

4

FOR THE LOVE OF TRUTH?

Ernest Sosa

Rational beings pursue and value truth (the true, along with the good and the beautiful). Intellectual conduct is to be judged, accordingly, by how well it aids our pursuit of that ideal. What does this mean, and is it true?

Even if intelligent life had never evolved or otherwise existed, Venus would still have orbited the Sun, so it would still have been true that Venus orbited the Sun. It is not the being thus true of what is true that we value indiscriminately. Some truths are good, but not all; far from it.

In loving the truth, then, what we value is not the being true of the truths. What we value in pursuing truth is rather our grasping it, our having it. What does this mean? Only through believing it does one relevantly have a truth: We have the truth that snow is white by believing that snow is white. In pursuing the truth what we want is (at least) true beliefs.

Suppose you enter your dentist's waiting room and find all the magazines missing. Deprived of reading matter, you're sure to doze off, but you need no sleep. Are you then rationally bound to reach for the telephone book in pursuit of truth? Were you not to do so, you would forfeit a chance to pluck some desired goods within easy reach.

If random telephone numbers do not elicit a wide enough yawn, consider a randomly selected cubic foot of the Sahara. Here is a trove of facts, of the form *grain x is so many millimeters in direction D from grain y*, than which few can be of less interest. Or take some bit of trivia known to me at the moment: that it was sunny in Rhode Island at noon on October 21, 1999. I confess that I will not rue my loss of this information, nor do I care either *that* or *how early* it will be gone.

As interpreted so far, the view that we rationally want truth as such reduces to absurdity, or is at best problematic.

What then is it we want in pursuing truth? If it is not after all true beliefs indiscriminately, what then is it? A manageable number of true beliefs? Obviously not; it is not just a matter of numbers. True beliefs that are not too costly? No, that also is refuted through our examples. True beliefs of a certain sort? What sort?

B

We are considering the role of the concept of truth in our intellectual lives and in epistemology. Does it have a role through one's motivation as a thinker?

What is the right model here? Is it the practical syllogism, with a truth-directed master practice? We focus on intellectual, belief-guiding *practices*; these may be social or individual, conscious or subconscious, freely formed or built-in or forced. What would be the master motivation required for proper guidance? What would be the content of the master practice? Would it be $\langle \text{If } P \text{ is true, then one is to believe } P \rangle$? No, the waiting room and Sahara examples show that we adhere to no such practice. Even if we did, moreover, it would seem pretty useless.

What other practice might use the concept of truth to guide our belief-formation? It might be suggested that we do after all prefer our beliefs to be true. We'd rather they were true than not true. Doesn't this show a generally shared pro-attitude favoring true belief?

You might reasonably want to repent your sins, to dine deliciously, to walk safely. Repented sins, delicious meals, safe walks—these are things one might well want, but in different ways. Sins you do not want; you just want to repent any you may commit. Meals you do want, properly spaced; and you would prefer your meals to be delicious. About walks per se your stance may be neutral. But if you have reason to take one, for exercise or pleasure or to get somewhere, you would prefer that it be safe. In each of these cases you want your X 's to be \emptyset , which is compatible with each of three attitudes on X 's per se: desire, aversion, and neutrality. The waiting room and Sahara examples suggest that our attitude on beliefs per se is neutrality. But this is compatible with our wanting our beliefs to be true, just as we want our walks to be safe.

The point must be put carefully. If we believe that a dear friend is terminally ill we would *not* want our belief to be true. What we want, therefore, is not the truth of the beliefs we *do* have. We want rather that we *would* believe $\langle p \rangle$ only if $\langle p \rangle$ were true. And from this it does not follow that we want to believe $\langle p \rangle$, nor does it follow that we want $\langle p \rangle$. Neither of these follows even on the assumption that we do believe $\langle p \rangle$ and that it is true that p . What we desire is only that our beliefs be *safe*; for any given proposition, other things equal we would generally desire this: that we would believe it only if it were true. Desire *neither* for the antecedent *nor* for the consequent is logically entailed by our desire for the conditional. Our general antecedent desire is only for the *safety* of our beliefs, whatever they may be.

However, this general desire for safety is not one that can directly guide how we form beliefs. Compare our desires for delicious meals and for safe walks. These desires can guide us if combined with knowledge of what makes for a delicious meal, and what for a safe walk. But how could we be guided on whether to believe $\langle p \rangle$ by considering whether believing $\langle p \rangle$ would be true? Once we believe that believing $\langle p \rangle$ *would* be true, then (minor exceptions aside) we *already* believe $\langle p \rangle$ and no longer need guidance.

If our desire for safe beliefs (ones that would be true) can provide guidance, it still remains to be seen how, and we shall return to this later.

