

Value Monism in Epistemology

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I

Here is a little story. It may not be true, but it may still be informative.

Once upon a time, analytic epistemologists thought that there was one significant concept of epistemic evaluation. The epistemologists had their own pet names for this concept. Some called it "justification," others called it "rationality"; some used the term "warrant"; others spoke of things being "evident," while still others formulated their views in terms of a "right to be sure." There were still more names than these being used, but the epistemologists figured they were all talking about the same thing. To simplify, I'll stick with the term "justification."

The epistemologists differed about more than their favorite name for justification. They held significantly different views about the nature of justification and the conditions under which a belief is justified as well. Some thought that for a belief to be justified it had to be based on a proper foundation, others that it had to cohere with the rest of the believer's beliefs, while others took being justified to require having the right sort of cause. Many held that justification was a matter of fulfilling epistemic obligations. Still others held that justification's essence was reliability, while others proclaimed that proper function was the key. And these were only the more widely held positions. As you might imagine, the advocates of the various contending views did their share of bickering over who was right.

"Why then," you might fairly wonder, "did the epistemologists think they were arguing about the same thing?" Because they all agreed about knowledge, and each assumed that what he or she was talking about was what made for the difference between mere true belief and knowledge. We now know things turned out to be a

little more complicated. Edmund Gettier cooked up some nice examples of justified true beliefs that were not knowledge.¹ But even after Gettier had produced his examples, the epistemologists still felt quite sure that justification played a crucial role in knowledge, even if more was involved. So they went on developing their accounts, and responding to criticisms and criticizing the accounts that others developed in their turn. On and on they went, criticizing and responding and refining, and refining and criticizing and responding.

Then something started to change. Perhaps it was because no one managed to produce a nice easy definition of knowledge. But for whatever reason, the epistemologists stopped worrying quite so much about knowledge. They started to realize that every one of them (or nearly every one—some poor souls maybe did come up entirely empty-handed) had latched onto something interesting and important and valuable, even if at most one of them had managed to identify what was involved in knowing. They began to think, "Having a proper foundation *and* reliability *and* cohering *and* functioning properly *and* even fulfilling one's epistemic obligations are all valuable and important after all. None of these concepts is perfectly clear; they all require more clarification and explication and analysis. So why fight. There is plenty of work for all of us to do, each on his or her own favorite concept."

And so ended the terrible, contentious time when epistemologists assumed that there was only one important concept of epistemic evaluation and endlessly fought about the correct analysis of this one concept. A fine new day of pluralistic tolerance dawned. There still were clouds, of course. A few who had a taste for it continued to argue over who had discovered what was required to turn true belief into knowledge. But for the most part, the epistemologists from each of the various camps happily worked away at their own favorite concept and watched with interest as the others worked away at theirs. Each camp was secure in the knowledge that it was working at understanding something important and valuable. There was no longer any need to feel threatened by the successes of those in other camps.

The end.

II

What about the real epistemological world? Do we now live in the fine pluralistic times envisioned at the end of my little story? Not really—or better, it depends on exactly what sort of pluralism is at issue. The problem is that pluralism regarding concepts of evaluation is compatible with monism at a deeper level—the level of one's theory of value. Consider a simple hedonistic version of utilitarianism: Pleasure is good, and it is the only good thing, while pain is bad. Pain and pleasure are negative and positive values along the same dimension. The utility of an action is a sum of the action's positive and negative consequences, that is, the pain and pleasure caused by the action. One is morally obliged to maximize utility, and any act that produces less than maximal utility is wrong. It seems that hedonistic utilitarians clearly accept a monistic theory of value, since they hold that pleasure is the one good thing. The contrasting pluralistic theory of value would hold, as G. E. Moore held,² that there are various independently good things, for example, knowledge, aesthetic

appreciation, and pleasure. However, as we all know, despite their acceptance of a monistic theory of the good, hedonists can easily generate a plurality of concepts of moral evaluation on the basis of their one good thing: An action is *objectively wrong* just in case it produces less utility than some alternative action would have produced. An action is *subjectively wrong* just in case it did not seem, from the agent's perspective, to be an action that would have produced at least as much utility as any alternative action. An action is *blameworthy* if the utility of blaming the agent for performing that action is higher than the utility of not blaming the agent. An action is *prudent* if and only if it in fact yields at least as much utility, for the agent, as any alternative. And so on.

