

# The Values of Truth and the Truth of Values

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It is not that hard to be skeptical about value. You can't see values. You can't touch them. And many think we can't even define them. Partly as a result, our disagreements about value have an interminable and intractable feel. Philosophically speaking, skepticism about value seems an easy sell.

At least this is the case when we are talking about the type of value that most philosophers worry about—moral value. But we have other values besides moral values. And one of the most basic of these other values is the value of truth.

In this paper, I want to address two questions. What does it mean to say that truth is a value? And how seriously—from what we might call the meta-normative point of view—should we take this value? In a certain sense to be explained, I think we have no choice but to take it very seriously, simply because we lack any standpoint from which we can make skepticism about the value—or, as we shall see, values—of truth intelligible.

## 1. TRUTH AS A GOAL OF INQUIRY

The claim that 'truth is a value' can mean quite different things. Two in particular need sorting out.

One thing we might mean is the value of true beliefs. It is true beliefs we have in mind when we say that truth is a *goal of inquiry*.<sup>1</sup> Here's how I understand this. First, by 'inquiry' I mean the range of epistemic practices we engage in when asking and answering questions, whether banal ('where did I put my other sock') or sublime ('Can something come from nothing?'). Second, by 'goal' I don't mean something that is necessarily desired. It is true that when we say that something is a goal, of inquiry or anything else, we sometimes take this to imply that we desire it.<sup>2</sup> But truth often seems the faintest of human

<sup>1</sup> Note that I say 'a' not 'the'. I remain neutral on whether true belief is the only aim of inquiry. It may be its most fundamental aim; or simply one among several fundamental aims.

<sup>2</sup> Thus Sosa (2001) worries about whether we can desire the truth and nothing but the truth, as does Piller (forthcoming). I too have suggested elsewhere (Lynch 2004a and 2004b) that we can,

passions, undesired or actively avoided. In any event, these are matters of human psychology and best left to the experts. So let's instead say that truth is a goal of inquiry in the sense of being a proper end of our epistemic practices, where 'proper end' means something that is *worth* pursuing, whether we in fact do pursue it.

A natural way of characterizing the end in question is James's demand that we shouldn't just 'believe the truth!' we should 'shun error!' It is not just good to believe the truth, then, it is good to not believe what is not true; that is, it is good to believe only the truth. Thus one might suggest that

(TE) It is *prima facie* good that one believes all and only what is true.

I use the word 'good' here to qualify a general state of affairs: the state of affairs of believing all and only true propositions. Note that (TE) does not say that it is good for one's actual beliefs to be true. One's *actual* beliefs might be absurd. The point is that it is good to believe *whatever* turns out to be true and only what is true.

The intuitive thought behind (TE) runs on all fours with the thought that it is *prima facie* good to be omniscient. And that seems plausible; it is good to be God, as it were. Understood in this way, however, the value of truth is too much of an ideal. After all, humans aren't gods, and no human can believe everything that is true. Accordingly, it seems to make sense to relativize the truth-goal to a restricted set of propositions:

(TG) It is *prima facie* good that, relative to the propositions one might consider, one believe all and only those that are true.<sup>3</sup>

Unpacking the embedded modality here will be tricky, but the point should be clear: (TG) doesn't say that it is good for the propositions that I actually consider to be true.<sup>4</sup> Rather, the point is that it is good, relative to the set of

arguing that this fact is good *evidence* for thinking we believe that having all and only true beliefs is good. But the key issue is not the psychological one; what matters is whether true beliefs are good or valuable, not whether they are desired. This betrays my conviction that what we desire is not equivalent to what is valuable, or even what we value.

<sup>3</sup> Here I am influenced by Ernest Sosa (2001) and Marian David, whose work on this matter has helped (and provoked) me in numerous ways; see David (2001); see also my reply to David (2005) in Lynch, 2005a.

<sup>4</sup> Alan Millar has suggested to me that one might capture the spirit of (TG) instead as:

(TG\*) It is a *prima facie* good that, when one has a belief as to whether or not p, it be the belief that p iff it is true that p, and the belief that not-p iff it is true that not-p.

This has the advantage of not containing the restriction to beliefs that one might consider. But, unlike (TG) itself, it would seem to commit us, via classical logic, to: for all p, either p is true or not-p is true. Whether this is a problem (given that TS might be thought to commit one to the same), I leave to one side here. In any event, for purposes of what follows, the choice between (TG) and (TG\*) is immaterial.

propositions I am able to consider, that I believe all and only those that are true.<sup>5</sup>