Perhaps we should relativize to questions already in place. Somehow people get interested in certain questions. They want answers to these questions, *correct* answers. *This* sort of true belief we do value, an answer to one of our questions. Whether we *should* be interested in these questions is another matter that we need not enter in order to understand our desire for truth.

A way to be interested in the truth as such, then, is to be motivated by interest in a question, ranging from questions of gossip, to practical questions of the law court or the legislature, to issues of scientific research. Questions both trivial and momentous can interest someone, whose desire for the truth is then a desire for an answer, a correct answer. Someone who wants the answer to the question *whether p* wants this:

<If p , then $B(p)$; and if not- p , then $B(\text{not-}p)$ >¹

That is to say, one desires that if p , then one believes that p , and if not- p , then one believes that not- p .²

Again, to be motivated by the truth on a question is to be motivated to believe the *correct* answer; let the chips fall where they may.

C

Does knowledge require responsible believing, believing that is well and rationally guided, and does this require motivation by a desire for the truth as such?

What is it to want the truth *as such*? Wanting the truth as such is not the same as wanting it for its own sake. When we want to know ahead of time whether N is the winning lottery number, we may desire the truth as such even if we do not want it for its own sake, not to the slightest degree. We may want the truth *as such* to some extent even if only as a means to buying the right ticket and getting rich. Compare wanting a key that has a certain brand name etched on it, not *as* one with such an etching, but only as one that opens a certain door. One wants a key with that brand name etched on it, but not *as such*. What one wants as such is rather a key that opens the target door, even if one wants to open that door not for its own sake, but only for gaining access to that room.

Let $\langle c \rangle$ be the proposition <my deceased parents cared for me at least slightly>. Surely this can be known based on good enough evidence. In order to be known, must it be believed out of desire for the truth as such?

Consider this:

Care <If c , then $B(c)$; and if not- c then $B(\text{not-}c)$ >

A desire for the truth as such on the question whether c would seem to require adopting *Care* as a desideratum, which in turn involves desiring this: that if not- c then $B(\text{not-}c)$. You might find the belief that not- c so painful, however, that you have no desire whatsoever to have it, not even if it is a fact that not- c . Indeed you would

tend to discount, deny, or ignore any evidence that not- c , in a way that makes you less than *epistemically* virtuous on this question. What if you have evidence aplenty for $\langle c \rangle$ and none at all for $\langle \text{not-}c \rangle$? Suppose your epistemically vicious disposition to discount, deny, or ignore contrary evidence is hence never engaged, nor would easily be engaged, given your situation. With all the weighty evidence favoring $\langle c \rangle$ firmly and extensively in place, you are able easily to believe that c . *Do you know that c ?*

It might be argued that in such circumstances you could not know that c , since your belief would not be sensitive to the truth on the question whether c , in the following sense:

One's belief [$B(p)$] is sensitive (to the truth) if and only if $\langle p \rangle$ were false one would *not* believe $\langle p \rangle$.

However, the sensitivity requirement is unacceptable, for many reasons.³ What we can more plausibly require is not sensitivity but *safety*, the contrapositive of sensitivity:

One's belief [$B(p)$] is safe iff one would believe $\langle p \rangle$ only if it were true.

This more plausible requirement for knowledge will in fact be satisfied in our example, so long as not easily would you believe that your parents loved you without your belief being true. Given enough evidence, as in our example, the condition of safety will be satisfied: In the circumstances, not easily would you believe as you do without being right. Compatibly with this, you might still have believed $\langle c \rangle$ rather than $\langle \text{not-}c \rangle$ had it been so that not- c .

Compelling evidence might surely enable you to know $\langle c \rangle$ despite being so averse to $\langle B(\text{not-}c) \rangle$ that you have no desire for *Care*. You might thus know the answer to a question despite having no interest in the truth as such on that question, at least not through desiring the likes of *Care*. So your inquiry and your belief-formation on that question is not really *disinterested*. It is influenced by nonintellectual personal preferences; it is so influenced in that your belief formation would not follow the evidence wherever it might point. On the question whether c , certain answers are kept out of bounds by nonintellectual preferences. Even so, if such preferences do *not* come into play, nor would easily do so given your actual situation, if in fact your belief does accord with and derive from the compelling evidence, then you can know in so believing.

If to desire the truth on the question whether p is to desire the twofold D , therefore, it is implausible that one should be able to know the answer only when one's answer is motivated by such desire. Someone lacking that twofold desire can still know the answer to his question, so long as he accepts it on good enough evidence.⁴

D

We have found no way to understand a *desire for the truth as such* on a given question, or at least not any that would enable requiring guidance by such desire as necessary for knowing the answer. One further account remains unconsidered: Why not understand the desire for the truth as a desire for “matching (conjunctive) pairs” *under that aspect specifically*: “under the aspect of involving a world/belief match of the sort $[X \& B(X)]$.” On this conception, one’s attitude to a matching pair would embody desire for the truth as such if one desired that pair “under the aspect of its being a matching pair.” One might then host three separable “desires” for a given matching pair: under the aspect of involving $\langle p \rangle$ as a component, under the aspect of involving $\langle B(p) \rangle$ as a component, and under the aspect of involving a match, of the sort $[X \& B(X)]$, between its two components.

