, dangerous, calamitous to be deceived. In this sense, science would be a long-range prudence, a caution, a utility; but one could object in all fairness: How is that? Is wanting not to allow oneself to be deceived really less harmful, less dangerous, less calamitous? What do you know in advance of the character of existence to be able to decide whether the greater advantage is on the side of the unconditional mistrust or of the unconditionally trusting? But if both should be required, much trust AS WELL as much mistrust, from where would science then be permitted to take its unconditional faith or conviction on which it rests, that truth is more important than any other thing, including every other conviction? Precisely this conviction could never have come into being if both truth and untruth constantly proved to be useful which is the case. Thus—the faith in science, which after all exists undeniably, cannot owe its origin to such a calculus of utility; it must have originated in spite of the fact that the disutility and dangerousness of "the will to truth," of "truth at any price" is proved to it constantly. "At any price": how well we understand these words once we have offered and slaughtered one faith after another on this altar! (GS S.344)

Here Nietzsche makes a couple interesting points. First, he claims that it is unlikely that there is any reason to prefer truth over falsehood, assuming that the falsehood serves to increase power and life (also see BG .34). Typically we assume falsehood is harmful, but this is not necessarily the case. At least this is not something that we should hold prior to testing its validity. This assumption that permeates science, philosophy, and culture in general is just that, an *assumption*. What Nietzsche calls us to do is critically evaluate how beneficial that assumption has been. If we find that truth is not always more beneficial to hold than falsehood, then Nietzsche would have us reject as false the view that "truth at any price" is something to be desired. Ultimately, upon such evaluation we would find that our previous faith in the absolute value of truth is not as indisputable as once imagined.

This leads to his other point concerning the impropriety of holding truth to be an absolute value. Science holds the conviction that truth "is more important than any

other thing, including every other conviction". But why should the value of truth always trump the value of love, happiness, life, power, or aesthetic achievement, not to mention any of several other worthy elements of human existence? It is precisely this unwavering faith in the absolute value of truth that makes the will to truth an ascetic ideal. Nietzsche makes this explicit in the following passage:

That which constrains these men, however, this unconditional will to truth, is faith in the ascetic ideal itself, if only as an unconscious imperative—don't be deceived about that—it is faith in a metaphysical value, the absolute value of truth, sanctioned and guaranteed by this ideal alone (it stands or falls with this ideal). (GM III, 24)

Were we to relax this unwavering faith in truth, as Nietzsche suggests we should, then truth would only be valuable insofar as it furthers life and increases power. So what is needed is to reevaluate truth according to its ability to satisfy these criteria. To accomplish this we need to test our beliefs to determine how beneficial they are for our continued survival and enhancement of power. If our truths are found to be harmful (or not as beneficial as some falsehoods), then we should be willing to sacrifice these truths in the interest of increasing life and power. So with his rejection of the ascetic ideal Nietzsche also rejects the absolute value of truth.

This understanding of Nietzsche's position is supported by Maudemarie Clark in her (1990). She says that "this means not that we must reject the value of truth, but that we will be able to judge its value only on the basis of the experimental evidence, which we will be positioned to gather only after we stop taking its value for granted" (Clark, p. 184). This is exactly the project we are faced with at present.

Furthermore, there appear to be many truths that are potentially harmful if known.

Something might be true while being harmful and dangerous in the highest degree. Indeed, it might be a basic characteristic of existence that those who would know it completely would perish, in which case the strength of a spirit should be measured according to how much of the 'truth' one could still barely endure—or to put it more clearly, to what degree one would require it to be thinned down, shrouded, sweetened, blunted, falsified. (BG, S.39)

In this passage Nietzsche talks about the possibility of harmful truths. For Nietzsche there were many truths that could potentially prove harmful if believed. Among these were his convictions that morality, free will, justice, causality, and any kind of afterlife were all illusions. If understood in the wrong light these harmful truths could prove devastating to both the lives of individuals and to the well-being of society. An

example of a harmful truth at the individual level could be something like discovering that any belief in an afterlife is in fact an illusion. Upon learning this truth, one may become despondent and lose interest in achieving goals (which would increase power) and self-preservation. But we don't have to accept Nietzsche's metaphysical views to see the potential disvalue of truth. In discussing truths such as celebrity gossip, foolish behavior, and irrational/perverse beliefs of others Jason Baehr submits "that many truths in the above categories (and other categories besides) are *cognitively* (not merely morally or otherwise) *disvaluable*" (Baehr). So not only are these truths not valuable to have, but they are actually harmful to our growth and wellbeing. Likewise, harmful effects could result from many other truths at both an individual and social level. This threatens not just a strong view about the value of truth (i.e. that truth is always valuable), but also a weaker view about the value of truth (i.e. that truth is typically valuable). If some truths are harmful to believe, even under normal circumstances, then it would not be correct to hold those truths to be valuable at any time.