It is not too hard to find epistemologists acknowledging that there are a number of different concepts of epistemic evaluation.³ Although they may not be quite so accepting of concepts other than their own favorites as my little story suggests, there is clearly a recognition that a fair number of these concepts are important and worthy of investigation. Nevertheless, I do not think that there is much question that the vast majority of epistemologists accept a theory of epistemic value very similar to the hedonistic theory just described. They take truth (or true belief) to be the only intrinsic epistemic good and falsity (or false belief) to be the only thing that is intrinsically bad. I would not need to be much of a scholar to put together an impressive string of quotations to back up my claim. So excuse me if I offer only the following representative expression of the sort of epistemic value monism I am talking about. It is taken from Larry Bonjour.

What then is the differentia which distinguishes epistemic justification, the species of justification appropriate to knowledge, from these other species of justification? The answer is to be found, I submit, by reflecting on the implicit rationale of the concept of knowledge itself. What after all is the point of such a concept, and what role is epistemic justification supposed to play in it? Why should we, as cognitive beings, *care* whether our beliefs are epistemically justified? Why is such justification something to be sought and valued?

Once the question is posed in this way, the following answer seems obviously correct, at least in first approximation. What makes us cognitive beings at all is our capacity for belief, and the goal of our distinctively cognitive endeavors is *truth*: We want our beliefs to correctly and accurately depict the world. . . . The basic role of justification is that of a *means* to truth, a more directly attainable mediating link between our subjective starting point and our objective goal. . . . If epistemic justification were not conducive to truth in this way, if finding epistemically justified beliefs did not substantially increase the likelihood of finding true ones, then epistemic justification would be irrelevant to our main cognitive goal and of dubious worth. It is only if we have some reason for thinking that epistemic justification constitutes a path to truth that we as cognitive beings have any motive for preferring epistemically justified beliefs to epistemically unjustified ones. Epistemic justification is therefore in the final analysis only an instrumental value, not an intrinsic one.⁴

Oops! I said I would provide only one representative quote from a host of possibilities, and then it seems I can't manage to pick one that expresses the view I'm after. Bonjour here commits himself to the claim that truth is of epistemic value and the claim that justification has value only in virtue of leading to the truth, but Bonjour

doesn't say that truth is the *only* thing of epistemic value. For all he says in this passage, he could perfectly well hold that there are many things in addition to truth that are intrinsic epistemic goods. It looks like the passage from Bonjour does not illustrate value monism, and supposing that I was at least right about its being representative of the view that is common among epistemologists, it seems to provide no reason to think that there is any widely shared commitment to monism.

Let's distinguish epistemology proper and broad epistemology. Epistemology proper is the easy one to identify. It is concerned with knowledge, and more specifically, the evaluative component of knowledge. So if justification is evaluative and it is what distinguishes knowledge from mere true belief, then justification falls within the scope of epistemology proper. I'm not sure it is possible to delimit broad epistemology precisely, but I can give an example of something that falls within broad epistemology but outside epistemology proper. In a couple of books, Richard Foley has examined what he calls epistemic rationality.⁵ "Foley rationality," as some others have taken to calling his target concept, is a matter of believing in a way that would stand up to one's own critical reflection or, as Foley sometimes explains, believing in accord with one's own most deeply held epistemic standards. Foley does not claim that epistemic rationality is either necessary or sufficient for knowledge, and he seems to be right about this. Yet, when one classifies a belief as Foley rational, one is clearly evaluating that belief, and, I think it is safe to say, evaluating it epistemically rather than prudentially or morally or in some other way. So Foley rationality provides us with one example of something that falls outside epistemology proper, but within broad epistemology. It is not too hard to think of other things that fall only within broad epistemology—indeed, that is where the various sorts of justification will end up that turn out not to be involved in knowledge that I mentioned in my little story. What is hard, as I've already admitted, is specifying what distinguishes broad epistemic evaluation from other sorts of evaluations. Perhaps this indicates that the things that fall under broad epistemology are linked only by a family resemblance. Or perhaps they do not even share that much, being linked only by the fact that they were once, mistakenly, thought to have been a component in knowledge. Nevertheless, I hope it is clear enough what I mean by broad epistemology.

