Review Essay on Jonathan Kvanvig's *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding*

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1. Overview

Jonathan Kvanvig's *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding* (2003) is a pioneering work in "value-driven epistemology." According to this approach, since certain epistemic goods clearly are *valuable* or *matter* to us, our accounts of these goods should at least be sensitive to, and ideally should illuminate or explain, their value.

It is natural to think that *knowledge* is one of the epistemic goods that we value, perhaps even that it is one of the great goods.[1] Some valuable things are what we will call *distinctively valuable*, in the sense that each essential part or constituent of the thing makes some distinct positive contribution to its value. A state is distinctively valuable, if the value of the state exceeds the value of any proper subset of its constituents. Thus, if it turns out that something we find especially good is valuable only in virtue of the value of some proper subset of its constituents, then however great the value of this thing, it is not *distinctively* valuable.

So is *knowledge* distinctively valuable? The majority of the book represents Kvanvig's attempt to identify such a distinctive value. He begins by noting that Plato poses essentially the same question in the *Meno*. Suppose we take it, along with Meno towards the end of the dialogue, that knowledge is valuable because of its practical usefulness. Perhaps, for example, the reason we value *knowing* the correct way to

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[1]   Timothy Williamson (2000: 30-31), for one, takes this claim as the point of departure for his work.

Larissa is because, when we are interested in reaching Larissa, this knowledge will (distinctively, as it were) set us on the right path. As Socrates points out, however, this seems like an inadequate explanation for the distinctive value of knowledge because (mere) true belief about the road to Larissa puts us on the right path just as effectively as knowledge. But if that's right, Kvanvig concludes, knowledge is not distinctively valuable because a proper subset of its constituents, viz., (mere) true belief, realizes our practical goals just as surely as knowledge.

In Chapter 2 Kvanvig notes that many philosophers seem to hold that a true belief stemming from a reliable source is in some sense more valuable (desirable or choiceworthy) than a true belief stemming from an unreliable source. If that's so, then perhaps reliabilist accounts of knowledge can explain the distinctive value of knowledge. It is at this point that Kvanvig unveils one of his major argumentative tools, the so-called *swamping problem*.[2] The motivating idea behind the swamping problem is that a true belief hailing from a reliable source seems to be no more desirable or worth having than a true belief hailing from an unreliable source. Suppose, for example, you had a choice between two true beliefs, one from a reliable source and one from an unreliable source. The fact that the one belief comes from a reliable source does not seem to *enhance* the value it already has simply in virtue of being true, any more than the fact that the game-winning home run was hit by a reliable power hitter (rather than a weak singles hitter) enhances the value of the home run (DePaul 1993: 76-77), or any more than the fact that the good cup of espresso was produced by a reliable espresso machine (rather than a faulty one) enhances the value of the good cup (Zagzebski 2003: 13-14). Once the truth is on the scene its value *swamps* the value of other properties (such as hailing from a reliable source) that seem to be only instrumentally valuable in relation to the truth.

This leads Kvanvig to ask (in Chapters 3 and 4) whether there are any epistemic properties that are not merely instrumentally valuable in relation to the truth, and whose value therefore is not swamped. He proposes two: being subjectively justified and being virtuously formed. The value of subjective justification is not swamped because subjective justification offers a transparent mark of truth—and transparency, Kvanvig suggests, has more than mere instrumental value in relation to the truth. The value of virtuously formed true belief is not swamped because the value of virtuosity (as Kvanvig puts it)

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2   A problem that Kvanvig attributes to Richard Swinburne (1999, 2000) but which has earlier roots in DePaul (1993) and Zagzebski (1996).

seems to be intrinsic. Although it might be true that believing in an epistemically virtuous way tends to lead to the truth, believing in this way is also something that (he plausibly claims) we value in its own right.

In his crucial Chapter 5 Kvanvig argues that even if the value of subjective justification or being virtuously formed (or both) is not swamped by the value of truth, and even if we think these properties help to constitute knowledge, this still does not illuminate the *distinctive* value of knowledge. For if we have learned our lesson from Gettier we will be aware that neither true belief plus subjective justification nor true belief plus being virtuously formed (nor some combination of the two) is sufficient for knowledge.[3] A fourth condition of some sort is needed.