Additionally, it seems as if the functioning of humanity rests on maintaining certain illusions and falsehoods.

It seemed as if it were impossible to get along with truth, our organism was adapted for the very opposite; all its higher functions, the perceptions of the senses, and in general every kind of sensation, cooperated with those primevally embodied, fundamental errors. Moreover, those propositions became the very standards of knowledge according to which the "true" and the "false" were determined – throughout the whole domain of pure logic. The strength of conceptions does not, therefore, depend on their degree of truth, but on their antiquity, their embodiment, their character as conditions of life. Where life and knowledge seemed to conflict, there has never been serious contention; denial and doubt have there been regarded as madness. (GS S.110)

What Nietzsche here suggests is that we have accepted as truth numerous errors, generalizations, and illusions that have become basic to our understanding of the world. With this the "conditions of life" have been established without regard to truth and falsehood, but with regard to what proved helpful to life. Under such conditions many false beliefs could satisfy the criterion of instrumentality.

An instance where a false belief is beneficial would be a case where we interpret the world causally. While Nietzsche holds that belief in cause and effect is full of errors and illusions (HA S.18; TI p499–501), a false belief in causality has proven beneficial in

furthering life and allowing us to increase our power. Much of the benefits of science result from the presumption of cause and effect; despite having been built upon the (allegedly) false belief in causality. The result of this false belief has undoubtedly served to increase both life and power. So it seems reasonable for Nietzsche to declare that some false beliefs can actually prove beneficial in increasing power and life.

For a long time it has been accepted without hesitation that true belief is of great value. On this present analysis we have demanded that truth defend its worth. After considering the prima facie goodness of true belief and instrumental value of true belief it has been weighed, measured, and found wanting. Not only is truth not always a prima facie good, there are instances where truth is actually harmful. Such cases clearly conflict with even a weak view of the value of truth. Even under normal conditions discovery that you are disliked by those previously regarded as friends, that your spouse is cheating on you, that your religion or worldview is a hoax, and many other true beliefs can be harmful when believed. Furthermore, we have considered cases where maintaining false beliefs can actually promote life and power. The placebo effect in medicine can really improve health, believing that you are better looking/smarter/more skilled than you really are can help you achieve goals you wouldn't otherwise attempt, and Newtonian physics allowed us to achieve much more than we previously could. Ultimately this leads us to the conclusion that truth is not as valuable as commonly thought. The implications this understanding of truth has on knowledge will be assessed in the following section.

TRUTH AND THE VALUE OF KNOWLEDGE

With the above critique of the value of truth, we are now poised to reassess the value of knowledge. Typically it is assumed that nearly any account of the nature of knowledge will include true belief. So if it could be shown that true belief is not as valuable as is commonly thought, then it would be equally shown that knowledge is not as valuable as is commonly thought. This would give us yet another reason to think that knowledge is no more privileged/valuable than empirically adequate belief. To put this a little more formally:

1. The value of the whole of knowledge is precisely a sum of its parts' values. (GM III S.24)
2. True belief is an essential part of knowledge. (Premise)
3. True belief is less valuable than we typically think. (GS S.110; GS S.344)

4. ∴ Knowledge is less valuable than we typically think⁴.

To get (1) it will need to be shown that there is nothing about knowledge qua knowledge that is more valuable than the sum of its constituent parts. Earlier I dismissed the possibility (for present purposes) that knowledge is intrinsically valuable. So if knowledge is not intrinsically valuable, then its value must be instrumental. This leaves open two different possibilities. First, it could be that the parts which comprise knowledge create a sort of increase in instrumental value once the status of knowledge is attained. The other possibility is that there is no instrumental value added to knowledge beyond the sum of the value of each of its parts when considered in isolation.