However, this brings us back once more to the waiting room. Suppose we do have a desire for pairs of the sort $[X \& B(X)]$ as such; this is then an aspect of potential pairs that makes them indiscriminately attractive under that aspect, other things equal. If we became aware that, at sufficiently low cost, we could bring one about, therefore, we would want to do so. Suppose our situation in the waiting room to be set up properly, however, so that nothing preponderantly counts against our reaching for the phone book, all other things considered. Would we then want to reach? Even in situations so set up, I for one would not be tempted. Which number is at the top of p. 245? I could not care less.

It might be replied that we do have a desire for matching pairs *of a certain sort* under the aspect of their being matching pairs *of that sort*. All right, but *what* sort? The most plausible sort would be “on questions of interest to us.” But this threatens vicious circularity once we consider what it is for a question to be of interest to us, and once we consider the *sort* of interest to us that will be of use to the approach under consideration.⁵

Our twofold desire is supposed to explain what is involved in desiring the truth as such on a question of interest. But it is a *selective* desire, tied to our selective interest in certain questions. Relative to desire for the truth so understood, moreover, one could also define a concept of *disinterested* desire for truth, or desire for the truth not only as such but also to some extent for its own sake. And these definitions would enable us to see how implausible it is to suppose that knowledge requires motivation by any such desire. Knowing the answer to a question does not require that one be motivated by a disinterested desire for the truth on that question, nor even by a desire for the truth as such, whether interested or disinterested.

So we have tried an approach in terms of specific questions and correlated desires for the truth as such. But this approach provides no illuminating account of how the concept of truth does or can have an important role in our intellectual lives or in epistemology.

Perhaps we need a more indirect approach. Perhaps our ideal of truth is one that bears directly *not* on true beliefs but on truth-conducive practices. Perhaps we aim more directly to adopt truth-conducive practices, which can then help us attain truth

and avoid error. What follows will consider this approach. A vicious regress threatens it, I argue, one that can be stopped in either of two ways. One way would appeal to master choices freely and autonomously chosen. The danger here is that this would not give us the sort of truth-connection required for knowledge, nor even for epistemic justification.

The only other approach would seem to involve appeal to virtues constitutive of the thinker's intellectual character or nature: in other words, to deep practices of perception, memory, and reasoning that are both (i) reliably truth-conducive, and (ii) a settled part of the thinker's character or nature.

E

Perhaps we must look beyond the particular belief, and even beyond the particular question whether p , for a motivation toward the truth that could play a role in determining whether a belief amounts to knowledge. Perhaps we should consider the methods, or rules, or policies, or virtues that lead to that belief. Let us adopt the term "practice" as a generic term covering all such items, with no requirement that a "practice" be either social or conscious. How then might truth figure in an account in terms of practices? Here is one way: The subject adheres to a practice to believe propositions that are F , and does so because of a belief that F propositions are true or likely to be true. Adherence to that practice would presumably derive from a further practice of believing propositions that are true. When you believe that p , you are accordingly moved by your desire for the truth so long as your belief derives from such a hierarchy of practices.

Take a Cartesian example where a practice of accepting clear and distinct (C&D) propositions is based on a more general practice to believe what is true, along with a belief that C&D propositions are true. This may then be combined with the belief that $\langle 3 + 2 = 5 \rangle$ is C&D to yield the conclusion that this proposition in particular, $\langle 3 + 2 = 5 \rangle$, is true, and to yield in turn belief in it. On this model, behind every fully justified belief lies a practical syllogism whose main governing principle is the practice of aiming for truth.

This account leads to the *reductio* of the waiting room, but that is not its main problem. A second problem is how to conceive of a belief-guiding practice constitutive of our pursuit of truth. Take, for example, the following:

$\langle \text{If } \langle p \rangle \text{ is true, then I am to believe } \langle p \rangle \rangle$

As a directly guiding principle this is useless. For it can gain purchase on one's conduct only through a belief that $\langle p \rangle$ is true. But if one believes that $\langle p \rangle$ is true, then one believes $\langle p \rangle$ already.

