

Veritic Desire

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ABSTRACT

The intellectual virtues are defined, in part, in terms of a love for the truth: *veritic desire*. Unpacking this idea is complicated, however, not least because of the difficulty of understanding the truth goal that is associated with veritic desire. In particular, it is argued that this cannot be formulated in terms of the maximization of one's true beliefs. What is required, it is claimed, is a conception of veritic desire as aiming at understanding the fundamental nature of reality, where this is a virtuous refinement of a crude drive for truth, as opposed to being a way of combining a love of the truth with a further independent good.

1.

A core component of an intellectual virtue is the distinctive motivational state that is associated with it.¹ This is often characterized as being a love of the truth, where this means a desire for the truth itself, independently of its practical utility. The love of the truth thus involves a non-instrumental (final) valuing of truth, and thus a recognition of truth as a good to be valued in this fashion. That is, intellectually virtuous subjects rightly value truth for its own sake because they recognize that truth is valuable for its own sake.² Call this motivational state *veritic desire*.

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¹ I am here understanding the intellectual virtues in the traditional way along broadly Aristotelian lines. For a canonical contemporary treatment of the intellectual virtues, so construed, see Zagzebski (1996). For a more recent discussion, see Baehr (2011). For more on the notion of an intellectual virtue more generally, see Battaly (2014). For two influential non-Aristotelian exponents of virtue epistemology, see Sosa (e.g., 1991; 2007; 2009) and Greco (2010).

² Of course, one might finally value something that doesn't warrant being valued in this way, as when the miser values money for its own sake, but that's not what is held to be happening when the intellectually virtuous subject finally values the truth.

Veritic desire needn't involve any specific occurrent mental state on the part of the subject, nor any explicit goal-directed behavior. It rather reflects a deep and abiding aspiration to get things right and thus to avoid inaccuracy and deceit (including self-deceit). Relatedly, rather than being a motivation that only arises in response to specific stimuli (such as by being prompted to reflect), it instead automatically informs, often unreflectively, the intellectually virtuous subject's day-to-day intellectual behavior (her beliefs, judgments, assertions, doubts, and so forth). Veritic desire is not an innate disposition, but is acquired, and thereafter cultivated, via the same processes that forge the intellectual virtues, such as habituation, emulation of exemplars, and so on. This means that one needs to learn to value the truth in the first place, and then refine this valuing disposition. There is thus more to veritic desire than the mere unrefined pursuit of the truth (we will come back to this point).

Veritic desire is important because cognitive skills, like skills more generally, can be employed in a purely strategic fashion, and yet this is held to not be the case with regard to the intellectual virtues precisely because of the distinctive motivational state that accompanies them. So, for example, a lawyer might have all sorts of sophisticated cognitive traits that enable her to mount a successful defence of her client. The lawyer may not care one jot about whether anything she says is true, beyond what is necessary to make the narrative she offers in support of her client plausible anyway. That is, the lawyer might put in a superb epistemic performance in the courtroom, but even so only value the truth instrumentally, as a means to achieving her legal ends. For that reason, however, this performance cannot be a manifestation of intellectual virtue, even despite the prodigious cognitive skills on display, because the subject lacks veritic desire, which involves a final valuing of the truth. Note that this is not to say that the intellectually virtuous subject should never value the truth instrumentally, as evidently they should be moved by, for example, practical considerations. But the point is that underlying any recognition of the instrumental value of the truths under consideration, there is also an abiding final value for the truth.

2.

Although it is widely agreed that veritic desire is a core component of the intellectual virtues, we are not usually told that much about what it means, exactly, to finally value the truth. We have already noted, however, that this is not

an innate disposition, but rather one that needs to be acquired and refined, which rather prompts the question of what this acquisition and refinement amounts to. We can see why this is important by considering what an unrefined valuing of the truth might involve.

For example, it would be implausible to suppose that the intellectually virtuous person prizes all truths equally, regardless of their importance (or the lack of it). Given the choice, the intellectually virtuous person would clearly prefer a weighty truth regarding, say, the fundamental nature of the universe to a trivial truth concerning (to use a familiar example) the number of blades of grass on the lawn. Moreover, she would do so precisely *because* of her veritic desire: to virtuously care about the truth is to prefer the weighty truth over the trivial truth. A crude love of the truth might well result in one valuing all truths equally, regardless of their importance, but that is not the kind of sophisticated motivational state involved in veritic desire.