Now personally, I suspect that epistemologists have a kind of unthinking tendency to assume that truth is the only epistemic good even within broad epistemology. I will not attempt to substantiate that suspicion, however, for I think that deep down we do all recognize that truth is not the only thing of epistemic value. Here is an easy demonstration. Take your favorite example of a well-established empirical theory, a theory you believe that we know. Throw in all the evidence on the basis of which we accept that theory. Depending on the theory you selected, all this will likely add up to a substantial number of beliefs. Now, compare this set of beliefs with an equal number of beliefs about relatively simple arithmetic sums and about assorted elements of one's current stream of consciousness. I suspect that most of us would want to say that the first set of beliefs is better, epistemically better, than the second set. But the two sets contain the same number of true beliefs. And so, to the extent that we are inclined to say that these sets differ with respect to broad epistemic value, it would seem that we are committed to saying that truth is not the only thing that has broad epistemic value.⁶

But that's broad epistemology. When I selected the passage from BonJour, I had epistemology proper in mind, and when it comes to epistemology proper, I think the tendency to hold that truth is the only epistemic good becomes very much stronger. BonJour could not have provided a much stronger statement of the view that as far as justification is concerned, truth is the only epistemic good. He holds justification to be of value solely as an instrument for the acquisition of truth. This brings him nearly all the way to a version of value monism for epistemology. During the perhaps mythic age that Gettier brought to an end, when it was universally assumed that knowledge is justified true belief, he would have been all the way to value monism. After Gettier, it was clear that something more was required for knowledge than justified true belief, so it is possible that something other than justification adds value to true belief. But I think I can safely set that possibility aside, at least for the time being, since justification has always been taken to be the significant evaluative element within knowledge.⁷ And so I think the passage from BonJour does represent the sort of value monism I wish to examine. And to the extent that this statement by BonJour and the numerous similar statements that could easily be found in the writings of other epistemologists have long been accepted without question, I think it is safe to go so far as to say that the assumption that truth is the only epistemic good dominates epistemology proper.

III

So where does this leave us? I have made a couple of distinctions:

- (a) monism versus pluralism with respect to concepts versus value
- (b) epistemology proper versus broad epistemology

And I have made three claims:

- (i) Contemporary analytic epistemology has come to accept pluralism with respect to concepts.
- (ii) At least as far as epistemology proper is concerned, epistemology is dominated by value monism.
- (iii) The sort of value monism that dominates epistemology proper takes true belief to be the one and only epistemic good.

I realize that I have not gone to any great lengths to explain my two distinctions, but then, they are fairly straightforward. And I confess I've done next to nothing to explain or defend my three claims, but that is because I don't believe they're at all controversial. So far so good. Now let me add one more trivial claim:

Knowledge is epistemically better than mere true belief.

Now, I'm afraid, we have a problem, or, to be more precise, contemporary epistemologists have a problem. Personally, I've got no problem, but that's because I'm not a monist with respect to epistemic value. What is the problem supposed to be? It is that knowledge *cannot* be epistemically better than mere true belief IF true belief is the only epistemic good. The point seems so simple and clear that I'm not sure

how to go about arguing for it, yet it does not seem to have been recognized. Indeed, far from being recognized, as the quote from BonJour illustrates, the general view seems to be that the rationale of the concept of knowledge requires that justification has value merely as an instrument to the truth. But certainly a central, and I would think nonnegotiable, element of our concept of knowledge is that it is of great epistemic value, and, more specifically, that it is more valuable than mere true belief. But it simply cannot be if truth is the only epistemic good. When one has a true belief, one has already attained the only thing of epistemic value—one's belief is as epistemically good as beliefs can get. No matter what other characteristics one's true belief might have, these characteristics cannot add any additional epistemic value, for we are supposing that truth is the *only* epistemic good, and the belief in question is a belief that is true! The belief cannot be true two times or three times over; it is true and that is that.

IV

Before trying to go any further along this line of argument, there is something I should try to clear up. It should already be obvious that my focus in this paper is on questions regarding epistemic good or value. Claims that something is good or valuable, or that it is better or more valuable than something else, can be unclear. Particularly when they are made in an unfamiliar context—and we really are not used to focusing explicitly on questions regarding epistemic value—such claims can leave us wondering about a number of questions, for example: "From what perspective is the evaluation being made? For whom is this thing supposed to be good? Who values this more than that? Are we talking about intrinsic goods or instrumental goods?" How, then, do I intend my claims about what is epistemically good or valuable to be understood?