Whatever the fourth condition turns out to be, Kvanvig argues, the last forty or so years have given us excellent reason to think it will be thoroughly gerrymandered and ad hoc. Suppose, for instance, that some enterprising young epistemologist adds enough bells and whistles to her account of knowledge that she manages to resist all remotely plausible counterexamples. After we toast the achievement, Kvanvig suggests, we should ask why anyone should be interested in *that* unbeautiful sprawl? The process of constructing accounts of knowledge seems to obey what we might call *Kvanvig's Rule*: the closer we come to identifying a fourth condition that is able to resist Gettier-style counterexamples, the less likely it is that the property described by the condition will be something that is valuable or worth pursuing.

The conclusion that emerges is not that knowledge lacks value, but that it is not *distinctively* valuable. Put another way, if knowledge is worth having, it is worth having because knowing brings with it some other properties that *are* worth having, for instance, the property of having a belief that is true, of having a belief that is subjectively justified, and so on, but also some properties that *are not* worth having, most notably, freedom from the sort of luck that is responsible for true belief in Gettier-type examples. On Kvanvig's view, therefore, there is no *special* reason to think knowledge is worth having. You can get everything that is worth having from knowledge when you have part of knowledge.

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[3]   Although the reader is left to wonder why, if subjective justification offers a "transparent" mark of truth, it wouldn't be sufficient. In Chapter 5 Kvanvig claims this is because "whether a mark of truth is transparent or not is such a subjective matter" (p. 110): in other words, we are apparently never in a position to tell whether our "transparent mark" of truth is really a transparent mark or not! This is, for lack of a better word, puzzling.

Rather than end on this pessimistic note, Kvanvig concludes with a flourish by claiming there is another cognitive accomplishment in the neighborhood of knowledge that *is* distinctively valuable: *understanding*. On Kvanvig's view, to understand why P is to "grasp" or "see" how one's belief that P is connected to or coheres with other things one believes (e.g., 192, 197-98). One condition for a successful grasping is that there actually *be* such a connection—probabilistic, logical, or otherwise—between P and these other things one believes. So, Kvanvig claims, understanding why P requires that one grasp the truth about why P. It therefore brings with it one valuable thing, namely, some element of *truth*. But understanding also brings with it another valuable thing, namely, the element of *seeing* or *grasping*. Moreover, this element apparently is not swamped by the truth of the connection grasped.

What about Gettier-style counterexamples? Will not any account of understanding require grossly gerrymandered conditions to avoid such cases? Kvanvig claims the answer is No. On his view, understanding is a luck-proof cognitive state. So long as the truth condition and the internal grasping condition are met, one understands why P even if one hit upon the truth, or grasped these connections, in an entirely haphazard or lucky way. Hence, the conditions for understanding, unlike those for knowledge, are simple and straightforward. This result is significant: Since to understand one needn't meet some gerrymandered condition, understanding is distinctively valuable.

According to Kvanvig what all of this implies is that the notion that knowledge distinctively matters is based on a confusion. What *does* matter distinctively is not knowledge but understanding, and the reason why we are sometimes inclined to think that knowledge matters distinctively is because understanding is a cognitive accomplishment that is in the same general neighborhood as knowledge.

2. Did we ever really think knowledge is distinctively valuable?

According to tradition, prior to the publication of Gettier's counterexamples, epistemologists took knowledge to be justified true belief. After confronting these examples, epistemologists realized that justified true belief was not sufficient for knowledge, but the majority of them still took each of belief, justification and truth to be necessary. Let's assume the majority opinion is correct and also that each of these necessary conditions identifies an essential constituent of knowledge. Thus, if knowledge is distinctively valuable, each of these three constituents must be valuable and contribute some value to knowledge.

Let's begin with belief, specifically, the claim that if S knows that P, then (1) S believes that P. The claim that being able to form beliefs is good for us is plausible.[4] But that is not the relevant claim. If knowledge is distinctively valuable, then including (1) in the analysis of knowledge entails that for any arbitrary person S and proposition P, it is good that S believes that P. But this seems preposterous on its face. Potential counterexamples are incredibly easy to find: randomly select a person and a proposition; chances are no value will attach to that person believing that proposition.