If all truths are not equally valuable to the intellectually virtuous subject, then it follows that the truth goal associated with veritic desire cannot be understood as simply a desire to maximize the number of true beliefs that one holds, as that could be achieved as much by assembling a large body of trivial truths as by assembling a large body of important truths. Indeed, that this would be an implausible consequence of the truth goal becomes clear once we reflect on what such a policy would entail. A general feature of inquiries about matters of substance, such as serious scientific endeavors (or, for that matter, serious philosophical endeavors), is that they are difficult to pursue, and may not result in many truths, if any (though what truths that do result would usually be worth having). In contrast, there are all kinds of trivial truths that could easily be acquired via very straightforward lines of inquiry, such as by taking it upon oneself to visit as many cafes as one can and memorize all the items on their menus. Accordingly, if merely maximizing one's true beliefs were the truth goal, then one should prefer the latter kinds of 'inquiry' over the former, but clearly that would be bizarre. On the contrary, we would expect the intellectually virtuous individual to be guided by their veritic desire to undertake serious intellectual enterprises and to set aside the trivial ones. Again, we see that the refined motivational state involved in veritic desire is to be contrasted with a crude indiscriminate love of all true propositions.

3.

Although we have just seen the implausibility of thinking of the truth goal associated with veritic desire in terms of true belief maximization, one apparent advantage of this proposal that it seems to offer a straightforward way of understanding what the truth goal amounts to. One simply needs to keep a count of one's true beliefs and look for ways of improving one's performance by improving the count.³ Such simplicity is deceptive, however. For in order to count one's beliefs one first needs to be able to individuate them, and that is a notoriously difficult thing to do.

Right now, for example, I am sitting outside a coffee shop writing this paper. How many beliefs do I presently have about my current environment? Do I have one overarching belief about the sign above the coffee shop, or lots of distinct beliefs about it (regarding its color, shape, distance from me, and so on)? How many beliefs do I presently have about the current location of my body? Do I have a belief about where my right leg is placed on the coffee shop chair that is distinct from a second belief about where my left leg is placed? What about a belief about how far my body is from the coffee shop sign? And so on. Once one starts to think about what it might mean to 'count' one's beliefs, one quickly realizes that the project is hopeless. And if that's right, then so is the idea that maximizing true beliefs offers a simple way of understanding the truth goal.

In any case, the proposal is a lost cause anyway, since it doesn't capture what the veritic desire exhibited by an intellectually virtuous subject aims at, as we have noted. Still, the concern remains that if we don't construe the truth goal in terms of true belief maximization, then how are we to understand it?

4.

Here is one tempting thought in this regard, which I think we should resist. Perhaps we should maintain that veritic desire is not a love for the truth *simpliciter*, but rather a love for a particular sub-set of truths, the important ones? The process of refining a crude love of the truth into a virtuous veritic

³ The idea that the epistemic good should be understood in terms of true belief maximization in this way is often called veritism, and it is these days associated with the work of Goldman (1999, *passim*; 2002; 2015). As I argue elsewhere, however, I think we should be reclaiming the term 'veritism' for the more general view that truth is the fundamental epistemic good, and dissociating it from this specific consequentialist interpretation of that idea. See, for example, Pritchard (2020).

desire would thus involve bringing in this additional axis of evaluation. This proposal would seem to solve the problem in hand, in that we can now account for why the intellectually virtuous subject doesn't value all truths equally, much less aims to maximize her true beliefs regardless of their content, by contending that it is not all truths that she is concerned with.

I don't think this solution is what we are after, however, despite its superficial attraction. The difficulty lies in how one is to understand the notion of importance in play. One way of interpreting this notion is non-epistemically, in that veritic desire involves not just a love of truth but also a further desire for the non-epistemic good of importance, such that the intellectually virtuous subject masters the skill of balancing these two goods. There are always axiological trade-offs of this kind that the virtuous person must navigate, so that the intellectually virtuous person might need to consider further issues than just the truth goal is not surprising.