Again, the present account explains how truth bears on our intellectual conduct, by appeal to its supposed place in the major premise of the practical syllogisms that help us guide our intellectual lives, a major premise that hence must lie behind our every justified belief. But this leads also to a regress. How so? Note first that the ex-

planation appeals to a hierarchy of practices held in place by beliefs of the form “Propositions of sort *F* are true or likely to be true.” Only a belief derived from such a hierarchy can be properly motivated and amount to knowledge, or so the account would have it. However, no belief is knowledge if held in place by arbitrary or otherwise defective beliefs. Constitutive beliefs of such a hierarchy, of the form “Propositions of sort *F* are true or likely to be true,” must themselves be knowledge. But these beliefs must then derive from practical hierarchies of their own. And these hierarchies must in turn depend on their own constitutive beliefs, which must then derive from further practical hierarchies. And so on.

The regress threatens to turn vicious since such a hierarchy cannot rise to infinity at the present moment, the moment of truth, when we hold the true belief under evaluation. Suppose we get to the top of a practical hierarchy which at this very moment yields or helps yield that belief. By a topmost practice I mean one *not* itself derived from a further practice then operative. So we assume that some topmost practices will be operative at that moment. Each such practice would seem to be of one of three sorts: either (a) chosen so “freely” as to be arbitrary; (b) constitutive of one’s un-acquired, deepest nature; or (c) constitutive of one’s acquired, second nature, or otherwise acquired. The first option will disqualify any belief based essentially on that practice. The second option takes us back to natural practices part of one’s first nature. The third option will raise the question of just *how* that practice *was* acquired and how sustained from its inception to the present. And this will lead to the same set of options, now across time rather than at a time.

It might be argued that a cluster of topmost practices could hold together through coherent mutual support, all at once. So none of them would be *arbitrary*, or absolutely autonomous. But it is absurd that *each* could be wholly legitimated through derivation from the others. The whole cluster would seem arbitrary absent some other consideration that lifts it above alternative clusters. For simplicity, I will therefore treat such clusters as single topmost practices.

Any component of our second nature would be adopted in one of two ways: either it is adopted through some “reasoning” (or “proper exercise of the mind,” according to Webster) or it is acquired somehow non-rationally (where the mind is relevantly passive or *improperly* exercised). Either way, we must now evaluate its acquisition (and sustainment). If it is through reasoning that it is acquired, we must evaluate this reasoning. And this leads us to premises (whether invoked at that very moment, or involved in earlier sources), and perhaps to further reasoning in support of *these* premises, and perhaps to further reasoning yet in support of these premises, and so on. I see no way to avoid relying at one or more stages on some component or components of the subject’s first nature. And this first nature had better be in proper touch with the truth if what ultimately depends upon it is to be epistemically in good, admirable order.

How far back should one go in assessing present knowledge? Back to habits inculcated through good schooling? Back to one’s earliest constitution that eventually joined one’s nurture to yield one’s adult makeup? Back to the transfer of genes from one’s parents to oneself? Back to the evolutionary forces that formed our species? It is not easy to deny any of these a place in the explanation of that truth-connection

that makes for intellectual virtue. It is through such factors, presumably, that one is properly connected to the truth by one's constitution upon reaching years of discretion, or upon reaching the stage of agency and cognition, when one is now a proper doer and knower. At this stage one will have a first nature not owed to one's present or past ratiocination, whose virtue is nevertheless evaluable in epistemic respects, involving how well it suits one for attaining truth worth attaining. By hypothesis this evaluation can no longer depend on prior practices: on prior policies, or methods, or faculties, or virtues.

Even early sources of one's intellectual makeup may be relevant, but we need not always go so far back. Take the Swampman, a being created miraculously by lightning so that he walks out of the Florida Everglades as a fully formed, fully functional contemporary resident of the United States, indistinguishable from ordinary Americans in respects of language, clothing, demeanor, habitual behavior, etc. Is the Swampman properly related to the truth? Much is importantly accidental behind Swampman's current beliefs. Does this sort of accident block his beliefs from being knowledge?

What are we evaluating when we assess beliefs and believers? Is it among other things the qualities that lie behind beliefs? And what is the respect that matters? What do we care about in such belief-yielding qualities? If the evaluation of a quality is epistemic then presumably it will concern how well it suits believers for grasping the truth in certain salient field/circumstance conditions. If so, then we will not be overly concerned with how such qualities got there, so long as they are now a stable part of the constitution of the agent/subject whose belief is under evaluation. But must such a quality take the form of a practice that can count as a motivation voluntarily held by the agent/subject? It is this that seems problematic. If the deepest such practices would not necessarily be held *properly* just in virtue of being deepest, then even for the deepest practices there will be the question of *how* they are acquired and sustained so as to constitute knowledge and so as to yield other knowledge. And *this* proper acquisition and sustainment would not be explicable in terms of practices deeper yet. Nor does such a deepest practice seem properly sensitive to the truth if it is just *chosen* with "*absolute freedom*." If such a choice is so free as to be arbitrary, how can we understand its connection with the truth? How can we make plausible the notion that the agent chose that practice *because* it is true, and because the agent is so in touch with the truth that he *would* have chosen correctly? If the choice is so "free" as to be arbitrary, how can it be that the agent *would* be likely to select it? This seems mysterious and unsatisfying.