Discussing the value of belief Kvanvig claims, "belief is valuable because it is action guiding" and true beliefs are valuable because they lead to actions that "are successful in satisfying desires and in achieving purposes" (30). We concede the second part of this claim, but what about the claim that "belief is valuable because it is action guiding"? Not all actions are valuable; some are disvaluable, and some may be intrinsically disvaluable. Why think beliefs that guide persons to perform intrinsically disvaluable actions have value? The value or disvalue of most actions probably is not intrinsic; it comes from something extrinsic to the actions, e.g., their consequences. In such cases it seems that at least the portion of the value of beliefs that is due to their role in guiding action is also instrumental. But then it will not be the case that every belief will have value, regardless of the content of the belief, who the believer is, the circumstances the believer is in, and so on.

Kvanvig recognizes potential counterexamples to the claim that all beliefs are valuable, mentioning racist views in particular. He tries to accommodate these counterexamples by claiming that in such cases the standing value of belief is "overridden by special features of the content of that belief and the willingness of holders of such beliefs to act on them" (32). If beliefs seemed to lack value only in rare cases and we had some strong reason for thinking all beliefs nevertheless are valuable, this approach might work. But beliefs do not fit this pattern; there are far too many cases where beliefs lack value. It makes more sense to hold that whether a belief has value depends on the particular content and circumstances of belief.

Let's now consider the truth condition. According to the standard formulation, if S knows that P, then (2) P is true. Let P = "there is a

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[4]   The limitation to "us" human beings is significant. It wouldn't be good for any thing, even any organism, to be able to form beliefs. A thing needs a sophisticated brain to form beliefs. Hence, having this ability would not be good for many organisms. For example, contrary to scenes from the horror classic "The Fly," flies would do badly if suddenly granted the ability to form beliefs. They couldn't get the requisite brain matter airborn no matter how ferociously they buzzed their wings; their tiny legs wouldn't support their grossly swelled heads, and such typical fly feats as walking around on ceilings or TV screens would be out of the question.

maximal amount of human suffering uncompensated by any good." Would it be good for this proposition to be true? One might say propositions are aimed at truth by their very nature, and hence that false propositions fail to achieve their goal while true propositions succeed. There would, then, be something good about any proposition being true, although in some cases this good is outweighed by the evil that would result if the world were such as to make the proposition true. So there is a story to tell in which the satisfaction of (2) contributes some value to any instance of knowledge. But this is surely a tall tale.

The problems with supposing belief and truth to be valuable are so obvious that we are led to wonder whether we ever really thought knowledge is distinctively valuable. But consider now replacing (1) and (2) in the analysis of knowledge with condition (1*) = S truly believes that P. And suppose that true belief, but neither truth nor belief, is an essential constituent of knowledge. This approach puts the claim that knowledge is distinctively valuable on better footing, since it seems plausible to hold that for any arbitrary person and true proposition, *some* value attaches to that person's believing that proposition. However, it seems strange that by making what seems a mere notational variation in the account of knowledge, we get a more acceptable view regarding the value of knowledge. The problem is that we are not entirely clear about what the essential constituents of knowledge are, but then we cannot be entirely clear about the claim that knowledge is distinctively valuable either. This should make us doubt that we have always taken knowledge to be distinctively valuable.

In any case, recall that the point of departure for Kvanvig's value-driven exploration of knowledge is the claim Socrates examined with Meno: that knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief—that for any S and P, the state of S's knowing P is more valuable, in some sense, than the state of S's truly believing P without knowing P. One thing a value-driven epistemology seeks is to understand this difference in value. But we should be cautious about generalizing from this point of departure. In his Introduction, after describing his Socratic starting point, Kvanvig immediately generalizes. "Socrates' issue … is whether and how knowledge has a value exceeding that of its parts" (x). He explains, "to account for the value of knowledge, we will look at each of its components to see if they have value and explain the value of knowledge in terms of the increase in value contributed by each of these components" (xii).[5] Thus Kvanvig is led to the dubious claims

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[5] To be fair we must mention that Kvanvig also critically examines accounts of the value of knowledge that do not proceed by summing up the values of its constituents.

that belief is valuable and that truth is valuable. If we stuck to the original point of departure, we would not be tempted by these claims and could focus on the value of what must be added to true belief to get knowledge. But we must even be cautious here. The intuition that the value of knowledge exceeds that of mere true belief is powerful. The same cannot be said about the idea that knowledge is more valuable than justified (or warranted or reliable) true belief. And the intuition that each element that must be added to true belief to get knowledge contributes some independent value is weaker still, if we have such an intuition at all. If we lack the intuition, or it is very weak, this constitutes another reason for suspecting that we never really took knowledge to be *distinctively* valuable.

