

Why Can't What Is True Be Valuable?

(In *Synthese*)

Abstract

In recent discussions of the so-called “value of truth,” it is assumed that *what* is valuable in the relevant way is not the things that are true, but only various states and activities associated with those things: knowing them, investigating them, etc. I consider all the arguments I know of for this assumption, and argue that none provide good reason to accept it. By examining these arguments, we gain a better appreciation of what the value of the things that are true would be, and why it would matter. We also encounter three indications that what is true really is valuable, each of which provides a promising starting point for a serious argument with that conclusion.

The Value of Truths Dismissed

Peter Geach tells us of “a wartime slogan in Poland...we fight for Truth and Poland: a slogan of which those who upheld logic and other learning at such peril in the underground Universities showed themselves worthy.”¹ Truth often appears in slogans like these alongside the other things that are most important to us: Poland, freedom, love, art, justice, and so on. Like these other things, Geach observes that “truth is often found worth living and dying for.”

Let us suppose that these slogans and descriptions are not badly misleading, and also that those at the underground Universities and others who find truth worth living and dying for are not making any kind of evaluative mistake. Under these suppositions, there must be some important *value* that is somehow closely connected with truth—a value with which devoted scholars, scientists, teachers, and journalists are somehow engaged. Moreover, the fact that these people sometimes pursue this value without regard to whether it will bring any other benefits—or even whether it is safe to do so—strongly suggests that they do not take the things that are valuable in this way to be only *instrumentally* valuable. Under these suppositions, then, it seems that there is some *important, non-instrumental* value that is *somehow closely connected with truth*.

¹Geach 1979, 234.

It is widely accepted by philosophers today that there is such a value, and I will take this for granted here.² I will also assume that our thinking about this value should be at least partly guided, as above, by the conduct of our intellectual heroes: that of devoted scholars, scientists, teachers, and journalists, including those who, in some sense, find truth “worth living and dying for.” To register its close connection with truth, I will call this important, non-instrumental value “alethic value,” and say that things valuable in this way are “alethically valuable.”³

Rather than “alethic value”, philosophers have traditionally called this value “the value *of* truth.” Those who still do so, however, warn readers not to take the name too literally, because it suggests that the property of truth *itself* is valuable, or that the things that have that property—the *true things*, the *truths*—are valuable, and both claims about the connection between alethic value and truth are widely rejected. As Bernard Williams explains, “The phrase ‘the value of truth’ should be taken as shorthand for the value of various states and activities associated with the truth.”⁴ Linda Zagzebski, similarly, claims that: “We...think of truth as good...[but] what we mean is that the relation that obtains between the believer and the [true] proposition believed...is a good one.”⁵ Michael Lynch begins his book about “why truth matters” with “a truism...about truth: that it is good. More precisely, it is good to believe what is true.”⁶ All three writers claim that certain human dealings with truths are alethically valuable, but not only that: they claim that *only* such dealings are valuable in this way. In particular, they claim that things that are true are *not*, themselves, alethically valuable. As Zagzebski goes on to put it, “the thing we think is good...is not true. The thing that is true...is not good.”

My interest here is in the claim that *true things are never alethically valuable*.

²For example, Goldman 1986, who thinks true beliefs have the relevant value, writes: “Truth acquisition is often desired for its own sake, not for ulterior ends. It would hardly be surprising, then, that intellectual norms should incorporate true beliefs as an autonomous [i.e. non-instrumental] value, quite apart from its possible contribution to biological or practical ends.” (98.) Alston 2005, who thinks knowledge and understanding are valuable in this way, claims that “the attainment of knowledge and understanding are...of intrinsic [i.e. non-instrumental] value.” (31). Williams 2002, who thinks dispositions to learn and tell truths are valuable in this way, argues that they are non-instrumentally valuable, and indeed, that “no human society can get by...with a purely instrumental conception” of their value. (59.) For a more critical discussion of the philosophical tradition that recognizes such a value, see the opening sections of Nietzsche 1886 and Essay 3 of **Nietzsche 1887**.

³At this stage, for etymological reasons, talking of “alethic value” is better than talking of “epistemic” or “doxastic” value. Those terms at least suggest a value that is essentially connected with *knowledge* or *belief*, respectively, but there ought to be no such suggestion: all we are entitled to assume that the value is somehow connected to truth. (Many who use those terms do make it clear that they are not assuming, at least at first, that the relevant value has any special connection with knowledge or belief, only with truth; such authors often mean what I mean by “alethic value.”)

⁴Williams 2002, 7.

⁵Zagzebski 2003, 136.

⁶Lynch 2004, 12.

As we will see, this claim is very widely endorsed in recent writings, and occasionally argued for. I know of no recent attempt to dispute it. But I think that this consensus is poorly motivated, and my main aim in this paper is to show that every argument I know of for this claim fails, providing no good reason to deny the alethic value of truths.

I know of five arguments in support of the claim, which center around:

1. Philosophical and ordinary-language tradition
2. The metaphysics of truth and value.
3. The claim that not all truths are valuable.
4. The claim that alethic value is found in connection with worthless truths.
5. Considerations of theoretical parsimony.

In coming to understand each argument and why it fails, we will come to better understand what the alethic value of true things would involve. In connection with the first, second, and fifth arguments, we will also encounter some indications that truths really *are* alethically valuable: three starting points for serious arguments with that conclusion. I will not develop these arguments here. My aim is to get philosophers to take seriously the possibility that true things are alethically valuable, by clearing away the spurious obstacles that prevent them from doing so.

Before we begin, a few terminological notes:

1. As I have said, the phrase “alethic value” refers to the important, non-instrumental value that is somehow closely connected with things being true: the value to which our attention can be drawn by descriptions like Geach’s. I will sometimes use the phrase “the value of truths” to refer to value (if there is any) of things that are true, and the phrase “the value of our dealings with truths” to refer to value (if there is any) of believing truths, knowing them, seeking them, being disposed to tell them, and the rest of our states and activities that involve true things. In these terms, the claim I oppose is that all alethic value is the value of our dealings with truths, none of it the value of truths. Put another way: I write in defense of the claim that some truths are alethically valuable, in opposition to the claim that only our dealings with truths are alethically valuable.
2. The central question is whether or not certain things are alethically valuable, which I have identified as *things which have the property of truth*, *things that are true*, and *truths*. But what are they? Following standard use, I will sometimes call them “propositions.” But in order to engage with as wide a range of arguments against their alethic value as possible, I will assume as

little as possible about what propositions are. (I will assume neither that they are structured nor unstructured, neither identical nor non-identical with facts, neither abstract nor concrete, and so on.) My aim is to show that no matter *how* we conceive of the things that are true, there are no obstacles to their being alethically valuable. For the sake of argument, then, I will accept almost any claim about what propositions are that anyone cares to use in an argument against the alethic value of true ones. I will assume only what is required to make sense of what Zagzebski, Williams, and Lynch are claiming: that beliefs, assertions, and the rest of our dealings with truths are never *themselves* true propositions—never, strictly speaking, things that are true—but they do *involve* true propositions in some way.