F

What then does constitute our advocacy of the ideal of truth? When is our belief formation virtuously guided by that ideal? If the approach via hierarchies of chosen practices is indeed vicious, and the piecemeal, question-by-question approach problematic, what better approach is there?

Sooner or later we shall need to recognize that our virtuous epistemic conduct

must derive at some deep level from our virtuous nature, a nature not itself due entirely to one's free and autonomous choice. Any choice due to the agent must derive from something in the agent's nature, lest it be unacceptably arbitrary or fortuitous. But that in the agent from which it derives cannot be prior choices unto infinity, even if choices may be affected by temporally prior choices that helped set the agent's character. Requiring a logically prior choice without exception would lead to the vicious regress or to the unacceptably arbitrary. Virtuous conduct must derive from something in the agent's constitution not itself a logically prior choice. If the conduct is really admirable, from an intellectual standpoint, then the constitution manifest in the evaluated conduct must itself be admirable because it helps the subject get into proper relation to the truth. The character from which the intellectually admirable conduct then flows must so constitute the agent that the conduct flowing from it is appropriately enough attributable to that agent as her own, admirably so. At this level, again, that in one's character to which the admirable performance is attributed cannot be some logically prior truth-conducive practice, or policy or motive or virtue.

We have allowed that Swampman's accidental creation as a fully formed subject, complete with underived practices, does *not* disqualify his later beliefs from being properly formed and candidates for knowledge. Yet his original practices are as accidental and arbitrary as can be. How then can we object to a practice derived from absolutely autonomous choice? No such choice is appropriately responsive to the truth. If I just will arbitrarily to accept propositions that are clear and distinct, and if this then gets installed as an underived component of my intellectual character, and if this character stays in place *simply* in virtue of having been thus established and similarly sustained, and not through any later support from other sources, then even if I do accept clear and distinct propositions because I see them to be clear and distinct, my acceptance of them will not manifest appropriate responsiveness to the truth. Note well: The acceptance here is *not* that of a rational being who *would* accept the clear and distinct through self-supporting sensitivity to its clarity and distinctness. On the contrary, by hypothesis one accepts the clear and distinct *only* because of one's arbitrary preference for the clear and distinct. This cannot be the way of intellectual virtue, and cannot yield knowledge.

It does matter, again, just how we conceive of the case. If the arbitrary volition manages to set in place a fundamental practice of accepting the clear and distinct, and if this then stays in place as a self-sustaining and firm part of one's intellectual character, one *not* in need of continuing supportive choices, then our subject *will* be harder to distinguish from the Swampman. To the extent that the underived practice chosen arbitrarily sustains itself firmly and stably enough, and independently of further arbitrary choice, to that extent will it bring our subject's position closer to that of Swampman. To that extent, moreover, will it grow more plausible to grant him intellectual virtue and knowledge.

The choice we face is hence this. We require the subject to be properly constituted so as to "exercise her mind appropriately": that is, normally to accept the deliverances of her senses at face value, to accept what is clear and distinct, to extrapolate inductively in appropriate ways, etc. And we would like all this to be largely a

matter of first or second nature, not requiring case-by-case scrutiny of the sort favored by skeptics. But in what ways can the subject properly acquire her nature? If accidental acquisition is allowed, as with the Swampman, why is acquisition by arbitrary volition disallowed? In my opinion arbitrary volition is disallowed *if* viewed as an ongoing juggle that keeps our practices aloft; but *not*, or not so clearly, if viewed only as an original source of a stable character that then operates on its own, with no further need for juggling by the unfettered will. Why might this be plausible? We are interested in evaluating actions and beliefs for the light this throws on the character of agents and cognizers. We are interested in keeping track of our own and each other's aptitudes and weaknesses, abilities and disabilities, virtues and vices. How surprising can this be in a species as deeply social as ours? What we thus care about, then, is stable, dependable constitution, not arbitrary volitions that can too easily change direction unforeseeably.⁶

Our relation to the environment with whose truth our nature puts us reliably in touch cannot itself be wholly accidental. It can be accidental in some respects. It is accidental that one is alive at all, as accidental as the chance meeting that led to one's parents' marriage. It is accidental that the human species is extant, as accidental as the outcome of the Cuban missile crisis, or as accidental as the physico-chemical combinations within the required range that enabled our evolution. And so on. But these accidents are all compatible with it being no accident, not relevantly, that one is now in an environment, on the surface of our planet, wherein one's perceptual organs are well adjusted to tell it like it is.