Principle (TG) claims that the state of affairs of believing what is true and only what is true on any matter that might come to hand is always good; but it is *always prima facie good*. Something is good in this way when there is always something to say for it; when it is good considered by itself but not necessarily good all things considered. Almost everything that is good is *prima facie good*. Keeping a promise, for example, is always good, other things being equal; but it is best to break a date to save the ubiquitous drowning child. Likewise, while it is always good that one believe only the truth, it is not always good, all things considered. This reflects the fact that while truth is a value, it is not our only value; and sometimes our values, whether they are cognitive or moral, conflict. Thus it might be good, all things considered, to believe something false when, for example, it is justified by the evidence. And not only are there good falsehoods, there are also bad truths. There are all sorts of trivial truths that are not worth believing, given my limited intellect and time. Nonetheless, were these limits not in place—were it to be the case that believing the truth was cost-free, so to speak—then it would be good to believe all and only what is true. And that is just to say that believing what is true is a *prima facie good*.<sup>6</sup>

It is helpful, in discussing these matters, to distinguish between the ultimate end or value that *governs* the practice and the more immediate aims that are justified in light of this ultimate value. The former is the light, however practically unreachable, by which the practice steers, so to speak. The latter are the direct goals practitioners typically aim to achieve. In saying that true belief is a proper end of inquiry, we take it to be an aim of inquiry in the first sense. An individual inquirer rarely has (TG) as a conscious aim in her everyday epistemological life. And even when she does, she cannot achieve that end—in the sense of (TG)—directly. One does not simply will oneself to believe the truth. Rather, we pursue truth indirectly, by pursuing those beliefs backed by reasons and supported by the evidence. Yet these more practical and immediate goals only make sense in the light of the value of truth. If it was not good to believe what is true, then the pursuit of justification would be unimportant. We pursue the truth indirectly by directly pursuing—aiming at—justification.

What sort of goodness is involved in (TG)? The question of how to sort goods is a thorny one, but we need not enter that thicket here. Instead, let us note

<sup>5</sup> (TG) and (TE) are obviously different: one is an absolute ideal; the other is relativized to propositions I am able to consider. But intuitively, (TG) is justified by (TE). For unless it were good to believe all and only what is true, it would be difficult to see why it would be good to believe all and only what is true on any matter that comes to hand. That is, if the unrestricted ideal was not good, it is hard to see how restricting it could be.

<sup>6</sup> For more remarks on the structural relationships between the value of truth and other values, see Lynch 2004a: ch. 4.

that it is at least initially plausible to think that true belief is not a moral good, because what is morally good is generally either a subject or an object of direct responsibility. But believing what is true and only what is true is not something we are directly responsible for. What we are directly responsible for is how we go about pursuing true beliefs (or not) in our everyday epistemic life. Thus in the sense described by (TG), true beliefs seem better described as an epistemic or, if you prefer, a cognitive good.

## 2. TRUTH AS A NORM OF BELIEF

The second idea we might be talking about when discussing the value of truth is the value of believing what is true. This is presumably what James was thinking of when he noted that truth is the good in the way of belief (1975: 42). He might have better said that truth is the right in the way of belief; for the idea here is that true beliefs are right or correct. That is,

(TN) It is correct to believe  $\langle p \rangle$  if and only if  $\langle p \rangle$  is true.

Where (TG) ascribes value to a general state of affairs, (TN) ascribes value—what I'm here calling 'correctness'—to *believing* true propositions.<sup>7</sup> There are of course similarities between the two principles as well. Here too the value in question seems more cognitive than moral. While I can be responsible for how I go about forming beliefs, I am not, strictly speaking, responsible for the belief itself.<sup>8</sup>

So unpacked, (TN) appears to be not only true, but a truism.<sup>9</sup> But it is not vacuous or trivial. For on the intended reading 'it is correct to believe  $\langle p \rangle$ ' and ' $\langle p \rangle$  is true' are not merely two ways to say the same thing. For what is true is the propositional content of the belief, while what is correct is the believing of that content. Thus *the two sides* of (TN) state different facts; while (TN) *as whole* claims those facts are co-extensive.

(TN) might be thought to tell us that truth is the aim of belief. But this is at best a metaphor. As Wedgewood, notes, beliefs aren't little archers aimed at

<sup>7</sup> Again, David 2001 and 2005 and Lynch 2005a are instructive.

<sup>8</sup> I use the word 'correct' here to help us distinguish (TN) from (TG). But don't be misled by the thought that what is correct is always an action. Beliefs aren't actions, at least in the typical sense of that term. I can't, for example, simply will myself to believe that George Bush wasn't President in the direct way I can will myself to raise my arm. Thus in saying that it is correct to for you to believe that  $p$  when it is true, I am not to be understood as saying that your true beliefs are actions done well.

<sup>9</sup> We might wish to add that believings are themselves only *prima facie* correct. At least this is what we should say unless we have an airtight argument that there are no other norms, cognitive or otherwise, that operate over belief. Justification and rationality, for example, are normative, and they operate over belief. Moreover, they can conflict with the norm of truth—what is justified isn't always true. Nor is believing what is false always irrational.

truth (2002: 267). Moreover, in saying that beliefs aim at the truth, we aren't saying that in deciding what to believe, I must somehow expend effort in trying to believe what is true. This means that in the literal sense, truth is not an aim or goal of belief. It is not something beliefs strive for.<sup>10</sup> *True belief is the aim of inquiry but beliefs don't aim at the truth.* Nonetheless, as a number of recent writers have urged, (TN) does tell us something about belief (Boghossian 2003; Velleman 2000; Shah 2003; Wedgewood 2002). Namely, it tells us that belief's basic norm or standard of correctness is truth.