3. Philosophers use different terms for the kind of value that contrasts with *instrumental* value. (Terms like “final” and “for its own sake” are reliably used in this way, while terms like “intrinsic”, “objective”, and “autonomous” are sometimes used in this way and sometimes to pick out different contrasts.) I will stick with the terms “instrumental” and “non-instrumental”. We will soon consider in more detail just what the contrast is.

The Argument from Tradition

Zagzebski presents the claim that only our dealings with truths are alethically valuable as a clarification of “what we mean” in talking about the relevant value. This might suggest that there is nothing in ordinary or philosophical talk or thought that would suggest that anyone takes truths to be alethically valuable: a claim made explicitly by Davide Fassio and Anne Meylan, according to whom “both in epistemology and ordinary language the standard objects of...assessments have been universally considered to be...attitudes, not propositions.”⁷ If that is right, then the claim that no truths are alethically valuable derives whatever support philosophical and ordinary-language tradition has to give.

But I believe it is not right. When we read philosophers’ discussions of the connection between truth and value, and when we listen to the ordinary speakers whose conduct should guide our thinking about alethic value, we find a strong tradition of ascribing truth and value to the very same things.

⁷Fassio and Meylan 2018, 54-55. Fassio and Meylan follow the (somewhat etymologically ill-advised, see footnote 3 above) practice of calling the value and assessments in question “epistemic,” but they (rightly) use the term in a way that does not presuppose that the value has anything to do with knowledge, acknowledging that that it instead could be found in connection with mere true beliefs, possessed by agents or character traits, and so on. (see, e.g., page 50 and footnote 20.)

Williams knows this: he points out that in their discussions of the sort of truth-related value which scholars characteristically pursue, philosophers have expressed “outlooks which have associated truth and goodness in ways that represented these things as altogether prior to a human interest in them...[views which represented] the objects of our knowledge and their value as in themselves entirely independent of our thoughts or attitudes.”⁸ It is not only obscure or archaic figures who ascribe truth and value to the same things. When he claims that the word “true” belongs with “good” and “beautiful”, Gottlob Frege is following the philosophical tradition of his day in holding “true” to be an evaluative term, even though the things to which it is properly applied are not states or activities of ours.⁹ Later, we will see that Frege’s view and those Williams describes are especially extreme ways to affirm that some truths are alethically valuable—but they do serve to remind us that it cannot be easily maintained that nothing in the philosophical tradition suggests that anyone ever affirmed that.

Turning to ordinary talk: people regularly describe things that are true using terms like “interesting,” “fascinating,” and “cool.”¹⁰ In particular, those very scholars, scientists, teachers, and journalists whose conduct should guide our thinking about alethic value describe the truths with which they are concerned in these terms. But in their typical uses, these are evaluative terms: to describe a piece of art, an idea, or a person as fascinating or cool is typically to ascribe value to it.¹¹ Since alethic-value-focussed people use these terms to describe truths, understood in the most straightforward way, they ascribe this value to the same things to which they ascribe truth. Listening to such talk from such people, one easily gets the idea that they take true things to have the value to which they are devoted.

A glance at the history of philosophy and at what ordinary speakers say, then, suggests that alethic value is sometimes ascribed to what is true. Anyone who

⁸Williams 2002 (60-61). Plato, arguably, holds this view, and as Zagzebski 2003 mentions, “according to the medieval doctrine of the Transcendentals there is a fundamental unity between the good and the true.” (135.)

⁹See, e.g., Frege 1918–1919, and see Windelband 1882 for a conception of philosophy’s task in terms of these three basic ways of being valuable. Though Frege’s word for the things that are true is “thoughts”, he makes clear that these are not mental states or activities, but their objects.

¹⁰A Google search for the relevant phrases (“true and interesting,” “interesting truths,” etc.) produce millions of hits for books and articles: “True and interesting facts about Mars,” “Interesting truths about America’s Most-Forgotten Military Branch,” “25 Interesting Truths about your Musculoskeletal System,” “Fascinating Truths You Probably Didn’t Know About Freddie Mercury,” “Carly Fiorina Just Said a Fascinating and True Thing About Crony Capitalism”, etc. (For reasons that elude me, most of the top hits for “cool truths” are about teeth: “Cool truths about Dental Care,” “Ten Cool Truths about the Tooth,” etc.)

¹¹Since they have descriptive content as well, they are “thick” evaluative terms. “Fascinating” and “cool”, for example, are identified as such in Kirchin 2013a (2) and Kirchin 2013b (65).

wishes to offer the Argument from Tradition must explain this evidence away as somehow misleading—for example, must argue that the philosophers never really held the views Williams and I ascribe to them, that any value ascribed by ordinary speakers using the relevant terms is not really alethic value, and so on. I see no obvious starting points for such arguments.¹²

The philosophical and ordinary-language tradition, then, does not seem to support denying the alethic value of truths. On the contrary, to the extent that it supports anything, it appears to indicate that truths really *are* alethically valuable.¹³

The Argument from Metaphysics

In support of his claim that true propositions are not alethically valuable, Williams appeals to a clash between the metaphysics of what is true and that of value: he claims that “truth, as a property of propositions...is not the sort of thing that can have a value.”¹⁴ Though Williams does not elaborate, others make such arguments more explicitly. Jane Heal, for example, argues that true propositions are the wrong kind of thing to be valuable because “propositions, regarded as abstract objects” are not things that “we can promote or bring about.”¹⁵ These claims suggest that truths are the wrong kind of thing to be *alethically* valuable because they are the wrong kind of thing to be valuable *in any way*. There may also be particular metaphysical obstacles to the *alethic* value of truths. Most saliently, since

¹²At best, I see arguments the driving force of which is not historical and linguistic data itself, but the substantive assumptions that drive the other arguments that we will consider below. (For example, one might suppose that the ordinary speakers cannot be ascribing *alethic* value with such terms because they do not describe *all* true propositions using such evaluative language, while (they must recognize that) alethic value must be found in connection with *all* truths. Whether alethic value must really be found in connection with all truths is the subject of the third argument below.)