One way in which claims that a thing is good or valuable can be intended is as applying to some particular person, as when we say that something is good *for* someone.⁸ When we say that something is good for a person, we ordinarily mean more than merely that the person in question desires or wants or prefers or values the thing. We recognize the possibility that the actual desires, wants, preferences, or values of the person can be deficient in some way. A very simple way in which they might be deficient is by not extending to things that are necessary for, or highly efficient means to, the things the person actually desires or wants or prefers or values. Another simple way in which the actual desires, wants, preferences, or values of a person might be deficient is by being inconsistent. A person might, for example, want two things that are, as a practical matter, incompatible with each other. If the person wanted one of these things very much more than the other, we would be unlikely to say that the thing the person wants much less is good for her; other things being equal, we would probably say the thing she desires more is good for her. Yet another way in which actual desires, wants, preferences, or values can be deficient is by having been formed on the basis of an incomplete or mistaken understanding of the facts. A person might, for example, want to eat a rare steak, not realizing that it is infected with mad cow disease. Given that the actual desires, wants, preferences, or values of a person can

be deficient in at least these ways, perhaps when we assert that something is good for a person we mean to assert that the person would desire, want, prefer, or value the thing in some sort of improved or ideal circumstances, for example, if the person were informed of the relevant facts or resolved conflicts.

Many philosophers consider evaluative claims understood along these lines to be relatively secure or respectable, since the evaluation is explicitly grounded in psychological states. Indeed, not a few philosophers seek to interpret all claims that something is good or valuable as claims about what a person would desire, want, prefer, or value in appropriately specified circumstances. I have doubts about whether this approach can succeed even for claims that something is good *for* someone, but I do not want to get involved in any controversy regarding the analysis of evaluative claims here. For my purposes, it is sufficient to note that we surely sometimes claim that things are good without having anyone in mind *for* whom the things are supposed to be good. We surely sometimes assert that things are good regardless of whether any person actually desires, wants, prefers, or values the things; any person should desire, want, prefer, or value the things given what he or she does desire, want, prefer, or value; or whether any person would desire, want, prefer, or value the things under improved circumstances. Such evaluative claims are sometimes described as being made “from the point of view of the universe as a whole.”

Even though this sort of evaluation strikes many philosophers as mysterious and problematic, I’m afraid that this is the way to understand the claims about epistemic goods that concern me. I want to raise questions about what is epistemically good, and what is epistemically better than what, from a first person point of view. I do not want to be looking at some other person or group and asking what is good for them. I want to ask what is epistemically good and what is epistemically better than what. When we approach questions about what is good and what is better from this point of view, it is most natural to understand them in the absolute, from the point of view of the universe as a whole sort of way. When we consider for ourselves whether something is good, or better than something else, we are obviously trying to decide whether or how much to value the thing in question or whether we should, or how much we should, value the thing. But I think it is pretty clear that we are not explicitly pondering whether we already actually desire, want, prefer, or value it. And since we obviously sometimes try to decide whether things are intrinsically good, I don’t think we need to be considering whether the thing is necessary for or an efficient means to some other thing we value. And I surely don’t think we are considering whether we would desire, want, prefer, or value it in some sort of ideal circumstances. At least in the case of intrinsic goods, it seems to me that we look at things the other way around: We try to figure out what is good and assume that our desires, wants, preferences, or values will adjust themselves accordingly. At least this is how things appear on the surface. Perhaps at some deeper level of semantic or metaphysical analysis a different story must be told. I here take no stand on that issue.

Another issue I do not wish to take a stand on is whether the epistemic good or goods are good for their own sakes or in virtue of leading to nonepistemic goods of one sort or another. Having confined myself to epistemology proper, I have so far assumed that truth is epistemically good, knowledge is epistemically good, and knowledge is epistemically better than truth. It seems obvious that in many instances, true

belief is good as an instrument to nonepistemic ends. For example, having a true belief regarding my PIN is good as a means to my aim of attaining money from an ATM. Is true belief also intrinsically good, or is it good only as a means to nonepistemic goods? Interesting question, but it is not what concerns me here. My aim is to consider the things we take to be epistemic goods, consider them in isolation from other sorts of goods, and see what sort of sense we can make of them. I hope I can reach some interesting conclusions regarding epistemic goods considered on their own.

