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## The Values of Truth and the Truth of Values

In this paper, I want to address two questions. First, what does it mean to say that truth is a value? And second, 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 of truth intelligible.

### 1. *Truth as a Worthy 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 an epistemic goal. That is, believing what is true is a proper end of inquiry.<sup>1</sup> 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?”). And by “proper end” I mean something that is *worth* pursuing, whether we in fact desire to pursue it. After all, truth, as A. E. Houseman remarked, often seems the faintest of human passions. Some may want the truth all of the time, and all may want it some of the time, but not all will want it all of the time. As we say, the truth can hurt.

So how exactly are we to characterize the end in question? A natural way of putting the point is that it is good to believe what is true. And that seems right, until one recalls that as James intoned, 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, for any S and any p, if S believes that p, then it is true that p, and if it is true that p then S believes that p.

Or more briefly (and suppressing the quantifiers): *It is prima facie good to believe all and only what is true.*

Here “good” qualifies 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

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<sup>1</sup> Note that I say “a” not “the”. I remain neutral on whether true belief is the only aim of inquiry.

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, for any S and any p that S is able to consider, if S believes that p then it is true that p, and if it is true that p, then S believes that p.<sup>2</sup>

Or, again more briefly: it is *prima facie* good to believe all and only the truth on any question that could come to hand. 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. Rather, the point is that it is good, relative to the set of propositions I am able to consider, that I believe all and only those that are true.<sup>3</sup>

According to (TG), 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-

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<sup>2</sup> Here I am influenced by Marian David, whose work on these matters has influenced (and provoked) me in numerous helpful ways; see David (2003); see also my reply to David 2005 in Lynch, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> (TG) and (TE) are obviously different: one is an absolute ideal; the other is relativized to propositions I 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.

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>4</sup>

When we are talking about the aims of a practice or set of practices –like those we typically engage in during inquiry—we should distinguish between the ultimate value that *governs* the practice and the more immediate aims that are justified in light of this 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)? It is not a moral good, because what is morally good is generally either a subject or object of responsibility. And believing what is true and only what is true is not something we are directly responsible for. What we are responsible for is how we go about pursuing the truth (or not) in our everyday epistemic life. But we are not responsible for what we believe. Thus in the sense described by (TG), truth seems 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 an individual belief's being true. This is presumably what James was thinking of when he noted that truth is the good in the way of belief (1975, 42). Here 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): For all p, the belief that p is prima facie correct if and only if the belief that p is true.

The difference between (TN) and (TG) is important.<sup>5</sup> While (TG) ascribed value to a general state of affairs – the state of affairs of believing all and

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

<sup>5</sup> Again, David 2003 and 2005 and Lynch 2005 are instructive.

only what is true, (TN) ascribes value – what I’m here calling “correctness” – to particular true beliefs. Nonetheless, there are 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>6</sup> And true beliefs while always correct are again always *prima facie* correct.<sup>7</sup>

So unpacked, (TN) appears to be not only true, but a truism. It appears to be a necessary truth, perhaps even a conceptual truth. But why is it important?

The first reason (TN) is important is that, as a number of recent commentators have argued, it tells us something about belief (Boghossian 2003; Velleman 2000; Shah 2003; Wedgewood 2002). Namely, it tells us

(1) Belief’s basic norm of correctness is truth.

This is sometimes put by saying that truth is the aim of belief. We should be careful not to overstate this idea, however. As Wedgewood, notes, beliefs aren’t little archers aimed at 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 of the word “goal” truth is not a goal of belief. It is not something beliefs strive for.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, there is a looser reading of “truth is the aim of belief” which gets at something important. Being true is the function of a belief; it is what beliefs are supposed to do. And that is all that we need mean by saying that beliefs aim at the truth. And this appears to be a very basic and constitutive fact about belief.

That (TN) tells us something about belief raises important issues in the philosophy of mind. But rather than getting into those issues here, I want to pass onto the second main thing we learn from (TN). This fact is

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<sup>6</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 obvious sense of that term. I can’t, for example, simply will myself to believe that George Bush isn’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. So on one reading, what (TN) says is that the state of affairs of believing the truth that p is good.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> Marian David (2005) and Nishi Shah (2003) both make this point.

less commented on, but I think equally or even more important. For (TN) not only tells us something about belief, it also clearly tells us something about truth. What it tells us is

(2) Truth is the basic norm of correctness for belief.