3. The intrinsic value of justification

Kvanvig claims there are powerful objections to the view that justification has intrinsic value. He asks us to consider someone who keeps track of the percentage of times a batter touches home plate on the way to first base and claims that a high score in this category is intrinsically valuable even though it is utterly unrelated to winning at baseball. According to Kvanvig, "The claim that there is some important statistical category that is important in its own right, apart from the goal of the game … is preposterous" (54). The same thing holds for the "game of belief," Kvanvig assures us; "Any claim that there are properties of belief that have value intrinsically, independent of any relationship to the truth, should be met with incredulity" (54).

Before describing the baseball example, Kvanvig states that DePaul has argued that inquiry has the "dual goals of truth and rationality, with neither being reducible to the value of the other" (53). Kvanvig denies this claim but offers no real argument; he simply asserts that belief and inquiry aim solely at truth. The baseball example is of no help, since it does not provide an apt analogy for DePaul's view. Ski jumping provides a better sports analogy. The winner at ski jumping is not the person who jumps farthest. Points are given for distance jumped *and* for style or technique. To win, one must jump far with good technique. Jumping far might provide an analog for forming a true belief, and good form an analog for being justified. Bull riding provides another sports example. To get a score, one must ride for eight seconds. Riders are then scored for style. (A score is also given to the bull for how ferociously it bucks and spins.) Here staying on for eight seconds might be analogous to forming a true belief, riding well an analog to being justified.

Doesn't good style help one attain the primary goals of these activities, i.e., jumping far and riding eight seconds, making style a mere instrumental good? No doubt many elements of good style do contribute to jumping far and riding bulls. But the connection can't be all that tight or these sports would not have evolved so as to assign a separate score for style. Moreover, at least in the case of bull riding, some things that increase a cowboy's style points, e.g., aggressively spurring the bull, actually make it harder to ride for eight seconds. But the main problem with this response is that it misconstrues the goals of the activities in question. In each case the real goal clearly is to win, and the winner is the competitor who receives the most points. In ski jumping, an exceptionally strong jumper with poor technique might consistently jump farther than anyone else, but just as consistently lose to jumpers with good technique who go nearly as far. In bull riding one must ride the bull for the required time, but then it is the style points (and the difficulty of the bulls) that determines who wins. There are some extremely strong riders with poor form who very often ride their bull for the required time, but these riders regularly lose to more stylish riders. It would be hard to maintain that such stronger but less stylish ski jumpers and bull riders do better at achieving the goals of these sports even though the more stylish competitors take away the gold medals and belt buckles.

What these examples illustrate is that certain human activities aim at complex goals that are composed of a number of independent goods. Those who propose that justification is intrinsically good think belief and inquiry aim at such complex or composite goods. One cannot overturn this view by considering examples of human activities that aim at simple goods and then just assert that belief and inquiry similarly aim at the simple good of true belief.

Kvanvig devotes more attention to Richard Swinburne's effort to explain why justification is intrinsically valuable. Swinburne compares two people who believe the same proposition; a scientist who believes because it is supported by the evidence and another person who believes on the basis of dreams. According to Swinburne the belief based on evidence is more valuable than the belief based on dreams, and this is supposed to support the claim that justification has intrinsic value. Swinburne explains that the scientist's belief is more valuable because the scientist grasps the a priori truths governing the justification of beliefs and is guided by these truths. Kvanvig responds,