¹³The idea that these sorts of traditions could establish one view or another about alethic value will appeal to philosophers who employ a broadly *endoxic* method for theorizing about value: one on which the ways of thinking exhibited by past theorists and by ordinary people, and which are encoded in their use of words, are taken to be good guides to how value is. Someone who wishes to turn this indication into a serious argument for the alethic value of truths would need to establish through detailed historical work that the view in question is well-represented in the history of philosophy, considering figures in detail and ruling out any alternative interpretations of what they say. One would also need to consider the linguistic data of ordinary speakers in more detail, ruling out any plausible linguistic reasons to doubt that the relevant terms are ascribing alethic value in these cases. (For example, Väyrynen 2011 claims that thick terms (like “fascinating”) can be sometimes used without conveying the usual positive evaluation; that this might be going on here would have to be ruled out.)

¹⁴Williams 2002, 7.

¹⁵Heal 1987-1988, 98.

alethic value is *non-instrumental*, if propositions are the wrong kind of thing to be non-instrumentally valuable, it would follow that they cannot be alethically valuable. (W.D. Ross would have thought so: he could “find no plausibility” in the idea “that there are or may be intrinsic [i.e. non-instrumental] goods that are not states of mind or relations between states of mind.”¹⁶ If Ross is right, then since propositions are neither states nor relations of mind, true ones are not the sort of thing that can be non-instrumentally valuable, and hence, not the sort that can be alethically valuable.) If any arguments along these lines are correct, then the claim that truths are not alethically valuable will derive support from the metaphysics of truth and value.

But I believe they are not correct. I am prepared to grant for the sake of argument Heal’s claim that propositions are abstract, as well as any other claims about what they are that might figure in an argument against their alethic value. The problem with such arguments is not their problematic assumptions about what propositions are, but their problematic assumptions about what *value* is. We can see this by noting that a widespread and plausible contemporary perspective on value straightforwardly rejects the assumptions on which these metaphysical arguments depend—and when combined with our minimal assumptions about what propositions are, this same perspective make it very hard to see how there could be any others.

Heal’s assumption that valuable things must be things we can “promote or bring about” belongs to what Selim Berker calls the “teleological perspective” on value: that perspective according to which “the proper response to value is to bring it about, and the proper response to disvalue is to stop it from being brought about...For the teleologist all value is ‘to be promoted,’ and all disvalue is ‘to be prevented.’”¹⁷ This teleological approach is not very popular these days. It is more common to hold that the key feature of valuable things is that there are reasons to *positively respond* to them: to take up “positive” (or “pro”) attitudes toward them, and/or perform positive actions directed at them, where promoting and bringing about are just one sort of positive response. As T.M. Scanlon emphasizes in an influential discussion, different sorts of valuable things call for different responses: “understanding the value of something is...a matter of knowing how to value it—knowing what kinds of actions and attitudes are called for.” The most common

¹⁶Ross 1930, Chapter V. Ross uses “intrinsic” in opposition to “instrumental” partly as a result of conflation discussed in Korsgaard 1983.

¹⁷Berker 2013, 343. Berker’s use of “teleological” is slightly broader than that of Scanlon 1998, since Scanlon takes teleological views to hold not only that the proper response to value is to bring it about, but also that “The primary bearers of value are states of affairs”, so that “what we have reason to do...as far as questions of value are concerned...is to act so as to realize those states of affairs.” (79-80.)

responses called for are not promoting and bringing about, but “admiring the thing and...respecting it.”¹⁸

On this sort of view, there being reasons for positive responses is the key feature of things that are valuable in general. *Non-instrumental* value is a matter of there being reasons for “a positive response...that is directed to the value bearer for its own sake,” whereas when a thing is “instrumentally valuable...there are reasons to have a [positive response] toward [it] not for its own sake but for the sake of its effects.”¹⁹ Though it is not wholly clear what this means, it is typically intended to allow non-instrumental value to the sorts of things which, intuitively, we appreciate without any thought of their effects, like a beautiful coat or the environment.²⁰ Adherents to this perspective sometimes explicitly note that it places no restrictions on the metaphysical status of the things that can be non-instrumentally valuable, allowing “that final [i.e. non-instrumental] value accrues to different kinds of metaphysical entity, including abstract states of affairs and concrete objects such as persons.”²¹

I do not assume here that the perspective on value just sketched is correct, but only note that it is quite a popular view, endorsed by many prominent thinkers, but has no place for the assumptions about value that underlie the metaphysical arguments against the alethic value of truths that we have considered so far. The point is that since those arguments presuppose views about value which are widely rejected, they must have little force for most of us today.²²

¹⁸See Scanlon 1998, 95 and 99. Scanlon himself aims to offer an *analysis* of what it is for something to be valuable in terms of reasons for such responses, in which case their existence becomes a necessary and sufficient condition for something’s being valuable, and something that we must be able to understand without at any point appealing to value itself. These analytic ambitions give rise to some much-discussed difficulties and challenges, such as the “Wrong Kinds of Reasons” problem. But the perspective on understanding value that Scanlon expresses in the quoted passage can be, and is, adopted even by some who do not aim for such an analysis. Without an analysis, one may still hold that the existence of reasons for positive responses is a central feature of valuable things: that the absence of such reasons makes it reasonable to doubt something is valuable while their presence makes it reasonable to affirm that it is, that part of understanding something’s value is to understand which positive responses are called for, and so on.

¹⁹See Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen 2003, 391 and Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen 2004, 409. See also, for example, Velleman 1999 on the non-instrumental value (the value “as an end”) of persons and their rational natures: “the rational nature of a person already exists, and so taking it as an end doesn’t entail any inclination to cause or promote its existence...[Such] ends are the objects of motivating attitudes that regard and value them as they already are...[a person with a rational nature] is a proper object for reverence, an attitude that stands back in appreciation of the rational creature he is, without inclining toward any particular results to be produced.” (357-358)

²⁰These examples, and the idea that they are non-instrumentally valuable, are from Korsgaard 1983 and O’Neill 1992.

²¹Rønnow-Rasmussen 2011, 25.

²²It may be worth explaining how a different perspective on value *also* has no place for the

Could there be a different metaphysical argument against the alethic value of truths—one that is consistent with the perspective on value just described? One might suggest that propositions have some metaphysical status which makes it impossible to respond to them in *any* way, and that this precludes our having reasons to take up the sorts of responses that are relevant to value. But ascribing that kind of metaphysical status to propositions conflicts with our minimal assumption about them: that though our dealings with truths are not themselves propositions, they do involve true propositions in some way. (At least, it conflicts with that assumption as long as we have reasons to engage in some dealings with truths, which is surely common ground among any who believe in alethic value.) One might still suggest that the metaphysical status of propositions ensures that none of the responses for which we have reason could be of the relevant kind: they could not be *positive* ones, directed at true propositions *for their own sake*. Perhaps, but those who look for such an argument will find no support from leading accounts of non-instrumental value, which (as we have seen) explicitly allow that things with a wide range of metaphysical statuses can be non-instrumentally valuable. The prospects, then, for a metaphysical argument against the alethic value of truth that is consistent with this perspective do not seem good.