Let us start with the view that there is an increase in instrumental value once knowledge is attained. Given Nietzsche's prior assessment of harmful truths as well as beneficial falsehoods, it seems clear that he is not disposed toward a view of knowledge that ascribes greater value to knowledge than what its components provide. But what should we think? Well, if there is nothing about knowledge that makes it especially well suited to satisfying our interests then it would not withstand experimental testing. And this is exactly what we can find with cases of lucky true beliefs, useful illusions, and even some empirically adequate false beliefs. If there was an increased instrumental value in having knowledge as opposed to an empirically adequate belief then this difference should be observable in experience. However, in the cases mentioned previously there is no noticeable difference between our experiences when we have knowledge compared to when we have numerous other epistemic states. More specifically, by definition, an empirically adequate belief will not conflict with experience. This means that there is no phenomenological difference between having knowledge and having an empirically adequate belief. In fact, it is possible that knowledge can be much worse than having an empirically adequate false belief or even just a false belief. This is because having knowledge of a harmful truth

⁴ One may argue that the other parts of knowledge (besides true belief) are more valuable than we think, and thus our assessment of the value of knowledge could be correct even if truth is less valuable than normally thought. But if truth does not provide a considerable amount of value to knowledge, then it seems like we have an extremely misguided conception of knowledge. It would be strange to think that justification is what really makes knowledge valuable (or any of the other components of knowledge besides truth). Instead, it seems we value knowledge because knowledge "gets things right" in a way we find helpful (and hence valuable). So any counterexample along these lines would require substantial argumentation to be reconciled with our everyday understanding of knowledge. Because of this it seems fair to place the burden of proof on the objector to explain how such an account could be palatable.

is much more detrimental to the instrumental value of knowledge than if we instead had an empirically adequate false belief. On the other hand, if the value of knowledge is precisely the sum of its parts then the implications from the cases cited above are not surprising. We would expect for the value of knowledge to be determined by how much value is added by justification, belief, truth, etc. Since the view that the value of knowledge is greater than that of the sum of its parts is unpromising, we should instead find that the value of the whole of knowledge does not possess additional value as knowledge. This leaves us with the view that the value of knowledge results from the exact sum of its parts.

This can be summed up as:

- i. The value of knowledge arises either from a) the exact sum of its parts or b) the sum of its parts plus additional value once the status of knowledge is attained.
- ii. If the value of knowledge arises from the sum of its parts plus additional value once the status of knowledge is attained, then this additional value would be observable when knowledge is compared to the isolated value of its components and other epistemic states.
- iii. Comparing the value of knowledge to the isolated value of its components and other epistemic states (in the form of true beliefs, empirically adequate beliefs, etc.) does not show any greater value for knowledge.
- iv. $\therefore \sim$ The value of knowledge arises from the sum of its parts plus additional value once the status of knowledge is attained
- v. \therefore The value of knowledge results from the exact sum of its parts. (iv, i)

Because we are in a phenomenologically identical situation concerning how the world relates to us when we have knowledge and empirically adequate beliefs, there is no reason to think that the status of knowledge adds any value.

(2) is a commonly held and largely uncontroversial claim about the nature of knowledge.

The basic argument for (3) would be something like the following:

- I. True belief is not intrinsically valuable.
- II. True belief produces proper action.
- III. Proper action is instrumentally valuable.
- IV. \therefore True belief is valuable only because it produces proper action.
- V. \therefore Since true belief is valuable only because it produces proper action, true belief is less valuable than we normally think.

This argument is similar to what Nietzsche describes in GM III S.24 when he requires truth to be “experimentally called into question”. Since we desire things that are useful in promoting life and power, the same should hold for our beliefs (regardless of whether they are true or false). So long as truth results in proper action it is valuable. Furthermore, in discussing GS 344 it was decided that there is no reason to avoid false beliefs that prove instrumentally valuable and also that truth should not be held as an absolute good. Within this framework (I), (II), and (III) should be acceptable premises. This suggests that instead of being an absolute good, the merit of truth hinges on its ability to increase power and promote life (i.e. its practical worth). This conclusion is adequate to establish that truth is less valuable than we typically think.

But in addition to the above argument, it seems that there are obvious instances where true belief is not at all useful to us. There are also cases where false belief can be just as useful, or even more useful, than true belief. Because of this, we need some further reason why true belief is more valuable than false belief. In the absence of any such reason we are left without any grounds to value true belief any higher than false beliefs that produce proper action, and thus we also lack reason to value knowledge as highly as is normally attributed.

One example where truth is not valuable would be a case where an acquaintance is moving away (so that you will never see each other again), and tells you that they detest you as a person. Since you’ve only been friendly with this individual, and you never had any prior reason to think they disliked you, you find this hurtful. In such a situation having a true belief does not seem any more valuable than having a false belief. It is certainly not of more practical value to believe the truth in this case. If you continued to think this person liked you (or was at least indifferent) then it wouldn’t prove harmful to maintain this belief. Especially since this acquaintance is never to be seen again. This seems to be a counterexample to any view that would hold truth to be an absolute value.