And surely, if, as seems plausible, (TN) implies that (1) is a constitutive fact about belief, then so it also implies that (2) is a constitutive fact about truth. 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. Similarly, the fact that the aim of belief is truth is not just a fact about belief; it is a fact about truth.

A common reaction at this stage is to maintain that while acceptable, neither (TN) nor (2) are particularly surprising or interesting. After all, one might say, it is natural to read (TN) as saying simply that truth just is or is determined by correctness of belief, and therefore that “true” is just another word for a belief’s cognitive correctness, just as “right” is another name for an action’s moral correctness. The thought here is of a piece with James’ remark noted at the outset: truth is simply a species of correctness: correctness of belief. Call this the minimal reading of (TN).

The minimal reading of (TN) is attractive for at least several reasons. First, it underwrites our thought that (TN) is a truism about truth. Accordingly, it is at home with the idea – common today – that truth is less metaphysically robust than traditional theories of truth would have it believe. For those with deflationary intuitions, for example, it is natural to think of truth as “nothing more” than correctness of belief or assertion. And even for those who think that deflationary conceptions of truth are too deflationary by far, the minimal reading also lends itself to a more pluralist or functionalist approach.<sup>9</sup> For it is consistent with thinking that what correctness or truth amounts to may vary from domain to domain.

As it turns out, however, even the minimal reading of (TN) has at least one interesting consequence. For it would appear to imply that truth is, at least in part, a normative property.

The question of what makes some property normative may not admit of a precise answer. In any event, I don’t think it is promising to attempt a reductive, High-Church Conceptual Analysis of normativity. Nonetheless, I do think we can say something illuminating. What we can say is that truth has what I’ll call three marks of the normative. These three marks are not exhaustive of the normative, but together, they provide a strong presumptive case for thinking that truth is, at least in part, a normative property.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See Lynch 2004; also Wright 1992.

<sup>10</sup> In talking of a property of truth, in this context, I remain neutral on the question of whether it is a substantive or nonsubstantive property.

First and most obviously, statements that ascribe the truth property *have an evaluative character*. In saying a belief is true, we don't just describe it, we also evaluate it, as (TN) suggests, as correct or right. In saying a claim is true, I pay it a compliment. Of course, this needn't be all I'm doing. That truth is normative is amenable with it being what Bernard Williams would call thickly normative, similar to being kind or courageous. Truth may well have both normative and descriptive dimensions. The present point is that the normative dimension is reflected in our linguistic ascriptions of the property.

Second, judgments about truth are *fraught with ought*, to use Sellars' turn of phrase. That is, x is normative when judgments about x entail judgments involving oughts. And (TN) would seem to do just that. For under the assumption that one ought to do what is prima facie good, (TN) entails that

(TO) One ought, other things being equal, to believe that p if and only if it is true that p.<sup>11</sup>

Thus (TN) says something about truth; and (TN) implies (TO); (TO) involves oughts, so therefore belief must be normative in the ought-involving way.<sup>12</sup>

Third, truth *constitutes a regulative normative standard*. A consequence of truth being a normative property of belief is that it 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 *committed* to regulating one's moves in the practice by one's judgments about what has or lacks that property (cf. Wedgwood, 2002, 268). Thus the property of being a legal chess move is regulative of chess: in playing chess I am committed to regulating my moves by my

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<sup>11</sup> A similar argument is given by Boghossian 2003, 37-38.

<sup>12</sup> As stated, (TO) runs up against the fact, previously mentioned, that beliefs are under our direct voluntary control. Consequently, under the assumption that ought implies can, it can't be strictly speaking correct to say that I ought to believe anything. Nonetheless, (TO) is clearly on the right track: perhaps the best way to read the "ought" here is not as obligation but as something more like an objective reason. The thought would then be, roughly, that (TN) together with

(R) Other things being equal, there is a reason to believe that p if and only if it is prima facie correct to believe that p.

entails

(TR) Other things being equal, there is a reason to believe that p if and only if it is true that p.