But the fact that such trade-offs are universal to virtuous action should make us wonder why they are now being *imported* into the distinctive motivation behind the intellectual virtues. Consider a parallel. Artistic choices have to be off-set against practical concerns, such as the feasibility of producing the artwork in the relevant time and with the available materials. But it would be bizarre to think that such practical concerns are part of the distinctive motivations that make artistic endeavor what it is. They are instead merely practical constraints on the manifestation of artistic endeavor, rather than being intrinsic to the nature of artistic endeavor. The same should apply in the intellectual sphere. Undoubtedly there are non-epistemic factors, such as practical concerns of time and resource in terms of the kinds of inquiries that one pursues, that provide decision points when it comes to the manifestation of intellectual virtue, but it doesn't follow from this that those non-epistemic factors are part of the distinctive motivations that drive the intellectually virtuous. Thus veritic desire doesn't include a non-epistemic component, even if its manifestation in practice is constrained by non-epistemic factors.⁴

⁴ If one does allow non-epistemic factors to be incorporated into veritic desire, then one is going to be subject to the kind of problems that pragmatic encroachment views face in epistemology. For example, if practical concerns are relevant here, then it could follow that the extent to which the intellectually virtuous subject should value the truth will be variable in terms of the practical stakes in play. For a useful recent survey of work on pragmatic encroachment in epistemology, see Fantl & McGrath (2011).

Besides, incorporating a non-epistemic value into veritic desire wouldn't capture what we wanted anyway. For example, suppose we treat the relevant non-epistemic value in terms of practical utility, such that the important truths are the useful ones. The problem, however, is that the weighty truth behind the door in our example may well be lacking in any practical import. Worse, the trivial truth behind the other door might well have greater practical utility. Even so, wouldn't we expect our intellectually virtuous agent to prefer the weighty truth regardless, and to do so precisely because she cares about the truth? This suggests that whatever the notion of importance in play here, it does not concern a non-epistemic value.

If we don't import a non-epistemic value into veritic desire, then the other alternative is to conceive of the notion of importance in play here epistemically. But this is not a helpful suggestion either on closer inspection. In order to be coherent, this would need to be an epistemic value that is independent of truth (i.e., which isn't just reducible to a desire for the truth), but what then could that be? Even worse, such an independent epistemic value doesn't capture what we are after anyway. For recall that our challenge is to explain why the intellectually virtuous subject seeks weighty truths, and thus favors weighty (even if unproductive) inquiries over trivial ones, precisely *because* she loves the truth. The proposal in hand, however, attempts to explain what is going on here by appealing to some mysterious separate epistemic value, other than truth. We are thus no further forward in completing our task. The crux of the matter is that the refinement of the desire for the truth involved in the virtuous cultivation of veritic desire seems precisely to be a refinement in that specific desire for the truth, rather than its intermixing with a further value, epistemic or otherwise.

5.

One might respond to the last point by disputing that the intellectually virtuous person is motivated by the truth *simpliciter*. Isn't what is really motivating this person to know or understand the truth? Relatedly, surely it would matter to the intellectually virtuous person to not just get to the truth but also get to the truth in a skillful fashion? This would similarly suggest that it isn't really the truth

that's being sought, but rather some kind of epistemic grasp of the truth which brings with it a notion of skillful apprehension of the truth.⁵

Neither proposal helps us with the puzzle in hand, however, since they don't speak to the issue raised by the pairing of weighty and trivial truths that concerns us. The intellectually virtuous subject comes to know both true propositions by having them revealed to her, but she would still prefer the weighty truth over the trivial one, and would do so because of her desire for the truth. Moreover, there is no inherent reason why we couldn't come to equally understand both true propositions as well. Indeed, the weighty truth might well be more resistant to understanding than the trivial truth. Crucially, however, where both are equally understood, the intellectually virtuous agent would surely prefer to understand the weighty truth as opposed to the trivial one, just as she would prefer to know it, and do so because of her desire for the truth. Again, then, we find that it is a desire for truth that is motivating a preference for the weighty truth, and thus for whether that truth is known or understood. What about the point that the intellectually virtuous seeks a skillful apprehension of the truth? Given the unusual way that the truths are being made available, it is certainly the case that neither truth would be known or understood via one's own skillful cognitive performance, but then given that this applies to both truths this fact can't explain why we would prefer the one over the other.