In the absence of such an argument, we are free to notice the strong analogies between responses to truths for which we have reason and other paradigmatic positive responses adopted toward objects for their own sake. For example, contemplating truths—an activity often engaged in by those whose conduct ought to guide our thinking about alethic value, and one for which we presumably have reason—seems to be a lot like, say, contemplating paintings. (Both involve mental focus, are characteristically accompanied with certain kinds of pleasure, involve calling to mind similar and related things which we have encountered, lead us to

assumptions on which the above arguments against the alethic value of truths depend. According to Geach 1956, all value is attributive: “there is no such thing as being just good or bad, there is only being a good or bad so-and-so.” (34) On the largely friendly emendation in Thomson 1997, the point is that “all goodness is goodness in a way” (276): if a book is good, it is either because it is good to read, or good to assign to undergraduates, or good to look at, and so on—not “just plain good.” Things that are good in these ways then provide reasons to those with appropriate desires: as Geach puts it, when someone wonders what they should do, “the only relevant answer is an appeal to something the questioner *wants*.” (39) Those who want something to read, for example, have reasons to read things that are good to read. (Geach does think that some wants are not optional.) This view does not support the idea that all value is to be “promoted”, or any other assumption that obviously yields a metaphysical objection to the alethic value of truths. Just as it is still the *book* that is good to read (and not just the reading itself), this view would allow that propositions would be good to engage in some relevant dealings with. (Neither this view nor Scanlon’s would be of the kind Williams describes, which regard “the objects of our knowledge and their value as in themselves entirely independent of our thoughts or attitudes.” As noted, Williams is describing one extreme version of the view I defend.)

encourage our friends who have similar interests to join us, etc.) But the latter is a paradigmatic positive activity directed at paintings for their own sake. It seems plausible, then, that the former is too. Not only, then, does general thinking about the metaphysics of truth and value not support the rejection of the alethic value of truths—to the extent that it supports anything, it appears to indicate that some truths really *are* alethically valuable.²³

The Argument From Truths That Are Not Valuable

Some philosophers deny that truths are alethically valuable on the basis of a claim about *which* truths are valuable. For example: in support of his claim that “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,” Ernest Sosa claims that “some truths are good, but not all; far from it.”²⁴ According to Sosa, even though some truths are valuable *in some way*, something about *how many* of them are valuable implies that any value they have is not alethic value, which is possessed only by our dealings with truths. A similar point convinces Chase B. Wrenn, who argues: “To call truth intrinsically [i.e. non-instrumentally] good is not to say that, for every true proposition, it is good in itself that the proposition is true. It is true that more than a billion people live in conditions of absolute poverty. It is not good in itself that that is true. Rather, to call truth intrinsically good is to say it is good *as a property of beliefs*.”²⁵ For Sosa and Wrenn, the existence of true propositions that are *not* valuable—or, Wrenn specifies, not *non-instrumentally*

²³The idea that this sort of thinking could establish one view or another about alethic value will appeal to philosophers inclined to pursue a broadly *theoretical* approach to thinking about value: one which aims to determine on general grounds the necessary and sufficient conditions to have various kinds of value, and then check whether those conditions are met in particular cases. Someone who wishes to turn this indication into a serious argument for the alethic value of truths would need to at least provide sufficient conditions for being non-instrumentally valuable and then argue that some truths meet these conditions. For the widespread perspective on value that we have been considering, this requires finding a general characterization of what it is to be a positive attitude directed at something for its own sake, affirming that the existence of reasons to take up such attitudes toward something is sufficient for its non-instrumental value, and arguing that there are such reasons for some truths. Though this does not necessarily require an analysis of non-instrumental value in terms of such reasons, it does depend on addressing some of the same problems that such an analysis must, including not only the “Wrong Kinds of Reasons” problem, but also the worry that there is no general characterization of the relevant attitudes available: that there is no “common element...all we have is just a complicated network of various family resemblances, without clear borderlines.” (Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen 2004, 401.)

²⁴Sosa 2001, 49.

²⁵Wrenn 2017, 108-109.

valuable—shows that alethic value is always the value of our dealings with truths, never that of truths.

There are unstated assumptions at work here, and I see two possibilities for what they could be. In this section, I consider the most straightforward: Sosa and Wrenn are assuming that *if any true things are alethically valuable, then every true thing is (perhaps: non-instrumentally) valuable*.²⁶ That is the conditional claim needed to conclude that no true thing is alethically valuable from the observation that some true things are not (non-instrumentally) valuable. I believe the conditional claim is false, though I see a line of thought that makes it look plausible. I will now try to expose and undermine that line of thought.

It helps to begin by noting that an analogous conditional concerning a different kind of value seems obviously false. Consider the question whether the *aesthetic* value found in connection with paintings is value possessed by the *paintings themselves*, or only by our *experiences* of them. It may be that paintings themselves are never aesthetically valuable; but surely no one would be tempted to reach this conclusion by claiming that *if any painting is aesthetically valuable, then every painting is valuable*. It is common ground in many discussions that aesthetic value comes into play at all only in connection with certain paintings: interesting ones, beautiful ones, etc. If the conditional is to be plausible in the case of alethic value, then, there must be some important difference.

The basic characterization of alethic value with which we began—a characterization which ought to be common ground between defenders and opponents of the alethic value of truths—supplies an apparent difference. The central feature of alethic value, which gives it its name, is that it is *somehow closely connected with truth*. What does this connection amount to? Surely at least this: alethic value exists *because* things have the property of truth—their *truth* is explanatorily implicated in alethic value. (If it were not so, the central place given to truth in slogans like “we fight for Truth and Poland!” and claims like, “truth is often found worth living and dying for” would be, at best, highly misleading—it would be highly misleading if things having the property of truth had nothing to do with whatever value is at stake here.) So it is common ground that there is an *explanatory* connection between truth and alethic value: things have alethic value *because* things are true.