In other words, a proposition's being true entails that, other things being equal, there is an objective reason to believe it.

judgments of what is or isn't a legal 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.

3. *Is truth the most basic norm of belief?*

So there are two values of truth: the value of true belief, or (TG) and the value of a belief's being true, or (TN). 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>

As is the case with other values, the question of how to understand the value of truth in the case of either (TG) or (TN) is complicated by the question of naturalism. And as in other cases, sympathy with a broadly naturalistic worldview may encourage us to look first towards a directly naturalistic reduction of this value to something more naturalistically respectable. And a naturalist understanding of (TN) seems particularly pressing, since as we just noted, it would seem to imply that truth is a normative property. And classically, normative properties have caused trouble for naturalists.

An obvious naturalist strategy is to grant (TN) but argue that truth, while a normative property is not a *deeply normative property*, where a deeply normative property is more than merely instrumentally valuable. This is important because almost any old feature of the world – no matter how natural or “descriptive” in character – can be instrumentally valuable. My new laptop's weighing what it does is instrumentally valuable for example – its being light is a means towards the end of its being easily portable. Consequently, if either value of truth is merely instrumentally valuable, then truth may be normative but only in a superficial sense that the naturalist can accommodate.

How would such a theory go with regard to (TN)? Presumably, it would amount to arguing that the value (TN) attaches to individual true beliefs – correctness – is entirely instrumental in character. And to argue that the correctness of individual true beliefs is instrumental would, presumably, be to argue that a true belief is, as it were, not inherently correct, but that it is correct just because it is a means to some other end or ends. To take such a stance, in other words, is to deny that truth is the most basic normative property of belief, and accordingly, to deny that truth plays a fundamental regulative role in inquiry.

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<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.

This is not a plausible position, as a little reflection indicates. For consider the thought that true beliefs are correct beliefs only insofar as they are a means to survival. Now presumably someone who says this doesn't want to deny that truth is indirectly normative of belief. That is, they'll accept that

(TN) The belief that p is prima facie correct iff the belief that p is true.

What they wish to hold is that the correctness in question is merely instrumental. That is,

(SN) The belief that p is prima facie correct iff the belief that p is a means to human survival.

But together with (TN), (SN) entails that

The belief that p is true iff the belief that p is a means to human survival.

Thus the suggestion is unmasked as an implausible form of pragmatism. There are many beliefs that are true but not a means to survival, and many that are means to survival that are not true.<sup>14</sup>

The argument just given appears to have a general character: the result would follow no matter what putative naturalistic property is named as the end towards which true beliefs are means. And since the argument is general, and the ensuing theory of truth patently implausible, we can conclude that truth is not instrumentally normative of belief.

#### *4. Naturalizing the Goal of Truth?*

So going instrumental about (TN) isn't plausible. Yet perhaps we might still show that the property of truth is not deeply normative by focusing

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<sup>14</sup> Of course, our interlocutor might protest: "it is not the correctness of beliefs that I am claiming is instrumental, but the correctness of true beliefs; thus I need not admit (SN)". But this move too fails. For the new suggestion amounts to (where "TBp" stands for "the true belief that p")

TBp is correct iff TBp is a means to survival.

But under the intuitive assumption that

Bp is correct iff TBp is correct,

it follows that

Bp is correct iff TBp is a means to survival.

But that, together with (TN) entails that

TBp iff TBp is a means to survival.

This amounts to an implausibly strong theory of truth. For it implies that the belief that snow is white is true when and only when snow is white AND the belief that it is a means to survival. But surely this last claim is superfluous. If snow is white but the belief that it is fails to be a means to survival, surely that belief is still true.

first on (TG). Thus while discussing the thought that truth is a normative “concept” we find Horwich remarking that

The basic idea is simply that we ought to try and ensure that our beliefs are true...because we can see that we are more likely to get what we want if our beliefs are true than if they are not. In other words, true belief is evidently conducive to practical success, and that is why it is rightly valued (2002, 140).