But even if these proposals don't solve our puzzle, we might find them independently plausible regardless. For example, it has often been noted that what legitimately closes inquiry is usually knowledge or understanding of the truth that one seeks, and not merely truth. If it was merely the truth, then how would one satisfy oneself that the inquiry has satisfactorily been concluded? Crucially, however, if the intellectually virtuous are motivated by the truth *simpliciter*, then it seems that they should be content to end their inquiries once the truth has been attained, regardless of whether that truth is known or understood.⁶

This line of argument isn't very plausible on closer inspection, however. It would be akin to arguing that since a chef wants to taste the food that she has

⁵ For an influential discussion of these points, see Sosa (2000).

⁶ For example, drawing on Williamson (2000), Millar (2011) and Kelp (2014) have used this objection to motivate the idea that knowledge is the goal of inquiry, since it is what legitimately closes inquiry. See Pritchard (2016*b*) for a critical discussion of this claim. See also Kelp (2018), which defends the idea that inquiry aims at understanding while contending that this is compatible with treating knowledge as the goal of inquiry.

produced that her culinary goal is not producing delicious food but rather *tasting* delicious food. But clearly that's not right. The chef wants to taste the food to determine whether she has reached her goal of producing delicious food; there is not some further goal being satisfied here. The same goes for the foregoing argument regarding what legitimately closes inquiry. Knowledge and understanding are ways of determining that one has gained the truth that one has sought, and so it doesn't follow that since only these states legitimately close inquiry that what inquiry seeks is thereby knowledge and understanding of the truth rather than the truth itself. The intellectually virtuous subject cares about knowledge and understanding *because* she cares about the truth, and not because she cares about knowledge and understanding *as opposed to* the truth.⁷

What about the idea that it is important to us, and thus to the intellectually virtuous inquirer, that we get to the truth in a skillful way? I wouldn't deny that this is the case, but it doesn't entail what our critic supposes. We need to remember here that there are a range of values, including non-epistemic values, that the virtuous person should be responsive to, which means that the way the motivation for the truth manifests itself in action will be complicated as a result. As we noted above, however, recognizing this fact doesn't entail that veritic desire is thereby a complex motivation involving non-epistemic factors. This point is important, since there is clearly something valuable about successes that are brought about by our abilities rather than through other factors such as luck or outside interference. In particular, only the former can qualify as our achievements, and achievements are generally regarded as valuable. If one's goal is to be atop Mount Everest, one would surely, *ceteris paribus*, prefer to achieve that goal by having the achievement of climbing the mountain as opposed to being placed there by a benevolent (and ridiculously brave) helicopter pilot. Not all of one's successes are on an axiological par.⁸

Similarly, it is undoubtedly the case that the intellectually virtuous agent would, again *ceteris paribus*, prefer to get to the truth via her skill rather

⁷ I discuss this point at greater length elsewhere—see Pritchard (2014*b*; 2016*a*; 2019). Note that some commentators dispute that understanding must be specifically concerned with the truth, as opposed to being concerned with an epistemic standing that can come apart from the truth, such as a kind of coherent account of things (which may or may not be true). See, for example, Zagzebski (2001) and Elgin (1996; 2004; 2009; 2017). I don't find such proposals at all plausible—see, for example, Pritchard (2007)—but it would take us too far afield to discuss them here. In any case, we can if necessary take an irenic line here and contend that our proposal is only concerned with understanding insofar as it is concerned with the truth.

⁸ For more on the value of achievements, see Pritchard (2010).

than through dumb luck or the intervention of others. But that doesn't establish that what the intellectually virtuous agent is motivated by is a skillful gaining of the truth rather than the truth itself. The value of achievements is not an epistemic value, but rather a broadly ethical good, a value exhibited by both the intellectually virtuous subject who gets to the truth via her own cognitive skills and the Everest climber who gets to the top of the mountain via her climbing skills. The value of getting to the truth through one's skills as opposed to in other ways is thus another case of the virtuous agent trading-off between different goods in their manifestation of their intellectual virtue. That is, the intellectually virtuous subject finally values the truth, but they also value, as virtuous agents, other goods too, such as the broadly ethical good of achievements, and so will adjust their manifestation of intellectual virtue accordingly. Indeed, the intellectually virtuous subject might well opt for the truths that require no great skill on their part precisely because of these trade-offs, as when the truth is easily available via other routes such that the cost of getting there under one's own steam would be prohibitive. Either way, veritic desire does not incorporate a desire to get to the truth in a skillful way, even if the virtuous manifestation of that desire may well be sensitive to such a good.