It would certainly be worth going on to consider how epistemic goods fit in with goods of other types. Perhaps it will turn out that epistemic goods are intrinsically good and stand on a par with such other intrinsic goods as happiness. This is certainly the view that most philosophers have accepted, but perhaps it will turn out that epistemic goods are good merely as means to other good things. Alternatively, it might turn out that epistemic goods conflict with other things we value, so that we must seek some sort of balance. It might even turn out that when we attempt to put together a broad view of the things we consider to be good, we will not be able to find a place for epistemic goods at all. Perhaps they can only be good as means to nonepistemic goods but in fact are not effective means to those goods. This last would be a disturbing conclusion, much at odds with the bulk of philosophical reflection. But it is a possibility we need to consider. The general question of how epistemic goods fit into an overall picture of the good is, in my opinion, a much-neglected matter to which epistemologists need to devote much more attention than they have. Unfortunately, it is not a question I can here address. I will be well satisfied if I can make a reasonable start on a sensible view of the epistemic good.

V

Let’s return to the main issue. I have already indicated that I take it to be uncontroversial that knowledge is epistemically better than mere true belief. I also think it is uncontroversial that true belief is epistemically good. But I maintain that if monism is true—if true belief is the only epistemic good—then it cannot be the case that knowledge is better than mere true belief.

I do not pretend to know how knowledge should be analyzed. As the story goes, philosophers always assumed that knowledge was simply justified true belief until Edmund Gettier published his two counterexamples to this analysis. Few took the moral of the Gettier and related subsequent counterexamples to be that justification is not the significant element in the analysis of knowledge. Most assumed that knowledge had to be justified true belief plus something else that rules out the sort of problem Gettier uncovered. For convenience, I’ll call the something else “the Gettier thing.” So a widely held view, no doubt the dominant view, is that knowledge is true belief plus justification plus the Gettier thing. If this view is right, then the most obvious way for knowledge to be more valuable than mere true belief is by either justification or the Gettier thing adding some additional value to the value of true belief.

In a number of writings, Alvin Plantinga has proposed a significant alternative account.⁹ He proposes to use the term “warrant” to indicate whatever it is that makes

the difference between mere true belief and knowledge. Plantinga prefers “warrant” to the more usual “justification” because he thinks justification is heavily laden with “deontological” associations—it suggests rights, duties and obligations—and according to Plantinga, it is a serious mistake to try to account for knowledge in terms of deontological evaluation, for example, in terms of responsible belief or belief that violates no epistemic obligation. On Plantinga’s way of dividing things up, we need not mention the Gettier thing, at least not up front. We can simply say that the most obvious way for knowledge to be more valuable than mere true belief is by warrant adding some additional value to the value of true belief.

Despite the greater simplicity of Plantinga’s account, I am going to work with the account in terms of justification. My main reason for this is that “justification” is the more familiar, traditional term.¹⁰ By opting for justification, I certainly do not intend to presuppose a deontological understanding of the evaluative component of knowledge. At this point, I wish to be noncommittal about the nature of justification, understanding it, as Plantinga initially understands warrant, by factoring it out of the equation for knowledge. The important difference between justification and warrant therefore has to do with the Gettier thing. Warrant includes it and justification does not. I think it is best, for my purposes, not to include the Gettier thing so as to call attention, first, to the possibility that the Gettier thing is either in part, or significantly, or even primarily responsible for the superior value of knowledge, and second, to the assumption that this possibility is unrealized. I think this is a widely shared assumption. Despite the large literature attempting to repair the traditional justified true belief account of knowledge in response to the Gettier problem, there is a tendency to downplay the significance of the Gettier thing and to view it as some kind of technical gimmick. When viewed in this way, it is very natural to assume that the Gettier thing has no significant role to play in accounting for the value of knowledge. I will go along with this assumption, but I will not argue for it, and I must admit that it might be mistaken.¹¹

Justification, then, is that which must be added to true belief and the Gettier thing to get knowledge. And I’m for the moment assuming that the superior value of knowledge is to be explained in terms of the value that justification adds to true belief. We now need to ask about the value of justification. As we saw above, the dominant view is that justification is instrumentally good; its value is to be understood in terms of its connection to the truth. No matter what the ultimate nature of justification turns out to be, if it is an instrumental good of this sort, it must be connected, in some sort of fairly reliable way, to truth.¹² Considered on its own, it isn’t apparent that there is anything wrong with trying to understand the good of justification in this way. There are plenty of things that are good because of a reliable connection with some sort of more basic good. But what happens when we turn our attention to knowledge? It would seem that the idea is to understand the good of knowledge by conceiving of it as a state where the good of truth has been attained, and it has not been attained in just any old way, for example, by luck or by accident, but has been attained by way of a reliable means to this good.