Another, stronger, version of this case has been discussed by Richard Feldman. He says the following:

“If at the end of my life I learned that my friends actually didn’t much like me but instead were on a lifelong mission to act as if they did, I’d be disappointed. I’d feel as if I’ve been duped, even though my so-called friends actually did do all the seemingly friendly things I thought they did.” (Feldman, 2000, p. 49)

In such a case it would certainly be unsettling to learn that your friends have only been acting friendly and never really liked you. However, when giving this analogy Feldman

asserts that he would rather have knowledge than be right by accident, even if he can't say why knowledge would be more valuable. While it may be accurate that Feldman would rather have knowledge than be right by accident (or presumably maintain a false belief), that says nothing about why knowledge is valuable. All that speaks to is a personal preference of Feldman's. Putting Feldman's partiality aside, it is difficult to say why we would prefer truth "at any price".

Of course, there are certainly numerous cases where we prefer knowledge over either true belief or empirically adequate false belief, but that doesn't provide us with any reason to privilege knowledge the way it traditionally has been. This "will to truth", as exemplified by Feldman, is something that Nietzsche would recognize as an instantiation of the ascetic ideal. As such, the will to truth is something to be avoided as anti-life (BG S.333, GS S.110).

From this example we can see the potential for false beliefs to be helpful and true beliefs to be harmful at numerous points throughout our lives. Furthermore, it has been previously suggested that neither truth nor knowledge is intrinsically valuable, and that they are valuable only to the degree they serve to increase power and life. In addition to the possibility that truth is valuable, we have also discussed cases where truth is not valuable, truth is harmful, and false beliefs are helpful. At this point we should be secure in maintaining (3) in the above argument.

Having defended (1) and (3), and since (2) is relatively uncontroversial, this leaves us with an argument that concludes that knowledge is not as valuable as is normally thought. Furthermore, the argument for this conclusion was established by directly comparing the value of knowledge to the value of true belief and empirically adequate belief. Both true belief and empirically adequate belief were demonstrated to be of equal or greater instrumental value than knowledge in at least some cases. This not only supports the view that knowledge is less valuable than we have typically thought, but also supports my thesis that knowledge is not of greater value than true belief or empirically adequate belief. With this, it appears that (b) also fails to lend adequate support to the Standard View.

IV. (C)

Having analyzed both (a) and (b), we have seen that it is unlikely that we will discover any superior value of knowledge by appealing to the practical value of knowledge or knowledge's possession of true belief. Let us turn our attention to (c) in order to determine whether this argument can support the Standard View.

In essence, (c) holds that knowledge is more valuable than true belief or empirically adequate belief because knowledge is more likely to preserve true beliefs over time. While knowledge is valuable for producing true beliefs, it is one (or more) of the additional components of knowledge that give it its superior value. This was presented previously as:

1. True belief is of great instrumental value.
2. The means of gaining and maintaining true beliefs are of great instrumental value.
3. True belief is a component of knowledge.
4. Other aspects of knowledge (i.e. stability, resistance to irrationality, etc.) are a means of gaining and maintaining true beliefs, and thus increase the overall value of knowledge as much, or more than, true belief.
5. The value of knowledge is greater than that of mere true belief or empirically adequate belief.

KNOWLEDGE IS MORE STABLE

Some argue that it is particularly that aspect of knowledge that allows knowledge to persist over time that gives it the comparative edge over true belief alone. For example, Plato presents this view in the *Meno*:

Socrates: And as long as he has the right opinion about that of which the other has knowledge, he will not be a worse guide than the one who knows, and he has a true opinion, though not knowledge.

Meno: In no way worse.

Socrates: So true opinion is in no way a worse guide for correct action than knowledge. It is this that we omitted in our investigation of the nature of virtue, when we said that only knowledge can guide correct action, for true opinion can do so also.

Meno: So it seems.

Socrates: So correct opinion is no less useful than knowledge?

Meno: Yes, to this extent, Socrates. But the man who has knowledge will always succeed, whereas he who has true opinion will only succeed at times.

Socrates: How do you mean? Will he who had the right opinion not always succeed, as long as his opinion is right?