6.

So we are still faced with our challenge of understanding the truth goal that corresponds with veritic desire. Rather than attempting to formulate such a goal independently of the notion of an intellectually virtuous agent, I think that we should instead take our lead by considering the intellectual activities of such agents when they are guided by veritic desire. The general nature of these truth-directed activities can be expressed as follows: *to gain an understanding of the fundamental nature of reality*. This would explain why the intellectually virtuous subject prefers the weighty scientific truths over the trivial ones about blades of grass, as the former offer the potential for understanding the fundamental nature of reality in a way that the latter don't.

This proposal raises two natural questions. The first is why this proposal isn't conceiving of veritic desire as directed at understanding rather than truth, a proposal that we rejected above? The second is what we mean by 'fundamental' here. In particular, how is this not another way of introducing a new value that's independent of truth, along the lines of 'important' that we discussed (and discarded) earlier? Let's take these issues in turn.

As we noted previously, that inquiry is at least paradigmatically legitimately closed by securing understanding does not entail that it is understanding that is the target of veritic desire as opposed to truth. The crux of the matter is that what one seeks is to understand the truth, so it is a mistake to suppose that one is replacing one object of veritic desire with another. The thought is rather that in desiring the truth, one thereby wishes to understand it. When we put this point above, we did so negatively, as merely showing that the ‘end of inquiry’ line didn’t establish that understanding (or knowledge) is the real goal of veritic desire. But we can now express the idea that understanding the truth can be the refined truth goal at issue in veritic desire in a more positive fashion.

To begin with, it is significant here that we are not talking about understanding *simpliciter*, but rather understanding of a specific kind—*viz.*, of the fundamental nature of reality. Recall our point from earlier that appealing to understanding as the veritic good wouldn’t solve the problem posed by the fact that the intellectually virtuous prefer weighty over trivial truths. The reason for this was that both truths could equally lead to understanding, and yet it would remain that the intellectually virtuous subject would prefer the weighty truth over the trivial truth, and do so precisely because they cared about the truth. This is why we can’t simply appeal to understanding to resolve this problem, but rather must appeal more specifically to understanding of the truths concerning the fundamental nature of reality. That resolves the problem because the weighty truth offers one a grip on the fundamental nature of reality that the trivial truth doesn’t. This highlights the fact that although we have two propositions that are equally, *qua* proposition, true, there is nonetheless a sense in which the weighty proposition offers one a greater grasp of the truth, which is why the intellectually virtuous prefers that truth, and thereby also why she wishes to understand that truth.

Still, one might be puzzled that it is understanding that is at issue here, even where that is qualified by being understanding of the fundamental nature of reality. Why not knowledge or justification, for example? What understanding offers, however, is a grasp of how truths fit together, in a way that knowledge and other epistemic standings need not provide. Knowing the weighty truth might just mean knowing that it is true. In contrast, understanding it means grasping how this truth fits in with other related truths. For example, I can know a foundational claim of theoretical physics because someone authoritative assures me of its truth, but that wouldn’t suffice for understanding

of it. For the latter one would need to grasp how this truth inter-relates with a range of other truths in the vicinity.⁹ This is the sense in which understanding, unlike knowledge and other epistemic standings, is at best only awkwardly applied to an individual proposition, since it specifically concerns an interrelated set of truths.

Since understanding is constituted by the possession of a body of inter-related truths, it is itself a kind of grasping of the truth.¹⁰ Because one can know a truth without thereby understanding what is known, it is tempting to think that understanding concerns something other than a grasp of the truth. But the difference between the two, when it arises, is rather just that one has failed to grasp a further set of related truths that are required for understanding.

7.

This brings us to the idea of fundamentality that is in play here. The basic thought is that we should not measure our grasp of the truth at the propositional level—i.e., by counting the number of true beliefs one has—but rather by seeking out an understanding of reality at a fundamental level. Such a grasp might be constituted by a relatively small set of propositions. Conversely, a relatively large set of propositions, if they concern trivial matters, might not offer us any grasp of reality at a fundamental level. If one cares about the truth, then one isn't concerned to simply accumulate true beliefs, but rather to seek out truths that offer one an understanding of the fundamental nature of reality.