It is not common ground, however, that this explanatory connection implies that something’s being true is *logically sufficient* for there to be anything of alethic value: it is not common ground that *whenever* something is true, something is

²⁶As we will see, one can arrive at this conditional claim by some apparently reasonable steps: steps that, I believe, lead Sosa to think that if any true thing is alethically valuable, then “the being true of truths” is valuable, and if so, every true thing is valuable.

alethically valuable. After all, someone who holds that *knowledge* is the only alethically valuable thing holds that alethic value appears only when something is true *and* someone knows it; if nobody ever does, then nothing has alethic value because of its truth. The same goes for any other view on which *what* is valuable is our dealings with truths. What is common ground is that alethic value exists *because* things are true, not that something's being true is *sufficient* for anything to be of alethic value. (Compare claims like "Winter traffic accidents happen because drivers lose control of their cars on ice," and the particular case, "This winter accident happened because that driver lost control of that car on this ice." Both claims can be true, even though losing control of a car on ice is not logically sufficient for an accident. One reason it is not sufficient is that a contribution is needed from something else for there to be an accident—something to crash into, like a tree or a ditch. If no such thing turns up before the driver regains control, there will be no accident.)

But could the explanatory connection still fall short of logical sufficiency if truths *themselves* are sometimes alethically valuable? Here we find the tempting argument for the above conditional. The argument aims to show that if any truths are alethically valuable, then something's being true would have to be *sufficient* for it to be alethically valuable—and so, all truths would have to be valuable.

Suppose an arbitrary true proposition T is itself alethically valuable. Since T *itself* is alethically valuable, *its alethic value does not depend on human dealings with T, or on anything else but T: T alone is enough.* But it is common ground that whatever has alethic value has it *because* things are true. Since T's alethic value requires no contribution from anything other than T, and is explained by something's being true, T's alethic value is explained by T's being true, and by nothing other than T. Therefore, *T's alethic value is wholly explained by T's being true: T's being true would have to be sufficient for it to have alethic value.* But if being true is sufficient for T to be alethically valuable, then it is also sufficient for any other proposition to be alethically valuable, and hence, non-instrumentally valuable. Since T was an arbitrary truth, it follows that if *any* true thing is alethically valuable, then *every* true thing is (non-instrumentally) valuable.

This reasoning is flawed in more than one way, but let me focus on the most important mistake: the fallacious move from T's alethic value being explained by T's truth and by nothing other than T, to T's alethic value being *wholly* explained by T's truth, so that T's truth is sufficient for it to have alethic value.²⁷ There

²⁷There is also a problem with the claim that since T itself is alethically valuable, its alethic value

can be an explanatory connection between two properties *of the same thing* that falls short of logical sufficiency because of something that can go missing *in that very thing*. (Poodles have four legs because they are dogs, and in particular, Rover has four legs because Rover is a dog. Both claims are true, even though not all dogs have four legs. There are various reasons that something's being a dog is not logically sufficient for it to have four legs, one of which is that that *the dog itself* may have a genetic defect that leads it to have only three legs.) Just as the explanatory connection between truth and alethic value leaves open that a contribution is required from something other than a true thing (like a knower), it leaves open that more might be required from true things themselves.²⁸

One might protest that there must be a stronger explanatory connection between truth and alethic value than I have been assuming: one which implies that the *only* contribution made by true things to the value in question must be their *being true*. But why should that be? The reason it is common ground that there is any explanatory connection at all between truth and alethic value is that without

does not depend on anything else but T. Something that is non-instrumentally valuable might still be valuable because of something other than the thing itself, so long as the relationship is not of the means-end variety. (This is why, as Korsgaard 1983 points out, even someone who thinks that all value in *some* way depends on humans and their interests should not acknowledge that point "by making goodness a property of something belonging directly to the human being—our experiences or states of mind." We should rather allow for "the possibility that the things that are important to us have an objective [non-instrumental] value, yet have that value because they are important to us.") This possibility is central to the approach to value described in the previous section. The problem I point out in the main text, however, is more important because the defense it offers extends even to the extreme view that Williams mentions: that truths and their value are "in themselves entirely independent of our thoughts or attitudes." (It does not, however, defend the other extreme view mentioned in that section in connection with Frege. Those who think "true" is an evaluative term that expresses alethic value really must hold that all truths are alethically valuable, rejecting Sosa and Wrenn's claim that not all truths are non-instrumentally valuable. The following section explains how they might do so.)

²⁸I do not intend here to defend any sufficient conditions for a truth to be alethically valuable. Nonetheless, filling in some possibilities on which being true is *not* sufficient might help to see how the explanatory claim could still remain true. Suppose, then, that truths themselves are always alethically valuable unless they have a relatively rare, disqualifying feature: the primitive, mind-independent property of "objective boringness." (On the perspective described in discussing the Argument from Metaphysics, this would mean there are always reasons to engage in positive attitudes directed at a truth for its own sake, so long as it lacks that property.) If being true and lacking the property of objective boringness is sufficient to be valuable, then being true explains being valuable in much the way being a dog explains having four legs: under normal conditions, with no interference by any rare condition, being true implies being valuable. To take a different example, suppose there is a mind-independent property of "objective interestingness" which most truths do not have, but many do, and suppose that being true and objectively interesting is sufficient to be alethically valuable. In that case, being true explains being valuable in much the way being a smoker explains having cancer: one well-travelled route to being valuable goes by way of being true, just as one well-travelled route to cancer goes by way of being a smoker.

such a connection, claims like “We fight for truth!” and “Some people live for truth,” would be badly misleading. The protest, then, would be that such claims remain misleading unless the *only* contribution made by true things to the relevant value is their *being true*; they are misleading unless these people hold there to be value in connection with every truth.²⁹ After all, one might insist, if it’s rightly said that someone fights for something, then he mustn’t fight for only one part of it and not another, but he must fight for *all* of it!

But anyone tempted by this line of thought should recall where it leads. After claiming that “if it’s rightly said that someone loves something, then he mustn’t love one part of it and not another, but he must love all of it,” Plato’s Socrates quickly concludes that someone who is rightly called a “wine-lover” must “love every kind of wine.”³⁰ As a point about what is implied by the proper use of the expression “loves”, that is wrong—few of those we rightly say to be lovers of wine love bad wine or take it to be valuable.³¹ The same is true of “living for,” “fighting for,” and the rest. (Many who have been rightly said to fight for freedom have fought only for the freedom of one particular group.) All that these phrases ordinarily imply is that these people live the way they do because they take there to be some important, non-instrumental value which is explanatorily connected with things having the relevant property, and the weaker explanatory connections considered above vindicate this implication.

I see no reason, then, to insist that the explanatory connection between things being true and the existence of alethic value implies that the only contribution made by the things that are true is their being true. In the absence of such a reason, we are left only with the initial implausibility of the conditional claim. There seems, then, to be no good reason to conclude that no truths are alethically valuable from the claim that not all truths are valuable.

²⁹A related protest would be that if the explanatory connection is as weak as those we are considering, we theorists will have no reason to carve off “alethic value” as an interesting kind of value at all. But this point depends on the one in the main text: if there is an explanatory connection between truth and value strong enough to vindicate as non-misleading the description of the conduct of our intellectual heroes in terms of truth, then philosophers ought to carve off and be interested in alethic value. (See the previous footnote for what a philosophical theory of alethic value that makes use only of the weaker explanatory connection might look like.)