Meno: That appears to be so of necessity, and it makes me wonder, Socrates, this being the case, why knowledge is prized far more highly than right opinion, and why they are different. (Meno, 97b–97d)

With this we find Meno sharing our uncertainty regarding the comparative value of knowledge. Like us, he has recognized the value of true belief and the problem of distinguishing any greater value for knowledge. So long as we have right opinion (aka true belief) it seems that we are just as well off as if we had knowledge. Following this exchange, Plato (via Socrates) offers this further assessment:

Socrates: For true opinions, as long as they remain, are a fine thing and all they do is good, but they are not willing to remain long, and they escape from a man's mind, so that they are not worth much until one ties them down by [giving] an account of the reason why. And that, Meno, my friend, is recollection, as we previously agreed. After they are tied down, in the first place they become knowledge, and then they remain in place. That is why knowledge is prized higher than correct opinion, and knowledge differs from correct opinion in being tied down.

Meno: Yes, by Zeus, Socrates, it seems to be something like that. (Meno, 97e–98a)

What Plato here suggests is that knowledge is of greater value than mere true belief because knowledge is more stable than mere true belief. Unlike true belief, knowledge gives us a security that is absent when we only have a true belief. True beliefs can be fleeting, knowledge will be stationary. So if we know which horse will win a race then we will be able to pick the winning horse each time we try. If we have a mere true belief about which horse will win the race then we might pick the winner this time, but we are fortunate that our belief about the winning horse happens to be true. We just got lucky in having that particular belief at that particular time. In the future we may not be able to pick the winning horse again if all we had was a true belief and not knowledge. In this case, as in others, we will usually prefer the stability of knowledge over the vicissitudes of fate that arise from hoping our beliefs are true.

However, this is not always the case. While it may not be prudent to rely on having true beliefs that are not knowledge, this does not mean that knowledge will necessarily be any more reliable. It is plausible that much knowledge is just as erratic as true belief given how easily we forget things we once knew, our susceptibility to loss of

knowledge due to brain injury, or the possibility of cognitive degeneration. In all these ways knowledge that we once had can be lost. Furthermore, it may be possible to be very good at forming true beliefs that are not knowledge. People who have good instincts or demonstrate great natural ability or insight may not rely on knowledge, but instead act on true beliefs that seem to just come to them.

So is knowledge really more stable than mere true belief? Timothy Williamson seems to think so. His view is that if your cognitive faculties are in good order, you will be more likely to believe p tomorrow if you know p than if you just truly believe p (Williamson, 2000, p. 79). Just having a true belief that is not knowledge opens one up to the possibility that further future evidence will cause one to reject one's true belief. This is because a true belief that is not knowledge will most likely be based on false beliefs that, when recognized as false, will serve to undermine a true belief. If, however, one has knowledge there will not be any undermining due to new evidence. It is also important to note that Williamson holds that there cannot be knowledge that is essentially based on a false belief (Williamson, p. 78). While Williamson does recognize that "we do not value knowledge more than true belief for instant gratification", if knowledge is more stable than true belief in the long run we may have found good justification for the Standard View. What we value about knowledge over other epistemic states is knowledge's ability to reliably give us true beliefs about the world.

Unfortunately, it is not clear that this view is satisfactory. First of all, while it may be the case that knowledge will sometimes give us more stable true beliefs over time, it is possible that our practical interests will often place demands on us to form true beliefs that fail to qualify as knowledge. Of Williamson's defense of the Standard View Kvanvig says that "it is true that discovery of evidence is a primary way in which fixation of belief occurs, but it is also well known that the importance of belief for survival and well-being depends on other factors for belief formation as well" (Kvanvig, 2003, p. 14). Kvanvig points out that oftentimes the formation of hasty generalizations or reliance on false positives can be useful for the survival of organisms with properly functioning cognitive systems. As living organisms our cognitive faculties have priorities other than the exclusive pursuit of truth. Oftentimes it is important for us to make snap decisions based on a belief or to maintain a belief in spite of contradictory evidence. So even if there were a theoretical basis holding knowledge to be of absolute value (such as the stability knowledge offers), such benefits are not reflected in the practical and comparative value of knowledge.

Another point that Kvanvig makes about Williamson's proposal is that there does not seem to be any difference in retention between knowledge and true beliefs fixed by evidence. While Williamson may be right that knowledge is not susceptible to being undermined by future evidence in the way that mere true belief would be, it is still possible for knowledge to be undermined in ways that true belief may not be. Kvanvig gives the example where one's mathematical knowledge could be undermined by the testimony of a renowned mathematician. If a renowned mathematician claimed to have discovered the falsity of a mathematical truth that I believe to be true, that would undermine my knowledge. However, despite this I could retain my true belief regardless of the testimony offered by mathematicians and other leading experts. This shows at least one way that true belief can be more stable than knowledge.