Three considerations suggest this is, moreover, a constitutive or essential fact about belief. First, the fact that truth is a norm of correctness for believing is part of what distinguishes believing from other cognitive attitudes. Imagining, assuming, and hoping, for example, are each governed by norms—assumptions can be justified or not, imaginings can be sharp or vague, hopes can be rational or irrational. But neither imagining that *p*, assuming that *p*, nor hoping that *p* are properly evaluated in terms of truth. Believing is.

Second, believing that *p* is not only properly evaluated in terms of the truth of  $\langle p \rangle$ , it is indirectly *responsive* to its being true. In the typical conscious, deliberative case, it is so by being directly responsive to evidence for  $\langle p \rangle$  (Shah 2003). And this suggests, third, that truth is not just a norm of belief, it is a basic norm. For we take it to be correct to believe what is based on evidence *because* beliefs based on evidence are likely to be *true*, and thus the value of truth in this sense is more basic than the value of believing what is based on evidence.<sup>11</sup>

In sum, that truth is the norm of belief serves to distinguish belief from other cognitive attitudes. And this norm seems more basic than the demand to believe what is justified or based on evidence. Thus it is plausible that (TN) is a necessary, constitutive fact about belief.<sup>12</sup>

Recently Shah (2003) and Shah and Velleman (2005) have gone farther and claimed that (TN) is a straightforward *conceptual* or analytic truth. As Velleman earlier put it:

The concept of belief just is the concept of an attitude for which there is such a thing as correctness or incorrectness, consisting in truth or falsity. For a propositional attitude to

<sup>10</sup> Marian David (2005) and Nishi Shah (2003) both make this point.

<sup>11</sup> This point also illustrates the difficulty in maintaining that epistemic rationality or justification is an *equally basic* norm of believing as truth. For to maintain that view, one would have to deny that what makes it correct to believe what is justified or epistemically rational is that justified beliefs are likely to be true. In other words, one would have to deny the seemingly necessary link between the value of justification and justification's truth-conduciveness. For more on this score, see Lynch 2004a. Note that *this* issue, which concerns which norms are basic on *acts* of belief, is distinct from the issue of whether there are other goals of *inquiry* besides having true beliefs. For this latter issue, discussed further below, see DePaul (2001) and David (2001).

<sup>12</sup> Some might say more cautiously: it is a constitutive fact about full-fledged beliefs: perhaps animals might have proto-belief states without being subject to any norms, no matter how trivial. I leave this difficulty to one side here.

be a belief just is, in part, for it to be capable of going right or wrong by being true or false. (2000: 16)

So, as Shah suggests, one must accept the ‘authority of truth over one’s cognition when one views it as a belief’—simply because this is a conceptual consequence of taking your cognitive activity to be a belief at all (2003: 474). This is certainly reasonable, but for purposes of our discussion we needn’t go so far. We need only say that given (TN), those who have beliefs, and have the capacity to recognize that they do, are implicitly committed to accepting that truth constitutes a normative standard for belief. Whether or not this is, as Shah believes, because (TN) is a conceptual truth, or whether it is simply a fact about belief, we can leave to one side.

Although they are distinct claims, (TN) and (TG) are interdependent. One connection between them consists in the structure of their justification (Lynch 2005a; cf. David 2005; McGrath 2005). But they are also connected in terms of how commitment to one can drag in its wake commitment to the other.

For example, we’ve noted that (TN) implies that truth constitutes a normative standard for belief. A consequence of truth being a normative standard of belief is that the having of that property plays a regulative role for any practice that aims at producing belief. Since inquiry is just such a practice, truth plays a regulative role for inquiry. A property P plays a regulative role in a practice when, just by virtue of participating in that practice, one is normatively committed to regulating one’s moves in the practice by one’s judgments about what has or lacks that property (Wedgewood 2002: 268). Thus the property of being a winning chess move is regulative of chess: in playing chess I am committed to regulating my moves by my judgments of what is or isn’t a winning move. Likewise, in figuring out what to believe—that is, when engaging in inquiry—I am committed to regulating my doxastic practices by my judgments about what is or isn’t true. Indeed, I am regulated by the truth in inquiry in the most direct possible way: the recognition that p is true is a decisive reason to believe it (Shah 2003).