I do not think that there is anything preposterous about the notion of a thing that is good in this general way. It is easy enough to think of examples of such goods. There used to be a TV commercial for a financial institution in which a pompous

older gentleman said, “We make money the old fashioned way: we earn it.”¹³ Allow me to twist this statement, just a little, so that it serves my purpose. It suggests a good—wealth—that might have been attained in various ways. One might have worked for it, that is, adopted a course of action that one could count on to produce the good reliably, or one might have attained the good in some other way, for example, by placing a winning bet on a horse race. The suggestion seems to be that the state of having attained the good in the first way is better than the state of having attained the good in one of the other ways. Here is another example. General A formulates a brilliant strategy for battle, carries through on it and wins. General B doesn’t adopt any coherent strategy at all, but wins because of several unlikely occurrences over which he had no control. It would not be unreasonable to consider General A’s victory superior to General B’s. Presumably, the brilliance of General A’s strategy largely consists in the fact that the strategy maximizes the chances for victory, so General A’s victory is a state where a good is attained, and it is attained in a way that reliably leads to the good in question.

Perhaps we do not usually have particular terms to designate states of successfully attaining goods by reliable means. But my two examples suggest that states of so attaining goods are familiar enough and that we not only value such states, but not uncommonly value them more than states of having attained the same goods by other means. So what is wrong with holding that the concept of knowledge is a concept of such a state, and the value of knowledge is to be understood accordingly? Quite possibly nothing. There is only a problem if we strictly adhere to the idea that justification is good *merely* as a means to the truth. If we do, then one just cannot maintain that a justified true belief is better, in terms of the good of believing the truth, than a true belief plain and simple. To the extent that we really consider attaining the truth by reliable means to be better than attaining the truth by other means, we value forming beliefs reliably for its own sake, apart from any connection with the truth.

I would want to say the same sort of thing about my other two examples. If all you care about is money, it makes no sense whatsoever to value the attainment of *X* number of dollars more or less depending on the means of attainment. If all you care about is victory on the battlefield, it makes no sense to value victory won in one way to victory won in some other way. It does not, of course, follow that it makes no sense to value one attainment of *X* number of dollars more than another attainment. I hope we would all value the honest attainment of a fortune over the dishonest attainment of a similar fortune. But this just means we value honesty as well as fortune, that is, that we are not thinking about the case as monists. Similarly, it makes perfect sense to value the victory won by a brilliant strategy more than a victory won by dumb luck. But that is because in addition to taking victory to be good, we consider excellence a good thing and incompetence a bad thing. Once again, it makes sense to value attaining the goal in one way more than attaining it in another, but only because more than one value is in play.

There is another, less happy, possibility. We might simply be confused about knowledge. Clearly some good things are good only because they reliably lead to other things we value. Think again about the investment firm earning its profits. Clearly the people who made the ad want us to picture the firm working hard to re-

search the investments it makes. We are supposed to value well-researched investments because such investments tend to pay off. That's why we are supposed to entrust our money to the firm. There is no puritanical valuing of sweat and toil for its own sake at work. We value money and we value well-researched investments because we rightly think that they are more likely to make us more money over the long haul. But if that is the whole story about our values, then it really would not make any sense to value money made the old-fashioned way more than money acquired in any other way. If we do value it more, it is because we get into the habit of valuing good means to an end and then assign more value to attaining the end via those means than we assign to attaining the end in some other way. But such valuing is simply confused. It is a result of our having lost sight of why we valued the means in the first place. The case of knowledge might be similar. Justification is valuable purely as a means to truth. We get into the habit of valuing it, forgetting that we value it merely as a means to truth and recalling only that we value it. Then, when we encounter a justified true belief, we think it is more valuable than a mere true belief because it has the good of justification as well as the good of truth. But this is clearly a mistake—the good of justification is no different from the good of truth, so when we add justification to a true belief we add nothing of value. In essence, we count the value of truth twice over and so think knowledge is better than true belief.