A useful way of unpacking this idea is in terms of the metaphor of mapmaking. The cartographer isn't interested in every detail of the terrain that she is charting, but only the key aspects that enable her to usefully map it, and part of the refinement involved in becoming a skilled cartographer is to learn to focus on those key aspects rather than the trivial details. In a similar way, the intellectually virtuous subject is trying to understand reality and thereby

⁹ Such understanding comes in degrees, of course, which is a point that we will return to. Nonetheless, the point is that there is a threshold in play here—to understand is to have at least some grasp of how the target truth relates to a body of related truths.

¹⁰ Some epistemologists have argued that understanding involves more than just a body of truths, in that it requires a further kind of epistemic standing that cannot be captured by one's grasp of further truths. See, for example, Grimm (2014), who claims that grasping involves a distinctive kind of non-propositional knowledge of causes. I think such a proposal is mistaken, as I explain in Pritchard (2014*a*). See also endnote 7, where I note accounts of understanding that aren't essentially truth-directed.

navigate her way around it, and that demands a focus not on any possible truth that might come her way, but rather on those fundamental truths that help her chart reality. It is precisely that focus which is the result of the refinement of the crude desire for the truth (i.e., which treats all truths as equally valuable) into the virtuous veritic desire (i.e., which focusses on the truths that enable an understanding of the fundamental nature of reality).

The chief utility of the mapmaking metaphor is that it usefully contrasts with a picture of the drive for the truth as entailing a policy of true belief maximization. A map that is lacking in basic information of a broadly structural kind would be useless, even if there was an incredible amount of detail to the map in certain peripheral respects. Conversely, a map that accurately depicted all the key structural elements, even if it was otherwise lacking in detail, could nonetheless be very beneficial. The point is that simply focusing on the truth of individual beliefs, regardless of the grip they offer one on the nature of reality, would be like attending to the peripheral details of the map while leaving the map's structural features blank.

Nonetheless, in seeking an accurate map, and thus one that is correct in fundamental ways, one is not thereby bringing a new value into play. That is, one doesn't have a drive for accuracy and a separate drive for fundamentality with regard to mapmaking. Instead, the desire for accuracy entails a desire for fundamentality, as accurate maps are accurate in fundamental respects. The same is true of veritic desire. In seeking a fundamental grip on the nature of reality, one is not thereby seeking truth and, independently, fundamentality; rather, the veritic desire for truth, properly understood, entails a desire for fundamental truths.

We can bring out the importance of this last point by reflecting that radical sceptical scenarios needn't appeal to widespread falsity in our beliefs in order to be the source of epistemic *angst*. For even if one's beliefs are generally true, this is nonetheless consistent with those beliefs being false in fundamental ways, such that one's 'map' is not capturing the fundamental nature of how things really are. Consider, for example, the fate of the protagonist in the film *The Truman Show*. He is completely unaware that he in fact occupies a production set for a TV show, with all his everyday interactions with people around him engineered for the show. So his 'friends', including even his wife, are in fact actors. The shops he goes to are fake, as is his job, and so on. Nonetheless, since the lies he is told are kept to an absolute minimum, a great many of his beliefs will be true, particularly where those beliefs concern quite mundane

matters such as what he is doing today, what is the capital of France, who is the current US President, and so on. Even so, this would be a devastating epistemic predicament to be in, since at a fundamental level his grip on the nature of reality is unsound. If one held that only widespread truth in one's beliefs mattered, then one could not capture this sceptical source of epistemic *angst*. Our alternative model, in contrast, is able to do it justice. Our protagonist's 'map' of the world is poor in essential respects, even if it happens to contain lots of peripheral elements that happen to be true.¹¹

The mapmaking metaphor can also capture the sense in which veritic desire can inter-relate with other values. Once the cartographer has got the essentials of her map in place, then there are all sorts of other decision points that can become relevant. There might be aesthetic questions about how best to present the map, or practical questions about which part of the map is relevant for one's current purposes. But these values are not part of the drive for mapmaking accuracy, but rather considerations that are brought to bear independently. The same is true of veritic desire and the truth goal that corresponds to it. Non-epistemic values are relevant to the manifestation of intellectual virtue, as they are relevant to the manifestation of all virtue, but that doesn't mean that they should thereby be incorporated into the nature of veritic desire itself.