³⁰Plato [Rep], 474c-475b.

³¹One might propose that philosophers should regiment their talk to make it maximally informative: when we say that someone loves a certain kind of thing, we should mention *all* of the features that something must have in order for this person to love it. But to do so would simply be to give up describing people who love things. Most of those whom love wine, for example, take a wide range of different wines to be valuable for a wide range of different reasons that could never be exhaustively listed, and there will always be at least *some* wines that satisfy whatever description we could provide that the person we are describing does not take to be valuable.

The Argument from Outrunning

We just explored one way to understand how Wrenn's and Sosa's claim about which truths are valuable could support an argument that truths are not alethically valuable. We now explore a second way.

Consider again the sad truth that Wrenn mentions: that more than a billion people live in conditions of absolute poverty. This truth is one that we would expect scholars and journalists to concern themselves with investigating, knowing, and so on. Guided as we are by their conduct, it seems that we should conclude that these dealings, at least, are alethically valuable: that alethic value is found in dealings with *this* truth. But this truth *itself* seems to be not good: it is bad. This suggests the following argument against the alethic value of truths.

Even if some truths are valuable in some way, many are not. By contrast, our dealings with most (or even all) truths are alethically valuable—and in particular, this includes dealings with some of the very truths that are not themselves valuable. In fact, *whenever* there is alethic value found in connection with a particular truth, our dealings with that truth are alethically valuable, while sometimes, that truth itself is not valuable at all. In this sense, alethic value *outruns* the value of truths, while coinciding with the value of our dealings with truths. The best explanation of this fact is that alethic value is always the value of our dealings with truths.

One might dispute whether this is an appropriate application of an inference to the best explanation,³² but there is a deeper problem with the argument: I see no reason to accept its central claim, that there are any truths our dealings with which are alethically valuable, but which are not themselves valuable.

Wrenn claims there are such truths, and presents a bad truth in support of this claim. His idea, presumably, is that this truth is so bad that it can't be good. But such badness is irrelevant. To see why, consider scientific breakthroughs that are

³²I myself think it is reasonable enough. Suppose you find yourself awoken almost every night by a noise. Whenever you are so awakened, you go outside to find the source of this noise and find a certain house on the block rollicking with a wild party. Sometimes you wait up to see how the noise starts, and find that, indeed, this house regularly erupts into a party in the middle of the night. A couple of times while investigating, you also find a different house emitting noise at the same time: two people in that house are having an argument. It would be reasonable to conclude that the noise you are looking for—the one to which your attention is drawn by the way you are so consistently awakened, and which you should perhaps now lodge a complaint about—is the responsibility of the first house alone. That is the best explanation of what you have observed, even if there is, occasionally, another source of noise too.

painful for those who make them. (Perhaps the knowledge that there are irrational numbers was emotionally devastating for Pythagoreans, though learning it also made them better informed about something important.) In describing such cases, it is natural to say that the knowledge is good in one way and bad in another.³³ Such knowledge may not be valuable *on balance* or *all-things-considered*, but this does not rule out its being valuable in a particular important way: it does not rule out, in particular, that it is *alethically* valuable. The point generalizes: no matter which things turn out to be alethically valuable, alethic value is just one kind of value. Bad truths, then, are like harmful knowledge: their badness has no bearing on whether or not the truths are alethically valuable.

There is a second way to support the central claim of the outrunning argument. The world seems to be full of boring truths that do not matter in any way. For example: if I scoop up a handful of sand, there will be some truth to the effect that there are *N* grains of sand in the handful: a truth which, intuitively, is without value of any kind.³⁴ If so, and if our dealings with this truth and others like it are alethically valuable, then alethic value will again outrun the value of truths. But there is a dilemma for anyone who would use such trivial truths for the purposes of the outrunning argument.

1. The same sort of evaluative intuition of worthlessness that prompts us to think that trivial truths are without value leads many philosophers to hold that our *dealings* with such truths are not valuable either.³⁵ These philosophers will find no support among trivial truths for an outrunning argument: for them, triviality shows that alethic value is not found in connection with *all* truths, not that alethic value outruns the value of truths.
2. Some philosophers maintain that our dealings with trivial truths are valuable, and try to make this plausible by arguing that the relevant intuitions of worthlessness are unreliable. (For example, perhaps such intuitions are not reliable when applied to things with as comparatively *small* an amount

³³Jonathan Kvanvig makes this point in defending the value of knowledge-relations to truth even when those relations are harmful to us. He urges us to “distinguish among different types of value: practical, social, moral, political, religious, and aesthetic...In addition to practical concerns, there are purely theoretical ones...it is this kind of value involved in the claim that knowledge and understanding have universal and unqualified value.” (Kvanvig 2008, 201.)

³⁴For this and other examples, see Sosa 2001, 49, and Sosa 2003, 156.

³⁵For example, Goldman 2001 takes the issue of triviality to motivate a “slight revision” to the claim that *all* true beliefs are alethically valuable: instead, “the core epistemic value is a high degree of truth-possession *on topics of interest*.” (38) Others who draw this conclusion from the phenomenon of triviality include Grimm 2008, Côté-Bouchard 2017, and Wrenn 2017. This conclusion is sometimes taken to rule out explaining doxastic normativity—the way we ought to believe—in terms of the value of believing that way.

of value as our dealings with trivial truths, since small amounts of value are so often overshadowed by the value of more valuable things, or by the disvalue of the same object.)³⁶ But these arguments undermine the basic reason we have seen for denying value to trivial truths themselves, which depends on such intuitions.³⁷

Trivial truths, then, do not support the central claim of the outrunning argument.

I see no reason, then, to think that there are any truths, our dealings with which are alethically valuable, but which are not themselves valuable. In the absence of such a reason, the outrunning argument fails.

The Argument From Parsimony

At some point in the course of this discussion, some may begin to wonder about the significance of our central question. In particular, one may worry that given how much is common ground about alethic value, it does not really *matter* whether or not truths are alethically valuable. When combined with a mildly pragmatic approach to theorizing about value, this becomes a final argument against the alethic value of truths, along the following lines:

³⁶See, e.g. Horwich 2006, 348: “Clearly our various values will occasionally conflict...on occasion...some are to be sacrificed for the sake of others....the sacrificed values continue to matter...but they are outweighed by more important considerations...we can explain our worry [about the value of trivial truths]...as reflecting the recognition that, in many circumstances, the value of finding out the truth...will be less than the costs of doing so.” Variations of this defense appear in Lynch 2004 and Kvanvig 2008).