I don't think we are mistaken or confused in valuing knowledge more than mere true belief, but I do not think there is any quick proof that we are not. The decision would have to be made on the basis of an overall comparison of the alternative accounts we might give of the value of knowledge. I do believe that the account we have just been considering, which attributes our inclination to regard knowledge as better than mere true beliefs to confusion, is a live option. But it is not the only live option. I have tried to show that we cannot coherently explain how knowledge is better than mere true belief if we assume that truth is the only epistemic good. But if we are pluralists about epistemic value and take justification to be good apart from any connection it might have to the truth, then we can explain the superior value of knowledge. So we have at least two live options. I happen to favor the pluralist option, but I will not argue for it here.

VI

I would now like to examine a less obvious way in which we might account for the value of knowledge.¹⁴ In the last section, I considered several "additive" accounts of the value of knowledge. The accounts assume that true belief is a good thing and then consider whether or how justification might add some value to the value of true belief to account for the value of knowledge. On such an approach, the value of knowledge is seen as a sum of the values of its parts. But perhaps knowledge is an organic unity. An organic unity is a thing with a value that does not equal the sum of the values of its parts. The most familiar sort of organic unity is a thing with valuable parts but with a value that is greater than the sum of the values of its parts. Plausible candidates for such organic unities can be found among collectibles and art objects.

Individual pieces of fine antique porcelain are valuable, but a complete set is more valuable than the sum of the values of the individual pieces. Each panel of a early Christian triptych is valuable, but the whole is more valuable than the sum of the three parts.

It is arguable that there are other sorts of organic unities as well. Some have maintained, for example, that in certain circumstances something that is ordinarily valuable can decrease the value of a whole, as in a case where a person takes pleasure in the suffering of another. Pleasure is a good thing, but in such a case it does not to any degree mitigate the bad situation of a person suffering; it only makes the total situation worse. It would seem to be good to feel empathy for the suffering person, which is to say that the addition of a kind of suffering, ordinarily a bad thing, serves to increase the value of the total state of affairs. Otherwise, neutral states of affairs might play similar roles in certain circumstances. If a person takes no pleasure in the success of a close friend, this would seem to make the total situation worse. I have heard military people maintain that it is appropriate for soldiers to be indifferent to the violence they must do to their enemies in battle. It certainly would be a bad thing for soldiers to take pleasure in such violence. And perhaps if they were pained by the violence, this would interfere with them performing their duty. If so, then perhaps adding the neutral state, taking neither pleasure nor pain in their actions, makes the state of affairs better where soldiers must do violence in battle.

One might think the supposition that knowledge is an organic unity might enable the monist to account for the superiority of knowledge over mere true belief. The monist might claim that even though justification is good only as a means to truth and hence can, strictly speaking, add no value to a true belief, the combination is an organic unity that has a value in excess of the sum of the values of its parts. Alternatively, the monist might claim that justification is not good as a means to truth, that it is always neutral, but its inclusion in knowledge still renders that organic whole more valuable than the sum of its parts, specifically, more valuable than mere true belief. Perhaps, but I cannot help feeling that both possibilities are highly implausible. I don't mean to say it is highly implausible that knowledge is an organic unity. I'm willing to grant, at least tentatively, that it is. What I find implausible are the two suggestions about how to turn this to the advantage of monism. The suggestion that the combination of attaining a good (truth) and attaining it by way of something good only as a means to that good (justification) has more value than the good itself does not strike any intuitive cord with me. Quite the contrary, it strikes me as intuitively suspect. I am, I think, even less sympathetic to the other suggestion, since it seems obvious that justification is a good thing, not a neutral thing.

However, even if I am just missing something wonderful about these suggestions, they cannot really provide comfort to the monist. For no matter how the details of the story go, if true belief is a good thing, and knowledge is a good that cannot be wholly understood in terms of the goods involved in its parts, then we just do not have a version of monism. We have just admitted that there are at least two good things: true belief and knowledge. One cannot maintain the claim that true belief is the only good involved in epistemology proper while holding that knowledge is a good that cannot be accounted for in terms of the good of true belief.