It is a quick step between being committed to doing what is correct and being committed to the goodness of that which is correct. If my action is morally correct just when what I do is right, then clearly, if I engage in moral deliberation, that is, if I am *trying to figure out what to do, morally speaking*, my activity is governed by the principle that it is good to do what is right. Engagement in a goal-directed practice commits me to the value of the goal I so pursue. Likewise, if my believing is cognitively correct just when what I believe is true, then if I am engaged in inquiry, that is, *I am trying to figure out what to believe*, then I am normatively committed to my doxastic practices being governed by (TG). Call this the *trivial connection principle*: If I am committed to (TN), and I engage in inquiry, I am committed to (TG).

### 3. THE META-ETHICS OF BELIEF

So there are two values of truth: the value of having true beliefs, or (TG), and the value of a belief's being true (TN). There is much more to say about the character of both values, but I now want to turn to our principal question: What sort of meta-normative stance should we take towards these values? Or perhaps we should say: what sort of meta-normative stance *can* we take towards them?<sup>13</sup>

Let's begin with (TN). Since (TN) is, we've claimed, a description of a norm of belief, asking about the ontological status of this norm amounts to asking for a meta-ethics of belief. (TN) says that beliefs are correct when true; for ease of exposition, let's call the correctness (TN) speaks of *alethic correctness*. Briefly put, the following options, at least, seem available towards alethic correctness:

Non-naturalism: It is a *sui generis*, non-natural objective fact that beliefs are correct if and only if true.

Naturalism: It is a natural, objective fact that beliefs are correct if and only if true.

Error Theory: It is (literally) false that beliefs are correct if and only if true.

Expressivism: It is a non-factual matter whether beliefs are correct if and only if true, since to describe a belief as correct is not to state a fact about it but to express a sentiment or attitude.

One version of naturalism about alethic correctness holds that true propositions are correct to believe only as a means towards something else (see e.g. Papineau 1999). I've argued against this claim elsewhere (Lynch 2004a); here my interest is in skepticism, not naturalism. Thus I won't be worrying here about either of the first two positions.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> I have characterized both values in a strong biconditional form. The arguments that follow, however, are largely independent of my own characterization of these values.

<sup>14</sup> Here's one way of putting the worry about taking alethic correctness to be a purely instrumental value. To believe that it is amounts to holding that:

- (i) It is correct to believe <p> if and only if believing <p> is a means to X.

Now if we assume that an advocate of (SN) will accept (TN), then given

- (TS) <p> is true if and only if p,

We can derive from their position, via transitivity of the biconditional:

- (ii) <p> is true if and only if believing <p> is a means to x.

Now presumably, any such position will read (i) and (ii) as follows:

Of the latter two, expressivism seems the far more interesting position. In part this is because error theory about alethic correctness is presumably already ruled out if (TN) is a constitutive fact about belief. It can't be false to say that a belief is correct when true if it is a necessary truth about belief that beliefs are correct when true. At least so it seems to me.<sup>15</sup> Thus in what follows I'll take expressivism about alethic correctness as my primary example of skepticism about that value; but I also take the arguments raised below to apply to any form of skepticism about alethic correctness.

As indicated, expressivism about (TN) amounts to saying that the normative import of ascribing truth to a belief is an expressive, rather than descriptive affair. The correctness of a true belief is not a property that the belief has *per se*, but an expression or projection of our own desires and sentiments. Consequently, it is not a new and mysterious feature of the world that the naturalist can't explain. It is no feature of the world at all, but a feature of us. Thus, for example, a toy version of the view would take (TN) to mean:

(TN<sub>e</sub>) Hooray for believing  $\langle p \rangle$  if and only if  $\langle p \rangle$  is true.

Since the left hand-side ('Hooray for believing  $\langle p \rangle$ ') lacks truth-value, the whole of (TN<sub>e</sub>) presumably does as well. And this of course brings up the usual problems faced by expressivists, for at a minimum it demands an explanation for the two associated conditionals, that is:

(1) Hooray for believing  $\langle p \rangle$  if  $\langle p \rangle$  is true.

And (even more oddly)

(2)  $\langle p \rangle$  is true if hooray for believing  $\langle p \rangle$ .

It is not clear what these statements mean, and thus they seem ill-suited to act in an analysis of (TN).

Yet this familiar type of worry is not the main problem facing the alethic expressivist. The main problem is that expressivism about (TN) is self-undermining.

(i\*) It is correct to believe  $\langle p \rangle$  in virtue of believing  $\langle p \rangle$  being a means to X.

(ii\*) Believing  $\langle p \rangle$  is a means to x in virtue of  $\langle p \rangle$  being true.

That is, the naturalist will claim that the alethic correctness of a belief is explained by its having some instrumental value, and its having that value is in turn explained by the proposition believed being true. Nonetheless, if (TS) and (TN) are accepted, (ii) remains true. And that means that the naturalist must make a plausible case that there is *prima facie* instrumental value of a specific sort that attaches to believing any particular true proposition. (Note that this is distinct from arguing that there is instrumental value to having all and only true beliefs.) Moreover, if their view is not to slip back into non-naturalism, they must argue that this is the *only* type of value that can attach to believing what is true. And that seems difficult to do.