A similar case is inspired by Gettier cases. Suppose that you are good friends with Farmer Brown, and you know that he has a barn on his farm. However, unbeknownst to you, the other folk in the area have begun replacing their barns with barn facades. While driving through the countryside one day you drive past many fields that have the barn facades. You also pass by Farmer Brown's field containing his real barn. Because many barns in the area have been replaced by barn facades it would seem that you no longer know that Farmer Brown has a real barn in his field. But you would continue to maintain your true belief that Farmer Brown has a real barn in his field despite not knowing that he has a real barn. This shows another way that true beliefs can be more stable than knowledge.

Between cases where true belief remains more stable than knowledge and cases where true belief serves our practical interests better than knowledge, it appears that knowledge does not gain any edge in value from claims of stability.

RESISTANCE TO IRRATIONALITY

Another aspect of knowledge that may give it greater comparative value is its resistance to irrationality. When we compare the value of knowledge to a mere true belief or empirically adequate belief it seems correct to attribute a degree of rationality that is not required by other epistemic states. Williamson mentions this benefit of knowledge when he argues that believing adds nothing mental to knowing. According to Williamson, "knowing *p* excludes: believing *p* solely for sufficiently confused and irrational reasons" (Williamson, p. 57). Now it is easy to see how this could be perceived as giving knowledge superior value to other epistemic states. Irrationality, if engaged in frequently or at the wrong time, is liable to generate all sorts of negative

outcomes that are best avoided. Because of this, if knowledge excludes irrationality then that would certainly increase the value of knowledge over true belief or empirically adequate belief.

But before this can establish that knowledge is more valuable than true belief and empirically adequate belief Williamson must first overcome a couple of objections. One comes from the possibility that knowledge can be based on a false premise, and the second arises from the potential to have knowledge even if your environment is rife with counterevidence of which you are unaware.

KNOWLEDGE FROM A FALSE PREMISE

First of all, in making his claim that knowledge excludes irrationality Williamson assumes that “a true belief essentially based on false beliefs does not constitute knowledge” (p. 78). Most likely this results from his disposition to want to avoid having knowledge for “confused and irrational reasons”. If our knowledge can be based on falsehoods then (depending on the falsehoods) that could potentially conflict with Williamson’s view that knowledge requires rational belief (p. 57).

While initially attractive this assumption that knowledge cannot be based on falsehoods is not unchallenged. Both Ted Warfield and Branden Fitelson have offered counterexamples to the view that knowledge cannot be based on falsehood. From Warfield we get the example where:

I have a 7pm meeting and extreme confidence in the accuracy of my fancy watch. Having lost track of the time and wanting to arrive on time for the meeting, I look carefully at my watch. I reason: ‘It is exactly 2:58pm; therefore I am not late for my 7pm meeting’. Again I know my conclusion, but as it happens it’s exactly 2:56pm, not 2:58pm. (Warfield, p. 408)

This shows us a case that seems to clearly be knowledge that is based on a falsehood. It would certainly be strange to deny that I know that ‘I am not late for the meeting’, and the belief on which I base that knowledge is indeed false. Still, if this is not compelling enough a more robust example is presented by Fitelson.

I have a 7pm meeting and extreme confidence in the accuracy of both my fancy watch and the Campanile clock. Having lost track of the time and wanting to arrive on time for the meeting, I look out of my office window (from which the Campanile clock is almost always visible). As luck would have it (owing, say, to the fluke occurrence of a

delivery truck passing by my window), the Campanile clock is obscured from view at that instant (which is exactly 2:56pm). So, instead, one minute later, I look carefully at my watch, which (because my watch happens to be running one minute slow) reads exactly 2:56pm. I reason: 'It is exactly 2:56pm (p) therefore (q) I am not late for my 7pm meeting'. Thus (supposing Warfield is right), I have inferential knowledge that q, based on a relevant premise p, which is a falsehood. Now for the twist. If my belief that p had been true, then (we can plausibly suppose) it would have been based on my reading (at exactly 2:56pm) of the Campanile clock, which would have read exactly 2:56. Unbeknownst to me, however, the Campanile clock has been (and would have been) stuck at 2:56 for some time.