> it is a mistake to think of beliefs justified in this sense as having a value that is completely independent of the value of truth—you can't have such justified beliefs without grasping these a priori truths and

being guided by them in belief formation. Moreover, it is in virtue of these truths that justified beliefs are objectively likely to be true, so it is hard to see how Swinburne can claim that the value of justification derived from these truths is independent of the concept of truth. In particular, it is hard to see how he can so claim when his explanation appeals to the concept of truth, namely, the a priori truths that establish the objectivity of the concept of justification under discussion. (55)

Kvanvig goes on to provide a detailed examination and criticism of Swinburne's position. We take no side regarding this dispute, and shall instead focus more generally on the view holding (i) there are a priori principles detailing which beliefs are justified in various circumstances, and (ii) those beliefs that accord with these principles, and hence are justified, have some *intrinsic* value independent of truth. In the passage just quoted, Kvanvig claims that one who accepts (i) cannot accept (ii), but must in fact hold that the value of justification depends upon the value of truth, more specifically, that for any justified belief, the value that belief has in virtue of being justified is wholly dependent upon the value of true beliefs to which it bears some relevant connection.

The first ground for this claim suggested in the passage just quoted is not cogent. Compare the view that there are a priori truths governing which actions are right and that when a person's action is guided by a grasp of these truths, that action has moral value. This is certainly a familiar view having at least some plausibility. It may prove false in the end, but it would be bizarre to criticize it on the grounds that it makes moral value dependent on the value of truth. Just because there are a priori truths regarding right action, it does not follow that the value of right action derives from the value of truth. But similarly, the mere fact that there are a priori truths regarding justification would not entail that the value of justified beliefs is somehow dependent upon the value of true beliefs.

The second objection Kvanvig suggests might be more telling, but it is not clear that it is. Suppose that beliefs that are justified according to the a priori principles of justification are objectively likely to be true. If questions regarding the value of justification are raised in this case, and the value of true belief can be taken for granted, it is mighty tempting to answer these questions by pointing to the connection between justification and truth. One need not answer the question in this way, however. Let's consider a moral analogy once again. It is possible to be both a utilitarian and a theist. Such a person might think that there is an a priori principle telling us that actions are right just in

case they maximize utility. Of course, such a person would also think that God, being good and morally omniscient, would be objectively likely to approve of right actions. But such a person need not explain the value of right actions by appeal to God's approval. He or she could instead appeal directly to human happiness to explain the value of right action. Similarly, even if it is true that justified beliefs are objectively likely to be true, and the value of true belief is taken for granted, the value of justified beliefs might be explained in some other way.

Perhaps the abstract possibility of some other explanation remains open, but there is a big difference between justification and the example of the theistic utilitarian. The utilitarian has something else of value ready to hand, namely, human happiness, to use in explaining the value of right action. But in the case of justification there just is no other value apparent. If we do not exploit the truth connection in order to explain the value of forming justified beliefs, we seem to be left with nothing to say. It remains mysterious why it is a good thing for a person to believe what he or she is justified in believing and a bad thing to believe otherwise. To the extent that there is a mystery here, it will not be a mystery that troubles the advocate of the view under consideration. The claim that something is intrinsically valuable is always mysterious to the extent that the value of the thing cannot be explained by establishing some sort of connection with something else that has a value that is not in question. In the case of intrinsic value, in the end, a person either recognizes the value or not. If we are confronted with a person who does not value something we regard as intrinsically valuable, we can try to get that person to form a better, more accurate or complete conception of the thing in question in the hope that he or she will then come to recognize its value. But if that fails, there really isn't much that one can do.

We should not, therefore, be surprised if things turn out this way for justification. Think, for example, of the sort of principle R.M. Chisholm strove to formulate regarding perception. Such a principle might begin by identifying a certain sort of sensory experience, e.g., the experience of being appeared to redly, and go on to state that if one has that experience and considers the proposition that something is now appearing to one in that way and in addition nothing one believes contradicts there being such a thing so appearing to one, then one is justified to some specific degree in believing that there is a thing that so appears to one. If one who maintains that justification is intrinsically valuable is asked to explain the value of a belief that such a principle classifies as justified, it may very well be that he or she can do no more than ask us to carefully attend to the nature of the relevant experience and invite us to share the intuition that it is a good thing for a person

who has such an experience and satisfies the other conditions specified in the principle to believe what the principle says the person is justified in believing. It is not clear that this is not good enough.