VII

It's time to wind down. I have taken it for granted that knowledge is a good thing and that it is better than mere true belief. I tried to show that if a form of epistemic value monism that takes true belief to be good is true, there is no way to account for knowledge being epistemically superior to mere true belief. More particularly, I have examined the very common notion that epistemic justification is good as a means to the truth and tried to explain that if it is, and the Gettier thing does not make a significant contribution, there is no satisfactory explanation for the value of knowledge.

Let me close by briefly mentioning where taking seriously the idea that knowledge is an epistemic good superior to mere true belief might lead. I have made it clear that I am sympathetic to value pluralism. I take true belief to be a good thing and knowledge to be a good thing. I also think justification is good. But if justification is to play a role in accounting for the good of knowledge, it must be good independent of any connection between justification and the truth. How so? We need an account of the good of justification, and I am well aware that I have not taken any steps toward providing such an account. In trying to provide one, it would make sense to consider various accounts of justification that have been offered to see whether any suggest plausible accounts of the value of justification and then knowledge. I can put this idea more aggressively: If knowledge is better than true belief, and justification plays the most significant role in accounting for the value of knowledge, then no account of justification that fails to provide an understanding of the values of justification and knowledge can be acceptable. Of course, it isn't as though we are buried under apparently acceptable accounts of justification, wishing we could find some way of eliminating some of them. But that does not mean it is a mistake to eliminate accounts of justification that do not allow us to understand how justification, and especially knowledge, are good. Even if it has been neglected, providing such an understanding is one of epistemology's more important tasks.

Notes

I presented a version of this essay at the 1999 Bled Conference on Epistemology. I am indebted to the audience there for feedback and also to the Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts at the University of Notre Dame for funding my travel to the conference. I should also acknowledge debts to Marian David and Linda Zagzebski. I have benefited from many discussions with Marian of the issues addressed in this essay. Although I have not had occasion to refer to her work at any specific point in this essay, I have benefited from hearing Linda's criticism of reliabilist accounts of the value of knowledge in "From Reliabilism to Virtue Epistemology," presented at the 1998 World Congress of Philosophy.

1. "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" *Analysis* 23 (1963): 121-23.
2. G. E. Moore, *Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1912).
3. See, for example, William Alston, "Epistemic Desiderata," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 53 (1993).
4. Lawrence Bonjour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985): 7-8.
5. Richard Foley, *The Theory of Epistemic Rationality* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987) and *Working Without a Net* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
6. Notice that the set of beliefs containing the scientific theory is not epistemically better because its elements are better justified than the elements of the other set. According to the

usual view, beliefs about simple sums and about current elements of our conscious experiences will be maximally well justified and quite possibly certain.

7. I will have a little more to say about this issue in section V.
8. Such a claim could be made for a group as well as for an individual.
9. See especially Platinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), and Platinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
10. I also suspect that readers would tend to take "warrant" to indicate Plantinga's particular theory of warrant.
11. I am indebted to Peter Klein, who does not assume that the Gettier thing is insignificant, for calling this assumption to my attention. There are two other things to note about the assumption: (1) If the assumption is that the Gettier thing does not add *any* value to justified true belief, it is obviously mistaken. The very examples that Gettier gave to show that justified true belief is not sufficient for knowledge also serve to show that we do not value justified true belief as much as we value as knowledge. The interesting assumption, then, concerns the relative contributions of justification and the Gettier thing to the value of knowledge. It is, specifically, that justification does the lion's share of the work. (2) Even if the Gettier thing is responsible for a significant amount of the value of knowledge, epistemic value pluralism does not obviously follow. It may be that the value of the Gettier thing can be explained, as many assume the value of justification can be explained, in terms of some connection with truth. Such an approach is at least suggested by efforts to understand the Gettier thing in terms of the person's justification not essentially involving any falsehoods.
12. How reliable the connection must be depends on the value of truth and what alternative instruments are available. Where something very significant is at stake and there is no very effective means to the end, people value things that are, by any objective measure, very poor means to the end. A good example is provided by the drugs first used to treat AIDS. When better instruments are available, even a very reliable means can seem worthless. A person who discovered a 90 percent effective cure for AIDS might well win a Nobel Prize, but an army procurement officer who sent soldiers into battle with small arms that fire only 90 percent of the time would be court-martialed.
13. I think "old fashioned" here must mean something like "moderately old fashioned," since the really old fashioned ways of making money are by inheriting it or by taking or extorting it from those who are weaker.
14. Thanks to George Pappas for reminding me of this possibility.