My scope in these recent comments has been modest. Beliefs are assessable along several different dimensions. They can be true or false, they can be safe (such that $B(p) \rightarrow p$) or unsafe, and they can be knowledge or not, to take three important dimensions. Here I have focused rather on belief that is "justified" or reasonable, epistemically so. When we categorize a belief thus positively we speak directly of the belief but also, indirectly, of the believer, whose intellectual reliability is also under evaluation. It has been my contention that *one* important requirement on justified or reasonable belief is an appropriate truth-connection, which cannot be secured through essential dependence on absolutely autonomous, free choice. Many sorts of dependence on accident *are* apparently allowed, as in the Swampman case. What one cares about in oneself and in one's epistemic fellows is a relevantly stable, dependable character, however, one whose aetiology is as may be and allows much room for the accidental. What is non-negotiably required to be sufficiently free of accident is the stable, continuing intellectual character of the subject. It is this that makes the subject eligible for epistemic credit and a potential knower.⁷

G

Objections and Replies

Objection 1 It is absurd to grant status as an intellectual virtue to a practice simply because it happens to get installed as a part of one's first nature and happens to be re-

liable. This is precisely what has made reliabilism objectionable. A brain lesion that reliably leads to your beliefs that you have a brain lesion cannot by itself yield intellectually virtuous, justified belief. A palmreader's practice of reading a certain pattern as a sign of serious illness cannot yield an epistemically justified belief if it is an isolated practice adopted arbitrarily, not even if it turns out to be a reliable practice.

Reply That all seems obviously true. Equally plausibly, however, Swampman can acquire epistemically justified, intellectually virtuous beliefs and can even come to know things when he forms these beliefs through his accidentally acquired practices. So I find myself pulled in opposite directions. How to resolve this? Note first that my suggestions about first nature are *not* a complete account of what is involved in intellectual virtue. Reflecting on our love of truth led me to suggest that truth has a role in the evaluation of practices constitutive of our first nature. But this does not imply, nor do I believe, that *any* reliable practice part of one's first nature constitutes an intellectual virtue. Again, practices need not be acquired *because* they are truth-conducive, not if Swampman's practices are allowable as virtuous. My relevant claim here is only that avoidance of the vicious regress requires that we postulate first-nature practices whose reliability enables them to yield epistemically justified beliefs. This claim does *not* commit us to the view that *any* such practice will do.

Objection 2 It is surely an epistemically important difference between Swampman and normal humans that his first nature is accidentally acquired whereas ours is not. Unlike Swampman, we adhere to our first-nature practices because these are true. Shouldn't our epistemic assessments of the respective beliefs reflect that fact?

Reply Perhaps we should say that our beliefs are superior to Swampman's simply in being *more deeply* truth-connected than his. And that leads us back to the first objection. The epistemic standing of a practice is boosted not only by its aetiology but also by its coherence with the subject's other truth-connected practices. This would tend to render that practice more securely fixed and safer. Thus supported, the practice would less easily mislead.⁸

Notes

1. Insertion of a declarative sentence within angle brackets will function as a nominalizing device, so that '<*p*>' is tantamount to 'that-*p*'; occasionally capitalization may also function thus.

2. We have focused on the case of yes/no questions of the form whether *p*. But our pattern of explanation fits other questions as well. For example, when we ask who is *F*, our desire for an answer has the following desideratum:

D' <For all *x*, if *x* is *F*, *B*(*x* is *F*)>

(Here I assume that if one knows of at least one *F*, that it is *F*, this may answer only partially the question as to who is *F*; a complete answer will need to specify for each *F* that it is *F*. Moreover, to allow for the possibility that nothing is *F*, the more strictly correct desideratum is not D' but D'': <If something is *F*, then for all *F*, if *x* is *F*, *B*(*x* is *F*); and if nothing is *F*, then *B*(nothing is *F*)>. And we should add the following clause, too: that if *x* is not *F*,

then $\text{not-}B(x \text{ is } F)$; otherwise, we would leave it open that we have an incorrect answer to our question. Our desiderata—D and D'—both manifest one's wanting beliefs in accordance with the facts in a certain range, where the range might be just $\{<p>, <\text{not-}p>\}$, or a set of facts of the form $[x \text{ is } F]$. Similar reasoning would seem to apply to questions of other forms, such as which-questions, when-questions, why-questions, etc. In what follows we shall focus mainly on yes/no whether-questions, but our treatment should be applicable *mutatis mutandis* to questions of other forms.

3. There is an extensive literature on this, including *The Possibility of Knowledge: Nozick and his Critics*, Steven Luper-Foy [now Luper], ed. (Rowman and Allanheld, 1987).