<sup>15</sup> It is possible that some form of fictionalism about alethic correctness might avoid this problem, but I won't explore the issue here.



In order to state expressivism, one must express a belief about expressivism, and in doing that, one is committed to (TN). That is, to assert that,

- (3) (TN) is neither true nor false

requires that you *believe* that (TN) is neither true nor false. But if (TN) is a constitutive fact about belief, then to believe that (TN) is neither true nor false in turn commits one to believing the following instance of (TN):

- (4) It is correct to believe <(TN) is neither true nor false> if and only if <(TN) is neither true nor false> is true.

Hence believing that (TN) is neither true nor false commits one to believing that it is true.

So the outlook seems grim for the expressivist about alethic value. But perhaps all is not lost. So far we've only looked at a toy version of the view. A more sophisticated version will attempt to dodge such complications by invoking a now-familiar two-stance approach. One stance is the stance we take when we *employ* evaluative language. Thus, from what Mark Timmons usefully calls the *morally engaged standpoint* (1998: 150–1), the moral expressivist can affirm all that the realist can affirm. She can do so, the claim goes, by adopting a minimalist or deflationary theory of truth (see Timmons 1998; Blackburn 1998).

Deflationism about truth comes in many forms. But the standard versions of the view tend to endorse the following three points.<sup>16</sup> First, our grasp of the concept of truth is constituted by our grasp of (the instances of) the T-schema:

- (TS) <p> is true if and only if p.

Second, the concept of truth we so grasp is only an expressive device: its sole function is that it allows us to generalize over propositions as in 'Everything Socrates said was true.' Consequently, third, it is a mistake to think that truth has a 'nature'; we needn't appeal to truth to explain anything of philosophical importance.

If minimalism is true, the expressivist contends, then since there is nothing more to saying that <p> is true than, roughly, saying that p, our sentimental commitments just carry over the T-schema. So whatever attitude I express when affirming that slavery is wrong, I can climb 'Ramsey's ladder,' as Blackburn puts it, and express it by saying it is true that it is wrong, or that it is objectively true that it is wrong, or that it is really incredibly objectively true that it is wrong, and so on (see Blackburn 1998: 78–9). At least, all this is so from the morally engaged standpoint.

<sup>16</sup> Representative examples of deflationists include Horwich (1998a); Field (2001); Williams (2001).

The expressivist, however, also employs another stance in regarding morality—what Timmons calls the *morally disengaged standpoint*. This is the stance from which the expressivist wishes to ‘give a story about how ethical thought functions’ (Blackburn 1998: 49). From this vantage point, the expressivist insists that evaluative thought and language look very different than the realist believes. Theorists describe the difference differently, saying variously that evaluative claims don’t aim to represent, or describe, they don’t express beliefs; they don’t correspond to the mind-independent world, or simply ‘they are neither true nor false’ (Timmons 1998: 151). But however it is cashed out, this need for a second stance is clear: it allows the expressivist to speak with the vulgar while still maintaining what is distinctive about her position—namely a form of meta-ethical skepticism or irrealism about value, one which affirms that, for example, ‘ethical properties of things are constructed precisely in order to reflect our concerns’ (1998: 80).

So according to the contemporary expressivist, from the engaged standpoint, slavery is wrong and so is anyone who believes otherwise. But from the disengaged standpoint, from which we are not using but explaining evaluative thought and language, differing moral ends are on a par, factually speaking. As Timmons puts it, there is no moral FACT—no mind-independent, objective fact—of the matter about which moral outlook is correct (Timmons 1998: 152).

Applied to the present case, we presumably arrive at something like the following. The expressivist will insist that, from the *alethically engaged perspective*, she can say whatever the realist can say about the truth-norm. It is correct to believe a proposition when it is true, and if a proposition is true, it is correct to believe. (TN) is therefore not, from this perspective, equivalent in meaning to (TNe). Rather (TN) is just true. But from the *alethically disengaged perspective*, ascriptions of alethic correctness, and hence (TN) itself, are neither true nor false but expressions of our desires and sentiments.

But here the expressivist faces an obvious problem. If the view is to be coherent, it must be possible for us to achieve the alethically disengaged standpoint. In order to even state her view, the expressivist about alethic correctness must be able to abstract from her own sentiments toward true beliefs in order to rise above them. And if we are going to be able to assess the view, let alone agree with it, we must be able to do the same. In the moral case, this is perhaps not too difficult—we don’t have to try too hard to imagine having been brought up with different values. But it is not clear, to say the least, whether I can abstract from my sentiments towards believing.