With this example we have knowledge that is counterfactually dependent on a false premise. If it hadn't been for the truck blocking the Campanile clock then it could not have been known that 'I am not late for my 7pm meeting' because looking at a stopped clock cannot serve as the basis for knowledge of the time. As it happened in the example the Campanile clock was blocked, so knowledge was gained by looking at the fancy watch. However, the essential premise for the knowledge (i.e. that the fancy watch read exactly 2:56pm) happened to be false. This indicates that it is possible to have knowledge that results from falsehood. If so, then the alleged benefit of knowledge in resisting irrationality is much less compelling. Even though gaining knowledge from a falsehood may not fall into irrationality, there is still something alarming about the implication that the basis for some of our knowledge can be much less epistemically virtuous than thought at first glance. For this reason the cases offered by Warfield and Fitelson give us reason to doubt the superior value of knowledge to ensure rational belief.

KNOWLEDGE DESPITE ENVIRONMENTAL COUNTEREVIDENCE

We find another problematic assumption for Williamson when he claims that "a true belief not essentially based on false beliefs still fails to constitute knowledge, because misleading evidence against that true belief is rife in one's environment, although one happens to be unaware of it oneself" (Williamson, p. 79). Like knowledge based on falsehood, if we have knowledge that is in constant peril of being lost due to rampant counterevidence, then it seems irrational to have that knowledge even if we are lucky enough to avoid encountering the counterevidence.

Again this is an initially appealing view. However, under scrutiny this assumption does not hold up as well as one might imagine. In his (1992) Mylan Engel offers a compelling reason to think that knowledge can be compatible with evidential luck. For

this, Engel focuses on an example first presented by Gilbert Harman in which epistemic luck is meant to prevent the subject from having knowledge due to the readily available evidence that, if acquired by the subject, would undermine knowledge. Harman's example goes like this:

A political leader is assassinated. His associates, fearing a coup, decide to pretend that the bullet hit someone else. On Nationwide television they announce that an assassination attempt has failed to kill the leader but has killed a secret service man by mistake. However, before the announcement is made, an enterprising reporter on the scene telephones the real story to his newspaper, which has included the story in its final edition. Jill buys a copy of that paper and reads the story of the assassination. What she reads is true, and so are her assumptions about how the story came to be in the paper. (Harman, p. 143)

What Harman intends to establish with this example is that Jill does not know that the political leader has been assassinated because everyone else has heard about the falsified television announcement. The idea here is that Jill should not have knowledge because she lacks evidence that everyone else has. All around her is undermining evidence. If she were to turn on the television or become aware of the cover-up story some other way then she wouldn't have knowledge, so (it is claimed) she cannot have knowledge in this case. Now, this scenario fits perfectly with what Williamson says in the above quote. Jill has a true belief that is not essentially based on false beliefs, and this true belief (supposedly) does not count as knowledge due to misleading evidence in her environment of which she is completely unaware. So if any case fits Williamson's claim that knowledge is incompatible with an environment rife with unknown misleading evidence, it would be this one.

But does Jill really lack knowledge? Engel thinks not. He says "it is not at all implausible that a person should know just because he is in a different evidential situation than everyone else" and that "sometimes a person knows, where everyone else lacks knowledge, not because he has more evidence, but because he has different evidence" (Engel, p. 66). This certainly seems correct. There is nothing strange about thinking that one can know something simply because one happens to gain better evidence than others.

So why does it seem intuitively correct to say that Jill lacks knowledge? Engel explains this as a result of how Jill came to have the evidence she has. In the example, Jill is lucky to have avoided the false reports and instead picked up the only newspaper with veritable evidence. It is the fact that she was lucky to come to have the evidence that

makes us question whether or not she has knowledge. However, there is nothing incompatible between evidential luck and knowledge. Just think, even if you happen to be evidentially lucky to witness something, *you still have knowledge of what you witness*. In this way luck does not prevent knowledge. Now, even though we think that Jill is lucky to have the evidence she gained, that does not mean that her evidence does not give her knowledge that the political leader was assassinated.