4. Is there some other way to understand how it is that one might desire and pursue the truth as such? Perhaps there is a response to our example. Perhaps we do not really need the full twofold desire. Perhaps I do believe that my deceased parents cared for me, and believe it out of desire for the truth as such, despite wanting to avoid belief that they did not even if in fact they did not.

The suggestion is now this. If one believes $<p>$ then one does believe out of desire for the truth as such, so long as one desires $<\text{If } p \text{ then } B(p)>$, regardless of whether one also desires $<\text{If not-}p, \text{ then } B(\text{not-}p)>$. We next explore this, both as a prop for a responsibilist epistemology requiring desire for the truth as such, and also for the light it might throw in any case on the way or ways in which it is possible to desire the truth as such.

To desire $<\text{If } p \text{ then } B(p)>$ is to desire $<\text{Not-}[p \ \& \ \text{not-}B(p)]>$. (I am of course interpreting the conditional here as material.) To favor *that if p then one believe it* is to oppose *that it be so that p without one's believing it*. To desire *that if p then one believe it* is to desire *that one not miss the fact that p if it is a fact*, i.e., to desire *that it not be the case that it is a fact that p while one misses this fact*.

One may well prefer that no present headache that one suffers should escape one's notice, for at least this reason: because one prefers that none such occur at all, whether noticed or unnoticed. Trivially, then, one will prefer that one not have a headache while one misses this fact. But such desire out of aversion to headaches is not a desire for the truth as such.

Similarly, I may be quite averse to overlooking my parents' indifference, for at least this reason: because I prefer that it not occur at all, whether noticed or overlooked. Trivially, then, I will prefer that it not be the case that my parents loved me not at all while I miss this fact. But such desire out of aversion to being unloved is not a desire for the truth as such.

How else then might we understand a desire for the truth as such without falling back to the problematic twofold desideratum $<\text{if } p \text{ then } B(p) \text{ and if not-}p \text{ then } B(\text{not-}p)>$? Try this:

On the question whether p , S has some desire for the truth as such if S prefers $<p \ \& \ B(p)>$ to each of $<p \ \& \ \text{not-}B(p)>$ and $<B(p) \ \& \ \text{not-}p>$.

How plausible is it that preferring $<p \ \& \ B(p)>$ to each of its mismatching alternatives constitutes a desire for the truth as such? What if, as in the case of our example $<c>$ (that my parents loved me some), one has a positive desire for each of $<c>$ and $<B(c)>$ separately? In that case one will naturally desire the matching pair $<c \ \& \ B(c)>$ more than either mismatch, but such desire is not necessarily desire for the truth as such. One does prefer the truth as such in preferring that matching pair only if how much one prefers it is not explained wholly through one's desires for its conjuncts separately. One's degree of preference must exceed what derives from desire for the conjuncts individually.

What would constitute such surplus value? We need some aversion to $<p \ \& \ \text{not-}B(p)>$ that does not derive trivially from the mere aversion to $<p>$ or desire for $<B(p)>$, nor from these in combination. But such aversion to $<p \ \& \ \text{not-}B(p)>$ will not derive from a desire for the truth as such unless it is a general aversion that would be present whatever the content of $<p>$. Compare the desire for a certain key as one that opens a certain door. If this is sim-

ply and solely a desire for a key as such a key, it will entail a general desire for any single such key as such indiscriminately, other relevant things being equal. But this leads back to the discredited account of the love of truth as the desire for true beliefs in general. If we really had such a love of the truth, then we would reach for the telephone book when in the waiting room. There again our aversion to situations of the form $[X \& \text{not-} B(X)]$ would move us to act, given enough time, no prospect of other useful occupation, etc.

Moreover, one has no preference for $\langle h \& B(h) \rangle$ over both its mismatching alternatives where $\langle h \rangle$ is the proposition that one has a headache. On the present account one therefore has no relevant desire for the truth as such on the question whether one has a headache. Yet, in spite of this, one's actual headache will surely make its presence known.

5. We have been exploring possibilities for an explanation of what is involved in desire for the truth as such. But so far we have understood the two conditionals in desideratum D as material conditionals.

D $\langle \text{If } p, \text{ then } B(p); \text{ and if not-}p, \text{ then } B(\text{not-}p) \rangle$

What if we take these conditionals to be subjunctive rather than material? We can have a single desire for $\langle \text{If } p, \text{ then } B(p) \rangle$ even absent a desire for $\langle \text{If not } p, \text{ then } B(\text{not-}p) \rangle$. A problem with the material understanding of these conditionals is, recall, this: On that understanding the desire for $\langle \text{If } h, \text{ then } B(h) \rangle$ follows trivially from our desire for $\langle \text{not-}h \rangle$, as in the case of the headache. And a desire for $\langle \text{If not-}c, \text{ then } B(\text{not-}c) \rangle$ follows trivially from our desire for $\langle c \rangle$, as in the case of our parents' love. But the subjunctive understanding of the conditional has no such problems.