But hold on, one might think—Isn’t the expressivist simply offering a different sort of *explanation* of our doxastic practice? The expressivist, one might say, following Simon Blackburn, is merely doing a bit of Humean naturalist philosophy, helping us to see what *grounds* our positive evaluations of beliefs and then reminding us that this is all the explanation we need for

those evaluations—no appeal to ‘normative facts’ is necessary. Surely that is a reasonable and coherent enterprise?<sup>17</sup>

An explanatory stance of this sort in the case of moral evaluation does seem coherent. But I remain unconvinced in the present case, and the issue again hangs on whether there is conceptual room for the expressivist to make her needed two-stance distinction in the case of alethic value.

Consider again the moral expressivist. In offering her explanation of the grounds of our moral sentiments, she typically insists, with the realist, on the supervenience of the moral on the non-moral. Our moral evaluations are *determined* by natural facts; and as such, they don’t just come out of thin air; they are roped, via our use of our specific moral concepts, to the non-moral facts on the ground. Asked to say why it is that we have the sentiments we do towards, for example, pleasure, the expressivist will point us to the natural facts about pleasure, its causes, and our human reactions to it. These facts explain why we have the sentiments we do, and why we express them in this way rather than not.

The alethic expressivist will wish to say the same in the present case. That is, she will presumably ‘read’ (TN) ‘Socratically’—as telling us that we positively evaluate beliefs in virtue of their being true. In other words, the ‘natural’ fact that a given proposition is true is what *makes it the case* that it is correct to believe—or at least makes it the case that we express a positive sentiment towards believing that proposition. Once again, our sentiments do not come out of thin air. We cheer for doing what is pleasurable because of what pleasure is; we cheer for believing a true proposition rather than a false but flattering one because of what truth is. And this means that, just as in the moral case, we need to say something about what truth is if we wish to explain why our moral sentiments are the way they are.

But now the problem appears: for just as our moral expressivist employs the facts about pleasure to *explain* our positive evaluations of it, so the alethic expressivist invokes truth to *explain* our positive evaluations of beliefs. This is no problem just so long as the expressivist has a theory of truth that allows for this. But the contemporary expressivist we’ve been imagining is a deflationist; and this is just the sort of explanation the deflationist is presumably barred from using.

The point here *isn’t* that a deflationist can’t agree that TN is true. She’ll insist that she can, just as she’ll insist that she can accept any generalization involving truth that we might happen to mention. In this case, she’ll first point out that she can obviously accept every instance of the schema:

It is correct to believe <p> if and only if p.

And then claim that ‘true’ is employed merely as a device for generalizing over such instances, resulting in the ‘equivalent’ (TN). I am not contesting

<sup>17</sup> Broadly speaking, this is how I understand Blackburn’s approach in his (1998).

this (familiar) move here, although I have elsewhere.<sup>18</sup> Rather, my point is that *expressivism* about (TN) is unstable. On the one hand, the expressivist about (TN) needs a deflationary theory of truth if she is going to make sense of biconditionals like (TN). On the other, she must appeal to the nature of truth if she is going to explain why our sentiments are as they are. And it is this that is not allowed on deflationism, for the deflationist believes that truth has no nature, and has no explanatory role to play in philosophical explanation.

The point here is analogous to the familiar point—widely granted by deflationists—that deflationism isn't compatible with a truth-conditional theory of the nature of meaning.<sup>19</sup> The deflationist *can* agree that, when explaining the meaning of any particular sentence, it is perfectly correct (if trivial) to cite its truth condition (e.g. to say that 'snow is white' means that snow is white). What she *can't* agree to is that we must appeal to truth to explain what meaning consists in. For to do that would be to concede that there are facts about the nature of truth—facts about its intimate relation to meaning—that go beyond the concept's expressive function. Similarly, the deflationist might be able to grant TN, but she won't grant the very point the expressivist needs: namely that it is correct to believe a proposition *in virtue of* its having the property of truth. For to say this commits one to holding that there are facts about truth and its explanatory power that go beyond what can be gleaned from TS.

This is perhaps unsurprising. After all, it seems reasonable to think that if (TN) tells us something about belief, then it also tells us something about truth—namely that truth just is, in part, a basic norm of correctness for belief. Truth and belief are clearly interrelated. And so it seems that if (TN) is a constitutive fact about belief, then it is also a constitutive fact about truth. Here Dummett's old analogy of truth and winning is on the mark: the fact that the aim of a game is to win is not just a fact about games; it is also a fact about winning (Dummett 1959). Similarly, the fact that the 'aim' of belief is truth is not just a fact about belief; it is a fact about truth. Of course, the nature and explanation of this fact, like its sister fact about belief, is a matter of dispute—but the conclusion, however understood, seems unavoidable if we read (TN) in the natural, Socratic, way we have here.

I conclude, therefore, that attempting to evade our initial arguments against expressivism about alethic correctness (that it can't explain the conditionals (1) and (2) and that it is self-undermining) by appeal to a two-stance approach towards (TN) fails. The expressivist about (TN) faces a dwindling number of options at this point. One is to deny that (TN) is a constitutive fact about belief. But that requires a non-standard account of belief and its norms. Another is to claim that statements of the form 'x believes that y' are themselves neither true nor false—that is, to embrace an expressivism about belief. This requires a very

<sup>18</sup> See Lynch 2004*b*.