4. Gettier problems and the value of knowledge

As we explained in the overview, Kvanvig grants that subjectively justified, virtuously formed true beliefs are better than mere true beliefs, while denying that knowledge is distinctively good. This is because the claim that subjectively justified, virtuously formed true beliefs count as knowledge is subject to Gettier-style counterexamples, and any effort to craft a condition that will exclude such counterexamples is subject to what we labeled *Kvanvig's Rule*. The closer a condition comes to excluding all Gettier-style counterexamples the more complex, ad hoc and generally unlovely that condition becomes. Hence, it becomes more difficult to maintain that it is good for beliefs to satisfy that condition.[6]

The form of argument Kvanvig employs here is not new. Stephen Stich (1990) argues against the claim that true belief is valuable. A large part of his argument proceeds by looking at what he takes to be the best current analysis of true belief, i.e., a causal/functional theory. This theory seeks to specify a function that pairs beliefs with their truth conditions. Consideration of the causal element of this theory can clarify one main element of Stich's argument. One job of the function is to pair up the right things with referring terms such as proper names. A causal theory of reference seems to do the trick. The problem is, when we identify the causal chains linking referring terms with their referents, it turns out that the specification of these chains is determined by our intuitions regarding a series of ever more complicated examples and counterexamples. Hence, this specification is extremely complex, ad hoc and idiosyncratic. A somewhat different specification of the causal chains and some terms would be paired up with different referents. This different specification would conflict with some intuitive judgments about cases, but we could use it to define a notion much like our ordinary notion of reference and then a notion much like our ordinary notion of truth. Indeed, we could define a series of such notions, which Stich labels TRUTH*, TRUTH**, …, some of which would be very close to our notion of truth, some very far away.

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[6]   Two forms of this argument are possible. According to one, when the Gettier excluding condition becomes sufficiently complicated, we have a strong intuition that satisfying the condition *does not have value*. According to the other, when the condition becomes complicated, we lose the intuition that satisfying the condition is valuable.

Now for the part of Stich's argument that is similar to Kvanvig's: Since our ordinary notion of truth involves an arbitrary, idiosyncratic notion of reference, what sense does it make to value beliefs that are true in this sense? Since he has described a whole series of truth like notions, Stich can press the question by asking why we should value ordinary truth over one (or more!) of the TRUTH*s. Perhaps things would go much better for us if our beliefs were TRUE* or TRUE** or ... than if they were just plain true. Stich wants us to see that, upon analysis, true beliefs turn out to have a messy, arbitrary, ad hoc and generally unlovely nature. His hope is that seeing this will shake our intuitive conviction that true beliefs are so obviously good.[7] Hence he is deploying exactly the form of argument that Kvanvig deploys to show that knowledge is not distinctively valuable.

Timothy Williamson (2000) only briefly mentions this form of argument, but he also finds it compelling. Rather than running the argument to show that knowledge is not valuable, Williamson kicks it into reverse. He begins with the assertion that knowledge is especially valuable. He then calls attention to the "ad hoc sprawl" (31) that purported analyses of knowledge have become to avoid Gettier-type counterexamples. Finally Williamson questions the sense of valuing anything like that, but unlike Kvanvig, his sense that knowledge is especially valuable is unshaken—he concludes that knowledge is unanalyzable.

One could respond to this type of argument by defending some particular analysis of knowledge against the charge of unloveliness. We leave that approach to those who have put such patient, loving care into constructing these analyses. We shall instead question a presupposition of the argument that has slipped under the radar. The argument presupposes that the recognizability of goodness must be preserved by analysis, specifically, it presupposes something along these lines:

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[7]   Given the fundamental similarity between the argument Stich offers against thinking that true beliefs are valuable and the argument Kvanvig offers for thinking that beliefs satisfying a Gettier proofing condition are valuable, it is odd that when he considers the question of whether true belief is valuable, Kvanvig summarily dismisses Stich's argument. It seems that Kvanvig misses the point. He interprets Stich as holding that "there is no unique property expressed by our linguistic practice involving 'true' and its cognates" (39). As we hope our brief exposition makes clear, Stich can perfectly well admit that our use of 'true' expresses a unique property. The problem is that there are indefinitely many truth like properties arbitrarily close to the unique property our concept 'true' has latched onto, and hence it does not seem to make sense to value beliefs having that unique property rather than beliefs having one of the other truth like properties.