Horwich does not explicitly distinguish truth as a norm of correctness from truth as a goal of belief. But context suggests that he is concerned with (TG) rather than (TN). Perhaps it is more plausible to think that the value in (TG) – the value of true beliefs, so to speak, is purely instrumental in character. And if so, then perhaps we could conclude that the property of truth isn’t constitutively normative.

Certainly true beliefs do have instrumental value. Other things being equal, the more true beliefs I have, the more I’ll be able to get other things I want, like safe passage across the road, and the salt I believe to be across the table etc. But it seems to be an entirely open question whether that fact exhausts the value or goodness of believing what is true. That is, it seems possible that true belief may have more than instrumental value. Indeed, reflection on our reaction to typical skeptical scenarios indicates that I care about whether my beliefs are true even when their falsity would have no impact on my life as experienced. I wouldn’t choose to live in a Cartesian Demon World even though doing so wouldn’t have any effect on my experiences. And this is a consequence of a simple fact that for most people, there is something grating to be deceived even when that deception has no negative practical effects.

Of course, it is one thing to have these intuitions; it is another for them to be right. I happen to think that true belief does have more than instrumental value, but I am going to put that point aside here.<sup>15</sup> Instead I want to consider the consequences of holding that the value of truth in the sense of (TG) is entirely instrumental. Broadly speaking, it seems to mean that (suppressing the relativization, the prima facie qualifier and the quantifiers for brevity)

(IG): It is (only) good as a means to x that: S believes that p iff the proposition that p is true.

Above, we interpreted (IG) as implying that truth is an epistemic goal – a proper end of inquiry, as we put it. Accordingly, we should take (IG) as implicitly denying this: true belief, according to (IG), is a mere handmaiden to some other more final good or goods. Of course, the plausibility of this assumption may seem to depend in part on what the value of “x” turns out

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<sup>15</sup> Lynch 2004, part III presents three arguments for the conclusion that believing what is true, that is (TG), has more than instrumental value.

to be. Among other things, one may worry that if “x” is something suitably strange such as “flattering my ego” then (IG) would amount to claiming that epistemic inquiry isn’t really even epistemic. But even putting that aside, there is a more direct problem: holding (IG) and (TN) leads to the implausible instrumentalist view of the norm of belief we just rejected.

This is a consequence of the structural relationship between (TG) and (TN). (TG) says it is good to believe all and only the truth, while (TN) says that correct or “right” beliefs are those which are true. Thus the good in this case – the state of affairs of believing all and only the truth – consists in the totality of the right, and what is individually right is so it seems, because it is a constitutive element of the good. Thus intuitively, if one holds both principles, whatever view one takes towards the nature of the good or the right carries over to the other.

By way of analogy, imagine we held both that a right action is a dutiful action, and that the good is the doing of all and only dutiful acts. Now suppose we read “good” here as “good only as a means to happiness”. So the state of affairs of doing what’s dutiful is good but only as a means to happiness. Given that we also hold that acts are right just when they are dutiful, how could we block the conclusion that their rightness is also only instrumental?

Arguably then, we are in a similar situation with regard to the truth norm and the truth goal. If one were to hold them both, then taking the value of in (TG) to be purely instrumental implies that the value of correctness expressed in (TN) is also purely instrumental. Moreover, note that it seems that the philosopher interested in arguing that truth – the property – is not deeply normative via an argument to the effect that the value in (TG) is merely instrumental *must already accept this conclusion*. For otherwise, it would be mysterious *how their conclusion (which concerns the nature of the property) would follow from their premises (which concerns the value of having beliefs with that property)*. But as we’ve seen, an entirely instrumental view of the truth norm should be rejected. This fact, together with the plausible supposition that true belief has more than instrumental value, means that we should reject a purely instrumental account of (TG).

The last two sections, I suggest, encourage us to draw the following moral. From the standpoint of our cognitive and epistemic practices, it is difficult to make sense of the idea that the values of truth are mere hand servants to other values. From *within* our cognitive and epistemic practices, at least, it seems that we must treat truth as an end.

##### *5. Nonfactualism about (TG)*

Attempts to “naturalize” the values of truth have turned out not to be very promising. What other strategies might be tried?