While the mapmaking analogy is ultimately just a metaphor, in that the intellectually virtuous subject is not literally making a map of the world with their beliefs, it is also not far off from what is in fact the case. For what is a system of beliefs but a kind of system of representation that enables one to navigate reality? Of course, the 'reality' in this context concerns not merely one's physical environment, but a lot more besides. Consider, for example, the importance of having fundamentally true beliefs about one's social reality, such as regarding ethical norms and political principles. Or having fundamentally true beliefs with regard to one's self-understanding. So long as we are not led by the mapmaking analogy into thinking of the scope of the truth goal as merely being concerned

¹¹ Certain kinds of semantic externalism offer ways of thinking about more traditional radical sceptical scenarios, like the brain-in-a-vat case, such that the subject's beliefs end up being mostly true, at least insofar as she has always been in the vat (or been there long enough anyway). See Pritchard, D. H., & Ranalli, C. (2016) for a summary of such arguments. But the idea that this offers us any intellectual comfort strikes me as bizarre, given that the subject's beliefs are false at such a fundamental level. For an alternative view in this regard, see Chalmers (2005).

with one's physical environment, it captures the essence of what we are after with regard to the target of veritic desire.

Finally, the mapmaking metaphor is useful in terms of accounting for how veritic desire involves seeking understanding of the fundamental nature of reality. An accurate map is useful because it enables you to see how aspects of the charted terrain relate to one another, and thereby be able to navigate one's way around it. Similarly, in gaining understanding about the fundamental nature of reality one acquires not only a series of inter-related truths about fundamental matters, but also further meta-truths about how these truths relate to one another. It is this that enables one to grasp the nature of things at a fundamental level, and thereby navigate one's way around one's reality (where, as noted above, this doesn't just include one's physical environment, but also other important realms, such as one's social environment).

8.

This way of understanding the truth goal helps us to understand where some alternative characterizations go awry. We have already noted that the truth goal, properly understood, doesn't entail that one should maximize one's true beliefs. For similar reasons, it also doesn't entail that one should minimize one's false beliefs either. One could achieve such a goal by avoiding having any beliefs at all, but that wouldn't enable one to gain an understanding of the fundamental nature of things.

Relatedly, the truth goal is often understood as effectively being two goals: a positive goal to promote truth in one's beliefs and a negative goal to avoid falsehood in one's beliefs. So construed, one might then be puzzled as to how these two goals interact with one another, and in particular what emphasis should be put on each of these goals, given that one could satisfy them in divergent ways.¹² This bipartite way of thinking of the truth goal buys into the same general way of thinking that led to true belief maximization, it is just that it complicates the story by combining the goal of true belief maximization with that of false belief minimization, and then asks how one attains a balance between these two (sometimes competing) goals. Once we recognize that not all truths are on a par in this regard, however, then we also recognize that not all falsehoods

¹² See, for example, Riggs (2003).

are on a par either. It is not individual truths *simpliciter* that we seek, nor is it individual falsehoods *simpliciter* that we are aiming to avoid.

Consider again the mapmaking metaphor. There are not two goals in play here—the seeking of an accurate map and the avoidance of an inaccurate one. There is simply one goal, in that the kind of accuracy that is sought will be by itself such that it excludes inaccuracy. In particular, there is no trade-off here in terms of ensuring accurate features of the map and avoiding inaccurate features, still less would it make sense to seek a map that lacks the fundamental elements so as to ensure that one avoids error. The cartographer rather simply wants the map to be accurate in its fundamental respects, and thus not inaccurate in those respects. Of course, there are decisions for the mapmaker to make about how to present the map, what elements of the mapped terrain to focus upon, and so on. But as noted above, these are not decisions that reflect a concern for accuracy, but are instead sensitive to independent factors.