³⁷To consider another such argument: Kvanvig 2008 argues that “part of the cognitive ideal...is knowledge of all truths....But for omniscience to be part of the ideal, no truth can be pointless enough to play no role at all in the story of what it takes to be cognitively ideal.” (209-210. See also Horwich 2006, footnote 2.) This strikes me as a rather dubious ideal, but even if it does provide reason to think our dealings with trivial truths are valuable, it thereby undermines the reliability of intuitions of worthlessness, leaving us without any particular reason to deny value to trivial truths themselves. Indeed, in many familiar cases, when our dealings with objects are non-instrumentally valuable, their objects are too. (For example, a lover typically thinks the states and activities that constitute her love are non-instrumentally valuable, and so is her beloved. See, e.g., Badhwar 2003.) This pattern ensures that any reason to think that dealings with trivial truths are valuable *itself* provides some reason to think that the truths themselves are. Strikingly, this very inference is endorsed in the same traditional discussions to which Kvanvig appeals to make it plausible that omniscience is a cognitive ideal in the first place: in Chapter 10 of the *New Testament's* Matthew, the point of bringing up God's omniscience is to use the fact that this (ideal) being engages in cognitive dealings with *us* to assure us that we ourselves must be “of value,” despite intuitions that we are not.

We all agree that there is reason to respond to truths by engaging in various dealings with them, and we agree that these dealings are alethically valuable. Who *cares*, then, whether truths are *also* alethically valuable? For example: according to the perspective described in discussion of the Argument from Metaphysics, the question whether or not truths have this non-instrumental value turns on whether the responses for which we have reason are “positive”, adopted toward truths “for their own sake.” But whether such labels attach to these responses would make no practical difference. So, we might as well just trace the reasons for the responses to the value of the responses themselves, and leave it at that. Doing so would at least be simple, and close off pointless questions by not multiplying loci of value needlessly.

It would do no good to reply that there must be a fact of the matter and that it is important to get it right. On this mildly pragmatic approach to theorizing about value, we as theorists should only affirm a thesis about value if it is not only (likely to be) true, but also such that affirming it would make some practical difference: a difference to what we would or should do, for example.³⁸

One might, of course, dispute the legitimacy of this mild pragmatist approach, but there is a deeper problem with the argument, from the mild pragmatist’s own perspective: affirming that truths are alethically valuable might well make an important practical difference.

Consider Henry Sidgwick’s account of the “fundamental paradox of hedonism.” It starts from the psychological claim that “the impulse towards pleasure, if too predominant, defeats its own aim...we cannot attain [certain pleasures], at least in their highest degree, so long as we keep our main conscious aim concentrated upon them.”³⁹ Indeed, according to Sidgwick, to attain some of the best pleasures, not only may we not consciously aim at pleasure; we may not even consciously *think* about it, or about *any* state or activity of ours: these pleasures “can only be enjoyed in the highest degree...by those who have an ardour...which carries the mind temporarily away from self.” That is because these pleasures are “active,” and to engage effectively in “the activities upon which the pleasures

³⁸This is pragmatism in the spirit of James 1907, Lecture II: “What difference would it practically make to any one if this notion rather than that notion were true?...Whenever a dispute is serious, we ought to be able to show some practical difference that must follow from one side or the other’s being right.” (Note that this question is about the consequences of one side’s *being* right, not of, say, publicly affirming that they are.) This pragmatism is “mild” because it does not yet propose to understand truth about value itself in terms of practical consequences.

³⁹Except where indicated, quotes are from the parallel discussions in Sidgwick 1872, 84-85, and Sidgwick 1874, 48-51.

attend...require[s] a certain self-abandonment.” This holds of all the best pleasures, including those of art, study, and benevolence. (On the other hand, it “is scarcely visible...in the case of passive sensory pleasures” like those of the gourmand, which are “least of all diminished by directly pursuing them” or otherwise consciously attending to them.)

Such a psychological fact (if that is what it is) is not in itself troubling, let alone paradoxical: it does not, for example, prevent many of us from attaining the highest pleasures. Artists attain these pleasures because “the gaze of the artist is...rapt and fixed upon his ideal of beauty,” rather than on anything involving the artist himself; scholars attain the highest “pleasures of thought and study” because their “curiosity” allows them to lose themselves in their subjects, and so on. It is not a paradox of pleasure, but of *hedonism*: the trouble arises once someone accepts the hedonist thesis that pleasures are the only non-instrumentally valuable things. It arises because of a second (purported) psychological fact: *accepting hedonism tends to focus our conscious attention onto pleasure itself*, because of a more general psychological tendency for attention to be drawn *to* the things we take to have non-instrumental value, and *away* from things that we take to lack it. *Recognized non-instrumental value is a magnet for attention.*⁴⁰ This is why hedonists have special difficulty achieving some of the highest pleasures. For example, “egoistic” (or “epicurean”) hedonists, who see only their *own* pleasures as non-instrumentally valuable, find their attention fixed upon that pleasure. This is why “epicureanism has always had...in ordinary minds, a tendency to sensualism”: egoistic hedonists end up pursuing passive, sensual pleasures, because though they are not the best pleasures, they are the only ones that can be effectively achieved while being consciously attended to. An ordinary scholar or artist who accepts such hedonism finds her attention continually re-focussed onto her pleasure, even if she knows that she would achieve greater pleasure if she could lose herself in her work the way she did before she came to accept hedonism. Fortunately, according to Sidgwick, certain special minds come equipped with “objective, extra-regarding impulses” (e.g.: “love of truth, love of beauty”) which are “so strong originally as to resist the corrosive effect of the epicurean principle.” Egoistic hedonists with such impulses can still achieve the highest pleasures reasonably well, since with “a very keen, natural susceptibility in any direction, the [attention-focussing] operation of the general law is counteracted.” But though counteracted, the law still has

⁴⁰This point is central to Iris Murdoch’s moral philosophy. Murdoch thinks that “in the moral life the enemy is the fat relentless ego,” which can best be defeated by way of focus on “an object of attention” other than “the brooding self.” The best such objects are non-instrumentally valuable things, because on them, “such focusing...is natural to human beings.” Hence, “It is...a psychological fact...that we can all receive moral help by focusing our attention upon things which are valuable.” See Murdoch 1969, 342-346, and Murdoch 1967, 369-370.

effects, so that if such hedonists still manage to achieve their “greatest happiness” it is only “by means of a sort of alternating rhythm...in consciousness.”