<sup>19</sup> See Field 2001; Horwich 1998*b* for prime examples of deflationists who make this point.

non-standard theory of mind. An initially more plausible approach might be to reject the premise, appealed to just above, that the expressivist needs to read (TN) as

Socratic: It is correct to believe  $\langle p \rangle$  in virtue of  $\langle p \rangle$  being true.

How else to read (TN)? Well, one possibility is to read it as

Euthyphronic:  $\langle p \rangle$  is true in virtue of it being correct to believe  $\langle p \rangle$ .

Another would be to take it that truth and alethic correctness are simply identical. Earlier we noted that this is implausible if we take correctness to attach to the act of believing and truth to the proposition believed. But we might try avoiding this by construing 'correct to believe  $\langle p \rangle$ ' as equivalent to ' $\langle p \rangle$  is correct to believe.' If so, then we might claim:

Identical:  $\langle p \rangle$  is true =  $\langle p \rangle$  is correct to believe.

Both of these interpretations have their problems; but for present purposes, we need only note that neither will do for the expressivist. If either Euthyphronic or Identical is endorsed together with expressivism about alethic correctness, the latter position collapses. Here's why. Let us grant, for the moment, that the expressivist is entitled to deflationism after all. And thus let us grant that she is entitled to her distinction between the alethically engaged and disengaged perspectives. Thus, on her view, from the alethically disengaged perspective

$\langle p \rangle$  is correct to believe

does not state a fact—or a FACT, even if from the engaged perspective, we are entitled to say that it is true, and thus expresses a fact in the deflationary sense. But now consider: if either Euthyphronic or Identical are true, then it is difficult to see how

$\langle p \rangle$  is true

could fail to be non-FACTUAL as well. Take Euthyphronic, which says that the truth of a proposition is determined by its being correct. If it is non-FACTUAL whether  $x$ , and  $x$  determines  $y$ , then it can't be a FACTUAL matter whether  $y$ . Thus if being correct is not a FACTUAL matter, and correctness determines truth, then being true is not a FACTUAL matter either. Even more obviously, if correctness is just identical to truth, as Identical contends, then if correctness is non-FACTUAL, so is truth. Things get worse from here. For given the T-schema, where

$\langle p \rangle$  is true

fails to be FACTUAL, so must  $p$ . Which is to say that nothing at all is a FACT. And that seems bad, not only because it is absurd—but because it once again deconstructs the distinction between FACTS and facts that the expressivist requires.

#### 4. EXPRESSIVISM ABOUT TRUTH AS A GOAL OF INQUIRY

So far then, we have found that skepticism about (TN) is difficult to sustain. What about (TG)? Here too, I think that skepticism is not promising. Since that is the subject of a companion piece to this paper, I will only briefly summarize my view on the matter here.<sup>20</sup>

Let's again take as our target form of skepticism an expressivist view of the value in question. That value is again the value of true beliefs as a goal of inquiry. Call this epistemic expressivism. It amounts to the view that there is no FACT of the matter about whether (TG) is true.

Again, the epistemic expressivist will wish to distinguish two stances: the epistemically engaged and disengaged perspectives. The first perspective is the one she has when she engages in inquiry; the second is the perspective from which she offers her meta-normative explanation of the goals of inquiry. From this latter perspective, to say that truth is a proper end of inquiry is not to say something true but to express a sentiment. This is to agree with Hartry Field when he says,

There are no constraints on what one's epistemological goals ought to be: nothing makes it wrong for a person not to care about achieving truth and avoiding falsehood but adopting beliefs that will make him feel good about his cultural origins. (Field 2001: 385)

From the epistemically disengaged perspective, there is no question of whether one goal of inquiry is better than another.

In my view, the epistemic expressivist, like the alethic expressivist we just discussed, faces a problem right here. For there are serious reasons to think that, whatever we might say in the moral case, the epistemically disengaged standpoint is illusory.

In the contrasting ethical case, the moral expressivist asks us to consider people who have very different moral ends than our own. For it is by considering this possibility that we are able to perform the necessary 'disengagement' from our own moral ends and view them with a critical eye. Similarly, if we are to make sense of the epistemically disengaged standpoint, we need to consider the possibility of not having true belief as an epistemic goal. It isn't sufficient to simply imagine someone who has *more* than true belief among his aims (such as someone who wants justified *and* true beliefs). Rather, one would have to say that someone could engage in inquiry without having true belief among his aims at all. But here we have the problem: for an activity whose aims don't include true belief isn't bad inquiry; it is not inquiry at all.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> See Lynch (forthcoming).