The same goes for the intellectually virtuous agent. In seeking truths that offer an understanding of the fundamental nature of reality, she is thereby also avoiding error, not as a distinct goal but merely as an immediate consequence of the goal that she has. There is, in particular, no trade-off between truth and error to consider, as there would be if she were pursuing a bipartite policy of maximizing true beliefs and minimizing error. There will be decision points, just as there are for the mapmaker, as when the intellectually virtuous agent needs to restrict the scope of her inquiries due to limited time and resources, but these constraints are independent of the purely intellectual factors that are our concern.¹³

9.

This last point relates to a further issue about veritic desire and the truth goal that accompanies it, which is whether it is unrestricted. Our discussion thus far has suggested that it should be understood in an unrestricted fashion, but

¹³ I think the more interesting question here is not how error accords with the truth goal, but how we are to conceive of ignorance in light of our account of this goal. Although I do not have space to defend this proposal here, in essence my view in this regard is that it is a mistake to think of ignorance as it is standardly understood as merely the absence of true belief or knowledge. It is, rather, the fundamental epistemic ill that corresponds to the fundamental epistemic good of truth. In terms of our account of veritic desire, that entails an absence of true belief of a particular normative kind—roughly, which manifests a failing of intellectually virtuous inquiry. For more on this way of thinking about ignorance, see Pritchard (2021).

doesn't that imply that the intellectually virtuous subject should be interested in all manner of inquiries, many of which go well beyond their capacities? For example, there are all sorts of domains that would be relevant to gaining a fundamental grip on the nature of reality, broadly construed, from theoretical physics, contemporary film criticism, ornithological classification, and so on. But is it really feasible to suppose that the truth goal that corresponds to veritic desire has this breadth of scope?

We should remember in this regard that maps that are lacking in their fundamental elements are completely useless, but even a map that has the main features in place can still be improved upon. Moreover, there is always further terrain that requires mapping (think, for example, of the mapping of the oceans or of distant parts of the Universe). The cartographical drive for accurate maps is thus in principle at least completely open-ended, as there is always more to be done to ensure more accurate and comprehensive mapping. But there are also independent constraints on our mapmaking. There may be terrain that is too difficult to chart with the resources available, or further details of charted terrain that are impossible to glean with the instruments available, and when this is the case one's mapmaking will face limitations, even if one's desire for optimally accurate maps is not thereby blunted.

We can say something similar about the veritic desire that motivates the intellectually virtuous subject. One cannot be a rational agent at all—i.e., someone who occupies, and thereby makes moves within, the space of reasons—without having some kind of conception of the nature of reality in place.¹⁴ The intellectually virtuous agent will want to ensure the accuracy of this conception, modifying it where required accordingly. She will also try to enrich it, where that means deepening the grip that it offers on the fundamental nature of reality and also enlarging its scope, where necessary. Since one can in principle enrich one's conception of reality indefinitely, this will be an entirely open-ended process. There is thus no innate limitation on the truth goal that corresponds with veritic desire, and thus on the extent to which the intellectual virtuous subject seeks an understanding of the fundamental nature of reality.

But this doesn't mean that the intellectually virtuous person is thereby fixated on enhancing her understanding the fundamental nature of reality to the exclusion of all other endeavors. The intellectual good is but one good among

¹⁴ Although it doesn't matter for our present purposes, I take the worldview that forms the tacit background to one's rational practices to be essentially constituted by the kind of hinge commitments described by Wittgenstein (1969). See especially Pritchard (2015, *passim*).

several that inform a virtuous life of flourishing, where this includes important instrumentally valuable goods, like purely practical considerations, and also all things considered finally valuable goods, such as ethical concerns. This is what ensures that the veritic desire of the virtuous agent is moderated in practice, albeit where the source of that moderation is external to the desire itself.

10.

Our objective has been to make sense of the nature of veritic desire that is at the heart of the intellectual virtues. We have seen that this cannot be plausibly understood as an undifferentiated desire for true beliefs, but must instead be conceived as something more refined, whereby one seeks an understanding of the fundamental nature of reality. Crucially, however, moving to the more refined conception of the truth goal does not mean introducing a further value (epistemic or otherwise) into the mix, much less does it amount to setting truth to one side in favor of this other value. The intellectually virtuous agent has this more refined truth goal precisely because she cares about the truth, and hence recognizes that this is the way to attain the finally valuable good that she seeks.

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