The paradox, then, is that if hedonism is true, knowing the truth about value directly prevents most of us from doing what value calls for; those who learn the truth face an obstacle to living well that “ordinary minds” cannot overcome at all, and special minds can overcome only through the kind of “schizophrenia” exemplified in Sidgwick’s “rhythm”.⁴¹ The paradox has much affinity with the “conclusions...of a paradoxical character” that Sidgwick notoriously reaches elsewhere: namely, that “it may be right to teach openly to one set of persons what it would be wrong to teach to others...it may be desirable that Common Sense should repudiate the doctrines which it is expedient to confine to an enlightened few.”⁴²

It would certainly be preferable if one could appreciate the truth about value without facing such an obstacle. This gives us a reason at least to *hope* that hedonism is not true, and neither is any other theory which would put us in a similar situation. This, I think, gives us a response to the Argument from Parsimony. The psychological claims to which Sidgwick’s discussion appeals require various refinements and qualifications, but they remain plausible and are widely accepted.⁴³ But if Sidgwick is right that the activities of scholars are among those that “require a certain self-abandonment” to be pursued at their highest levels, some of the “active” alethically valuable dealings with truths are presumably among them. And if recognized non-instrumental value attracts our attention, then affirming the alethic value of truths will help to anchor our attention on these objects so that we can engage in the relevant dealings as successfully as possible, while rejecting

⁴¹This term comes from the discussion of hedonism in Stocker 1976; Railton 1984 discusses a related “alienation”. One might think that this is only a problem for *egoistic* hedonists, but it is not: “universal” (or “Benthamite”) hedonists have their attention fixed on *everyone’s* pleasure, but this still hinders them, for the same reason, from pursuing the high pleasures of art and study, which depend on activities that can only be effectively engaged in if we focus entirely on something which is not anyone’s pleasure. Such hedonists can, though, still achieve the high pleasures of benevolence, since these involve actions whose conscious aim is the production of others’ pleasure.

⁴²Sidgwick 1874, 489-490.

⁴³For example, Haidt 2006 argues that empirical research by Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi and Martin Seligman shows that achieving the greatest pleasures (which he calls “gratifications”) requires something that “fully engages your attention” which “allow[s] you to lose self-consciousness” and achieve a “state of total immersion.” (94-98) Before Sidgwick, philosophers who had made similar claims include Mill 1873, who recognized at a crucial point in his upbringing that “those only are happy...who have their minds fixed on some object other than their own happiness.” Mill takes this realization to have much in common with the “anti-self-consciousness theory of Carlyle” (145) and related points figure prominently in the eleventh Sermon of Butler 1726: “*Disengagement* is absolutely necessary to Enjoyment: And a Person may have so steady and fixed an Eye upon his own Interest...as may give him great and unnecessary Sollicitude and Anxiety; and hinder him from *attending* to many Gratifications within his reach, which others have their minds *free* and *open* to.”

it and affirming that only our dealings with truths are alethically valuable will leave us with a paradox akin to that of hedonism: our attention will be drawn off of the truths and onto our activity, thereby hindering that very activity. If these psychological claims are true, then it makes a concrete, practical difference whether or not we affirm that truths have alethic value.

It seems, then, that even for those who accept the mildly pragmatic perspective on theorizing about value, since the Argument from Parsimony presupposes the falsity of some plausible psychological claims, it cannot provide much support for denying the alethic value of truths. Of course, many who are inclined toward this mild pragmatism are also inclined toward a more fully pragmatist approach to theorizing about value: an approach which drops the independent requirement of truth, holding that recognizing that overall benefits result from accepting a thesis about value is all it takes to adequately establish it.⁴⁴ As we have just seen, it is plausible that accepting that some truths are alethically valuable will help us to engage in alethically valuable dealings with them effectively. From the pragmatic perspective, then, not only do considerations of practical consequences not support denying the alethic value of truths, they appear to indicate that truths really *are* alethically valuable.⁴⁵

⁴⁴Variations on this perspective might insist that the benefits be especially *important*, and/or that affirming the thesis about value meets certain reflective tests. Williams 2002, for example, claims that “It is...a sufficient condition for something...to have an intrinsic value that, first, it is necessary (or nearly necessary) for basic human purposes and needs that human beings should treat it as an intrinsic good; and, second, they can coherently treat it as an intrinsic good...[doing so] is stable under reflection.” (92) Those who take the paradox of hedonism to be an *objection* to hedonism are assuming something along these lines: Stocker 1976, for example, thinks that “as ethical theories,” theories like hedonism “fail by making it impossible for a person to achieve the good in an integrated way.” When he considers the objection that they might nonetheless provide correct “indices of goodness and rightness,” his pragmatism emerges: “why should we be concerned with...theories that cannot be acted on?” (455-456, 463.) Since such pragmatists drop independent requirements of truth, they sometimes end up simply identifying truth itself in terms of these practical consequences: as Rorty 1985 puts it, they come to “view truth as, in William James’ phrase, what is good for *us* to believe.” (4).

⁴⁵Again, the idea that discovering what it is most useful to think about value could support one view or another about alethic value will appeal to philosophers inclined to pursue a broadly *pragmatic* approach to thinking about value: one which holds philosophical theses about value to be adequately established when overall benefits attend their acceptance. A serious argument for the alethic value of truths along these lines would need to establish in detail the truth of psychological claims like those above, and also ensure that it is *overall* better for us to affirm the alethic value of truth. It would, then, need to rule out that believing in the alethic value of truths requires giving up on believing something that brings more important benefits. This will put it in conflict with the general thrust of Rorty 1985, which is that the more we come to understand truth itself and the value connected with it in terms of our practices and relations to each other, the better off we will be.

Conclusion

I have examined five arguments for the conclusion that truths are not alethically valuable, and found that none support that conclusion very strongly. Each one rests on what looks like an error, or at best, contains a major lacuna that looks difficult to fill:

1. Arguers from Tradition must explain away a great deal of what both philosophers and ordinary people think and say.
2. Arguers from Metaphysics must overturn widespread contemporary views of the metaphysics of value in favour of relatively unpopular ones.
3. Arguers from Truths that are not Valuable must find a reason to insist on a closer explanatory connection between truth and alethic value than is motivated by our best guide to that value.
4. Arguers from Outrunning must actually produce a plausible candidate for a truth that is not itself valuable even though our dealings with it are (instead of, for example, pointing to truths that are bad but in an irrelevant way.)
5. Arguers from Parsimony must establish that a range of plausible and widely accepted psychological claims are false.

Let us, then, no longer start papers with breezy dismissals of the idea that truths are alethically valuable. Those who wish to reject it must find another argument, or supplement one of these in the way indicated.

In the first, second, and fifth of these arguments, we also found some promising starting points for serious arguments for the alethic value of truths, each of which will appeal to those inclined to pursue a different philosophical method. I plan on taking a close look at whether these arguments could be developed, and I hope others will too.⁴⁶

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