<sup>21</sup> And the point can be put in terms of (TN) as well: the expressivist about the truth norm would have to be able to make sense of believers whose beliefs were not correct when true. But

Suppose we encounter someone, for example, who is committed to the goal of 'accepting' all and only that which flatters his cultural origin. What would make us think that in attempting to 'accept' propositions that have this property, he is actually engaging in inquiry? Our reflections on (TN) suggests that, unless his practices are regulated by the property of truth, we can't even understand him as engaged in figuring out what to *believe*, as opposed to engaging in an elaborate game of wishful thinking. And if he isn't engaged in figuring out what to believe, he isn't engaged in inquiry. On the other if he is forming beliefs when accepting his preferred type of proposition, he is implicitly committed to (TN); and what we've called the trivial connection principle tells us that if one is committed to (TN), and one engages in inquiry, one is committed to (TG). In sum, it seems that unlike the moral case, we can't readily conceive of different *epistemic* goals that don't include among them the goal of believing what's true. And that is just to say that we can't meaningfully abstract from our own epistemic goals, which in turn means that the idea of an epistemically disengaged standpoint is empty.

Of course, even if this argument is successful, it doesn't solve what might be a deeper question. For suppose we grant that people who don't care at all about the truth, and are motivated by entirely different goals, aren't engaged in inquiry, but rather schminquiry, and they form schmeliefs rather than beliefs. So what? This just pushes the question back. Why is it better to have beliefs rather than schmeliefs to engage in inquiry rather than schminquiry? Why is it good to be epistemically engaged at all?

Can we answer this? If the question is understood as a demand for justification for *inquiry as a whole*, it seems simply impossible to answer. For it asks us to provide an epistemic *reason*, an *argument*, and a *justification* for the practice of giving reasons, arguments, and justifications. And that obviously can't be done, for those activities are constitutive of inquiry, whose aim is the formation of true beliefs. I cannot give a non-circular justification of my belief that it is valuable to engage in inquiry; for in answering the question I am already committed to the value of the very practice in question. Consequently, I can't say what makes inquiry epistemically better than schminquiry. But the best explanation of this fact is not, surely, that there is no fact of the matter. Rather, it is because one can assess something epistemically only from the epistemically engaged standpoint. To ask for a justification from the epistemically disengaged standpoint is to ask for nothing.

Of course, this is not to say that we must remain mute in the face of a more realistic and hence more formidable skepticism, one which challenges us to tell us why we should care so much about truth, or claims that inquiry and true belief are only good as means to power, or some such. In the face of this more limited

that can't be made sense of, for it is a fundamental fact about belief that beliefs are correct when true.

skepticism about inquiry and truth, we can point to the connections between true belief and inquiry and our other values. We can, in short, demonstrate the constitutive role inquiry and its proper aim play in our lives. To do so would be to show how the values of truth are essentially part of, rather than mere means to, other things that matter, such as integrity, authenticity, and democratic political institutions. I have attempted some remarks to this end elsewhere, and will not repeat them here (2004a). My present point is simply that we are not without resources for giving a less global, if more realistic, explanation for why we should care about truth and inquiry.

Skeptics may respond to these more limited justifications by suggesting that they only give moral, or at any rate non-epistemic, reasons for the value of true belief and inquiry. Does this mean that true belief is not a truly epistemic value after all? Of course not—any more than a successful answer to the question ‘why be moral’ would show that there were no moral values. We cannot give reductive answers to such spade-turning questions; we can only point to the connections between our values.

Thus it appears that expressivism about (TG), like expressivism about (TN), is difficult to make sense of simply because we don’t seem to be able to reach a sufficiently impartial standpoint from which to understand the position.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Our reflections have led us to something of a curious conclusion. They suggest that, unlike some of our other values, we cannot sufficiently abstract away from either value of truth in order to be sufficiently skeptical about them. It is as if we cannot be objective enough about our commitment to the values of truth.

One reason this is curious is that it falls short of a straightforward defense of realism about the values of truth. By a ‘straightforward’ defense I mean an argument which proves that (TN) and (TG) are objectively true. Our reflections don’t show this. They show that we can’t help but think they are objectively true. Yet the fact that we can’t help but think that either (TN) or (TG) is true threatens to be as much a fact about us as it does about the world.

Thankfully the conclusion has bite either way. It shows that we cannot, even if we wish to, take a skeptical attitude towards all of our values; towards some, certainly, but not towards all, or at least, not towards all at once. In particular, we cannot take a skeptical attitude towards the values of truth. And that means that we can’t help but think that there are some objective values. If this is not realism about value in the strictest sense, perhaps it is realism enough.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Earlier versions of this paper were read at the Stirling workshop on epistemic value and at the SSPP meeting in Charleston, NC. I thank the audiences on these occasions and Alan Millar, Duncan Pritchard, Adrian Haddock, Chase Wrenn, Carrie Jenkins, Patrick Greenough, Crispin Wright, Tom Bontly, and Paul Bloomfield for helpful discussion and comments.



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