In sum, it is not at all obvious that we cannot have knowledge just because our environment happens to be full of misleading evidence. So long as we remain unaware of the misleading evidence, and base our knowledge on good evidence, then it is very plausible that we can still have knowledge. If correct, this would be another blow to the idea that knowledge is of superior value to true belief and empirically adequate belief. By being subject to evidential luck in such a manner we can see that whether or not we have knowledge can be an uncertain and fragile thing. Given the pervasive influence of luck in gaining and maintaining knowledge, and the fact that we can have knowledge in spite of an epistemically hostile environment, the purported superiority of knowledge to mere true belief and empirically adequate belief seems inflated. So yet again we have reason to be skeptical of the Standard View. This conclusion, in addition to the other arguments of this chapter, offers enough resistance to premise (4) of (c) that we shouldn't accept the superior value of knowledge without substantially more compelling reasons than those offered by Williamson.

CONCLUSION

To this point I have argued that knowledge is not of greater value than true belief or empirically adequate belief. I first considered an argument for the conclusion that knowledge is of greater value than true belief or empirically adequate belief because knowledge is essential for proper action. To this I offered two counterexamples that show how it can be proper to engage in both action and assertion without knowledge. Additionally, I argued that by accepting Pragmatic Encroachment we cannot avoid accepting external world skepticism. Given such a result we should resist a connection between practical interests and knowledge. For these two reasons I concluded that (a) failed to successfully support the Standard View.

From there I looked to an argument which sought the value of knowledge from the fact that true belief is an essential component of knowledge. However, upon closer examination the value of truth was found to be inadequate to perform its essential role in the argument. This is because of the possibility that some falsehoods can be more valuable than truth, and because some truths can be inherently harmful. After arguing that the value of truth is less than we normally think I went on to argue that this would likewise negatively influence the value of knowledge. For this I argued that the value of knowledge is exactly the sum of the value of its constituent parts. Having that, if true belief is an essential part of knowledge, and true belief is less valuable than we normally think, then knowledge is less valuable than we normally think. Once we see that knowledge is less valuable than we normally think the superior value of knowledge is threatened. Thus, (b) does not give us any reason to think that knowledge is more valuable than empirically adequate belief.

Lastly I considered an argument where factors such as stability and resistance to irrationality gave knowledge its superior value. But it was first objected that the stability of true beliefs over time does not give knowledge its superior value. This is because it is sometimes more valuable for us to quickly form beliefs in situations where knowledge is either not possible or would come too slowly. Also, it was suggested that knowledge is not any more stable than other epistemic factors. In fact, new counterevidence could keep one from having knowledge where a true belief or empirically adequate belief would persist. So it seems that stability does not give knowledge an edge in value. Another factor that might give knowledge its superior value is its resistance to irrationality. If knowledge is more resistant to irrationality then it seems like that would be a valuable thing to pursue. However, counterexamples were discussed that give us reason to think that knowledge can be essentially based on a falsehood, and that we can have knowledge in environments

which are fraught with counterevidence of which we are unaware. If this is accurate, then knowledge does not present us with much meaningful resistance to irrationality after all. If we can have knowledge from false beliefs, and if our knowledge can be had despite pervasive undermining evidence, then there is little about knowledge itself that excludes irrationality. This means that like (a) and (b), (c) is also insufficient to support the Standard View.

Through this analysis I hoped to shed some light on the goals and subject matter of epistemology. If successful, this project should have an impact on how epistemology is conceived. Up to this point in the philosophical tradition, epistemology has been narrowly defined as the study of knowledge and has held a prominent position as one of the major topics studied by philosophers. Consequently, much time and energy has been spent trying to determine the nature of knowledge because knowledge has been viewed as something extremely valuable. At the same time there has been little work done to justify the assumed value of knowledge. But once we begin to question the value of knowledge we see that expending so much effort on the study of knowledge is misguided. I have considered three arguments for the superior value of knowledge and have concluded that they all fail to adequately support the Standard View. Given this, we face a choice. We can either abandon the epistemological enterprise as it has been traditionally conceived, or we can redefine the subject matter of epistemology.

If we are not disposed to choose the first option and abandon epistemology altogether, then we must decide how to best rework the central aims of epistemological inquiry. One possibility is to listen to Kvanvig when he says that “epistemologists should quit contemplating the nature and extent of knowledge as much as they do, and focus instead on the broader question of the nature of exemplary cognition, constrained perhaps by the possibilities of such for us, and the intellectual virtues such as understanding and wisdom that make for it” (Kvanvig J. L., 1998). Were we to limit our theorizing about knowledge in this way and instead pursue broader epistemic goods like Kvanvig suggests, then we might be able to better understand what exactly those goods are and why we value them. But regardless of the path we choose, unless some compelling defense of the superior value of knowledge comes forth, we should resist the Standard View and treat knowledge as a much more humble and imperfect epistemic good.

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VITA

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