On the subjunctive understanding, then, I might easily desire $\langle \text{If } c, \text{ then } B(c) \rangle$ and yet have no desire for $\langle \text{If not-}c, \text{ then } B(\text{not-}c) \rangle$ despite my overpowering desire for each of $\langle c \rangle$ and $\langle B(c) \rangle$. How might we now explain, on the subjunctive understanding, my desire for the truth as such in believing $\langle c \rangle$? We might now resurrect the "single-desire explanation," saying that my desire for the truth as such in so believing can derive from my desire for $\langle \text{If } c, \text{ then } B(c) \rangle$ singly, and does not require a conjoint desire for $\langle \text{If not-}c, \text{ then } B(\text{not-}c) \rangle$. How defensible is this?

Suppose while desiring $\langle \text{If } c, \text{ then } B(c) \rangle$ I desire with equal intensity $\langle \text{If not-}c, \text{ then } B(c) \rangle$. It follows that I do desire $\langle \text{If } c, \text{ then } B(c) \rangle$. However, my belief of $\langle c \rangle$ could hardly, in such circumstances, betoken any desire for the truth as such on the question whether c . What I want at all costs, in complete disregard of the truth on that question, is to believe $\langle c \rangle$. I want to believe $\langle c \rangle$, with equal intensity regardless of whether it is true or false. So it is not so that the single desire for $\langle \text{If } c, \text{ then } B(c) \rangle$ will sufficiently explain how I might be motivated by a desire for the truth as such in believing $\langle c \rangle$. We must at a minimum require that this desire not be joined to an equally intense desire for $\langle \text{If not-}c, \text{ then } B(c) \rangle$. Only the combination of the single positive desire for $\langle \text{If } c, \text{ then } B(c) \rangle$ with the absence of desire for $\langle \text{If not-}c, \text{ then } B(c) \rangle$ might therefore give us a basis for attributing to the subject a desire for the truth as such in believing $\langle c \rangle$.

However, this account seems just as useless as is the full requirement of D itself, if one wants to defend the following view: the view that one can know in believing $\langle p \rangle$ only if one's so believing is somehow motivated by a desire for the truth as such. Just as someone who does not desire the full desideratum D might still know in believing $\langle p \rangle$ so long as her evidence for $\langle p \rangle$ is powerful enough, so someone who desires both $\langle \text{If } p, \text{ then } B(p) \rangle$ and $\langle \text{If not-}p, \text{ then } B(p) \rangle$, showing thereby a certain disregard for the truth as such, might still know in believing $\langle p \rangle$, so long as she believes on the basis of powerful enough positive evidence and a total lack of negative evidence.

We must be careful with the temporal specifications: One's desire for the truth as such on a question whether p should not necessarily be viewed as just a desire for the truth, at the very moment of desire, of the conjunction of conditionals: $\langle \text{If it were so that } p, \text{ I would be-}$

lieve that p ; and if it were so that not- p , I would believe that not- p >. For example, I can now be interested in the question whether p without desiring that I already be such that the conjunction of conditionals be true of me right now, at the moment of desire for the truth as such on that question. I may not desire that at all, since it would preclude the pleasure of inquiry. What one desires is rather that the conditionals become true at some point, perhaps aided essentially by appropriate inquiry designed precisely to change one through the acquisition of some property F such that, once that property is acquired, the two conditionals are then true of one. But actually even this is not quite right: What one wants may be only that one acquire some property F such that <If p and one had F , then one would believe that p ; and if not- p and one had F , then one would believe not- p >. Inquiry on a question whether p may then be understood as an attempt to acquire such a property. Successful inquiry would lead to the fixation of belief through such a property thus acquired (but of course not all processes of acquisition of such a property would properly count as “inquiry”).

6. Compare Hume’s *Treatise* (fourth paragraph of Section 1 of Part III of Book III): “If any action be either virtuous or vicious, ’tis only as a sign of some quality or character. It must depend upon durable principles of the mind, which extend over the whole conduct, and enter into the personal character. Actions themselves, not proceeding from any constant principle, have no influence on love or hatred, pride or humility; and consequently are never consider’d in morality.”

7. For an alternative take on some of these issues, compare the work of Linda Zagzebski.

8. My dissertation group at Brown (Jeremy Fantl, Jason Kawall, Jennifer Lackey, and Baron Reed) gave me helpful comments as usual, as did John Greco, David Sosa, and my commentator at the Santa Barbara Conference, Christopher Kulp. My warm thanks to all!