Sticking with (TG), it might be thought that I've overlooked the most plausible explanation of the value of true belief. So far, I've been taking a thoroughgoing factualist account of that value. I've interpreted the instrumentalist account, for example, as one according to which it is a *fact* that the state of affairs of having true beliefs has the *property* of being good as a means to some other end, and that fact exhausts the value of true belief. But perhaps there is another way to go. Consider David Papineau's claim that

In my view, there is nothing constitutively normative about the end of truth itself. So I take the force of these prescriptions [to the effect that if one wants the truth, then one ought to reason in such and such a way] to derive from independent moral or personal reasons for attaching value to the truth (1999, 18).

Notice how Papineau puts the point: he talks of "attaching" value to the truth. The thought seems to be that we attach value to truth by way of desiring it; and the question is therefore why one should desire the truth.

The question I now want to consider is this: could it be a nonfactual matter whether one should desire to believe what is true? Perhaps the best we can say is that some of us desire it and others do not; end of story.

Recent work by Hartry Field, while concentrated principally on the epistemic notion of "reasonableness", suggests a position along these lines. In Field's view, beliefs are not simply reasonable or unreasonable full stop; they are reasonable relative to our epistemic values – what he calls our epistemic goals. Consequently, it is misleading to say that some standards of reasonableness are strictly correct and others incorrect. Rather, "what we can say is that some standards are better than others in achieving certain goals" (2001, 383). Moreover, "there is no further fact here – no fact about non-relativized oughts, or about which of the [goals] we might relativize to is 'objectively correct' " (2001, 248). Once we pick our epistemic goals, there will be ways to achieve them that are better than others; but there is no question of whether one goal is better than another. Goals simply are.

Presumably therefore, Field would say that (TG) is not, as he puts it, "objectively correct". That is, there is no objective fact of the matter about whether it is good to believe all and only what is true on any matter at hand. In calling that goal "good" I may be doing a number of things, including expressing my preferences, or signaling my approval or perhaps simply attempting to browbeat others into adopting it. But one thing I am not doing is describing an objective fact about it.

Thus, the nonfactualist can argue that the naturalist need not fear the values of truth at all – for the values of truth usher in no new facts, only new pro-attitudes, desires or sentiments. Nonetheless, when seen from within our cognitive and epistemic practices, the nonfactualist can agree with the most robust and serious factualist about those values. She can

agree that truth is more than instrumentally valuable – after all, she might say, she too desires the truth for its own sake. And she can grant that no naturalist reduction of the values of truth is possible or necessary.

Like all nonfactualists, the nonfactualist about epistemic value has a two-faced relationship with her commitments. Consider the moral nonfactualist or expressivist, according to whom there are no objective facts about what is morally good. From the morally engaged standpoint, as Mark Timmons (1998) has put it, the moral nonfactualist can affirm all that the factualist can affirm – given a choice of ultimate moral ends, some actions and persons are good and others are not. But the morally disengaged standpoint tells another story. Seen from that view from nowhere, all moral ends are on a par. There is no fact of the matter about which moral outlook is correct. Similarly, from what we might call the *epistemically committed standpoint* – that is, from the position from which one has chosen one’s epistemic goals – the epistemic or cognitive nonfactualist can affirm that desiring to have true beliefs is better than not doing so. But from the *epistemically disengaged standpoint*, nonfactualism about the value of true belief is clearly a form of skepticism about that value. From that standpoint, abstracting from all epistemic goals, the nonfactualist claims that there simply is no fact of the matter whether true beliefs are better than false ones. And of course, for epistemic nonfactualism to be coherent, *both standpoints must be possible*. For in order to state the view, the nonfactualist must abstract from her own commitment to her epistemic goals and rising above them, see that they are on a par – factually speaking – with all others. And of course if we are to understand the position, *we must be able to accomplish this same feat*. We must be able to reach the epistemically disengaged standpoint.

It is right here, I think, that the epistemic nonfactualist encounters a grave problem. For there are serious reasons to think that, whatever we might say in the moral case, the epistemically disengaged standpoint is an illusion. It is a view from nowhere to nowhere.

In order to make sense of the idea of the morally disengaged standpoint, the moral nonfactualist 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. That is, one would have to say that someone could engage in inquiry without having true belief among his aims. But here the problem becomes obvious: inquiry whose aims don’t include true belief isn’t bad inquiry; it is not inquiry at all.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> And the point can be put in terms of (TN) as well: the nonfactualist about the truth norm would have to be able to make sense of believers whose beliefs were

Notice the difference with the moral case. Here, the pitiable track of human history forces us to confront radically different views about what is moral. We may not consider these different moral outlooks morally good, but we recognize them, however demented, as distinct moral outlooks. It is not that Hitler had no morals; it is that he had the wrong ones. It is difficult to do the same in the epistemic case. Suppose we encounter someone, for example, who aims to believe all and only that which flatters him and his cultural group. What would make us think that in attempting to discover propositions that have this property, he is actually engaging in inquiry? Unless his doxastic 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. 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.

Field raises and dismisses a similar line of thought by saying that claiming that we can't conceive of distinct epistemic goals that don't include truth to be mere "stipulations about the meaning of "epistemological goal" and "belief" and course one can stipulate as one likes" (2001, 385).

Let's consider an analogy. Cooking is good, let's say, when it produces edible food. And food is edible only if it is non-poisonous. Cooking that doesn't aim at producing edible, non-poisonous food isn't just bad cooking, it ain't cooking at all. Is this a mere semantic constraint? I don't see that it is. It simply seems a fact that edible food is non-poisonous and cooking is supposed to produce such food. This is no mere stipulation. Paint isn't edible just because I call it so. Likewise, one might think with beliefs and epistemic goals: wishful thinking isn't believing even if I call it so. Consequently, we might say, it is as much of a fact that truth is the proper aim of inquiry and the norm of belief as it is that edible cooking is the goal of cooking and a rightly cooked dish is one that is edible.<sup>17</sup> Such

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

<sup>17</sup> Moreover, we might even go further and make a more Davidsonian point. In interpreting a speaker's language, we must, among other things, operate under the principle of charity. This is often put by saying that we must assume that most of the speaker's beliefs are true. But such an assumption only makes sense if we take the speaker to be a believer in the first place. And being a believer means that one must operate under (TN). And being a human being, one must figure out what to believe, to inquire, to dig around in mud of the facts, and thus operate under (TG) as well. Now a language that is not interpretable we have no reason to regard as a

practices cannot be separated from their aims; their aims are partly constitutive of them. Accordingly, we can't just dismiss the internal connections between truth, belief and inquiry as mere "stipulations".

Yet perhaps Field's point is somewhat other than I've so far described it as being. Let us grant, he seems to suggest at one point, 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?

This is an interesting, and one is tempted to say, deep question. But understood as a demand for justification for *inquiry as a whole*, it seems simply impossible to answer. For it asks us to provide a *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 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 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 (2004). 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

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language at all. Consequently not only is one not engaging in inquiry and belief when one rejects (TN), one isn't even speaking a language.

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 nonfactualism about (TG) 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.

#### *6. Nonfactualism about (TN)*

This same conclusion can, interestingly enough, be reached by another route. Recall that above we concluded meta-normative stances towards (TG) trickle down to (TN). If this is right then nonfactualism about (TG) is also committed to nonfactualism about (TN). Indeed the point is particularly clear on Field’s view. For according to Field’s account of nonfactualism about normative discourse, to attribute normative correctness to something is to evaluate it relative to some goal. Thus in calling a belief correct or good when and only when it is true, we are not, as he says, stating an objective fact about it; we are evaluating it, saying that it is a right belief given our goal of believing what is true. But on Field’s account, there is no objective fact of the matter about whether we should have the goal of believing what’s true, and hence there is no objective fact of the matter whether a belief is correct when true. And given the T-schema, that amounts to saying that there is no objective fact of the matter whether the belief that p is correct if and only if p. And that seems bad.

But let us be careful. I am not claiming that a deflationist (whether Field or any other) can’t assert that it is true or a “fact” in the minimal or purely disquotational sense that a belief is correct just when it is true. Of course they can. For as Mark Timmons, Simon Blackburn and Field himself points out “for given that truth is disquotational, the norms license calling an evaluative claim true to precisely the extent they license the evaluative claim itself” (2001, 249). Rather, the point is that this is all they can say, since “the nonfactualist about evaluatives cannot invoke the notion of an ‘objectively correct’ norm” (Ibid. 248). As Timmons might put it, it is true that a belief is correct iff p; it just isn’t TRUE.

Fair enough, one might think. But hold on. Recall what we’ve deduced from Field’s nonfactualism: that it is not a factual matter (or a FACTUAL matter if you like) whether a belief is correct or incorrect. As Field might put it, a belief’s correctness is an evaluative, not an objective property. But as we saw above, the minimal, deflationary reading of (TN) holds that truth just is or is determined by correctness for belief. Together these suppositions strongly suggest that Field is also committed to

nonfactualism about a belief's being true. We can spell this out as follows. If we are a nonfactualist about

(B) The belief that p is prima facie correct

And yet we accept the minimal reading of

(TN) The belief that p is prima facie correct if and only if it is true

then it seems that we must also be nonfactualists about whether a belief is true. For on the minimal reading, (TN) is a strong conceptual equivalence, whose modal strength is enforced by the trivial connection the minimal reading takes to hold between truth and correctness of belief. Roughly put, if truth either is doxastic correctness or trivially determined by such correctness, then whatever stance we take towards correctness we must also take towards truth.

Of course, one might question the minimal reading of (TN). But it is difficult to see how a deflationist cum nonfactualist like Field could deny it. To do so would be to say that first, truth and correctness are distinct properties, and second, that it is a substantive fact that truth determines correctness. This is perhaps not implausible, but it would seem to imply straightaway that truth is a robust, metaphysically interesting property. But that is something no deflationist should admit! Accordingly, Field seems stuck with the minimal reading.

If so, then things get worse from here. For of course

(T) The belief that p is true if and only if p.

Yet if that it so, then together with the above reasoning, it is hard to see how to block the conclusion that it is a non-factual matter whether p.<sup>18</sup>

So from the assumption of a nonfactualist account of the value of true belief, we've been led, by a chain of reasoning that the nonfactualist should accept, to first a nonfactualist position about the truth-norm and finally to the position according to which not only are there no objective truths, there are no objective facts.

The deflationist who is *also* a nonfactualist (that is, Field) may shrug. There may be no FACTS she might say, or objectively obtaining states of affairs, but at least there are facts. But that is too quick. The nonfactualist about the value of the truth-goal, after all, wished to *contrast* her view with a factualist account of that value. But it is now hard to see how we can make that contrast, even by the truth nonfactualist's own lights. For nonfactualism about (TG) leads to the position that there is no contrast: for it follows on her position that every claim, while factual, is non-FACTUAL. So however we try to draw the line between the facts and the non-facts, we end up, as it were, on the non-fact side of the line.

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<sup>18</sup> Boghossian, 1990 reached a similar conclusion in arguing that deflationists are committed to a form of nonfactualism generally. Note however, and as is stressed in the text below, I am not claiming that this conclusion is a result of deflationism. Rather, it is a result of nonfactualism about the value of true belief.

It is important to see that the point I am making is *not* that a *deflationist qua deflationist* can't accommodate the distinction between factalist and nonfactalist accounts of value. For they can; as we saw above, the deflationist captures the nonfactalist's point by saying that nonfactual claims, while capable of being true in the disquotational sense, are not capable of being objectively true or TRUE. But this is precisely the distinction that *the nonfactalist* about the value of truth *can't* allow. On her view, there are no claims that are objectively true (TRUE), and thus there is no contrast between a declarative claim that is fact-stating *in any sense* and a claim that is not. The upshot is that nonfactualism about the value of truth, independently of whether it is conjoined with deflationism or not, is simply self-undermining.

## 5. Conclusion

Our reflections have led us to something of a curious conclusion. They suggest that unlike 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.

Consequently, 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 in at least one sense, we can't but think that there are at least some objective values, the values that constitute our very understanding of objectivity.

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