> (PGA) If A is an analysis of C, and we recognize things having C as good, then upon consideration of A, it will be apparent to us that things satisfying A are good.

Once this presupposition is made explicit, we can construe Kvanvig's argument as proceeding via modus tollens. It is not apparent to us that things satisfying a correct analysis of knowledge are good (given how messy they are). Hence, although we intuitively suppose knowledge is good, we must not in fact be *recognizing* that knowledge is good, and this for the simple reason that it isn't good.

Should we accept (PGA)? Note first that it is an epistemic principle. It does not tell us that if A is an analysis of C and something holds of C, then it also holds of A. It tells us what anyone who considers the matter will *believe* about things that satisfy A given that A analyzes C and we recognize that C things are good.[8] We must confess a general caution, if not down right skepticism, about such principles. People seem to have an astounding capacity to believe things, or fail to believe things, in all sorts of circumstances. Hence it does not seem we can say much about what people will believe, recognize or know about one thing given only that they believe, recognize or know something else and that some necessary connection holds between the two things.

Perhaps if analyses were transparent, so that A could only be an analysis of C if anyone possessing concept C would immediately know that A is an analysis of C, then something like (PGA) *might* hold true. But of course we do not require so much of analyses in general or the analysis of knowledge in particular. The main requirements on analyses are that they be immune to intuitive counterexample and that they not be circular. There is no reason to think anything like (PGA) must hold true for any analysis that meets these minimal conditions. One might think that if we restrict ourselves to special sorts of analyses, e.g., analyses that reveal the true, deep, essential nature of a thing, then something like (PGA) would hold. But remember, (PGA) is an epistemic principle. There is no guarantee that an analysis revealing a thing's true nature will operate on the same level as our ordinary thinking; a correct analysis need not employ the concepts we usually employ or even concepts with which we are terribly familiar. Hence what we find obvious about things described in the more ordinary way may well not strike us as obvious, or even believable, when things are described using the concepts of the analysis.

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[8] We are here assuming that if it is apparent to S that P, then at least S believes that P.

While its application to knowledge may be novel, a version of the argument based on (PGA) played a huge role in the history of 20th Century metaethics. The argument in question is G.E. Moore's infamous open question argument against naturalistic definitions of good. Moore claimed that no naturalistic definition, N, proposed for "good" can be correct because the question of whether a thing that is N is good will always be open. He held that if N really defined "good," then it would be obvious that a thing that is N is good. The question of whether an N thing really is good would necessarily be closed. The open question argument is a limit case of the argument grounded on (PGA) because its crucial premise simply substitutes "good" for C in the antecedent of (PGA), thereby rendering the second conjunct of the antecedent redundant.

The open question argument has been considered a failure almost from the moment Moore presented it. The most obvious problem with the argument is that it presupposes that definitions have a sort of transparency—that what we know or believe about a concept will immediately be transferred over to a definition of the concept. Definitions just are not transparent in this sense.[9]

There are differences between the idea behind the open question argument and (PGA). We mentioned one above, that the open question argument presupposes a simplified, limit case of (PGA). Another difference is that (PGA) concerns analyses while the open question argument is concerned with definitions. These differences are either insignificant or they count in favor of the open question argument. If Moore's assumption isn't true, and we cannot just assume that we will recognize the things to which a correct definition of "good" applies as good, why would we expect (PGA) to hold? Hence, we reject Kvanvig's primary argument for thinking that knowledge is not better than subjectively justified virtuously formed true beliefs on the grounds that it presupposes a principle that is at best dubious.

5. The Immunity of Understanding to Gettier Problems

To this point we have been questioning the negative side of Kvanvig's project, his argument that knowledge is not distinctively valuable. But Kvanvig also has a positive proposal. On his view, since the epistemic good of understanding is primarily an *internal* matter (once an external

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[9]   Kvanvig recognizes the failure of the open question argument on page 77. But he only explicitly mentions that this failure shows that there can be necessary truths that are not recognizable a priori. He does not consider that the argument he offers against thinking that knowledge is good might be similar to the open question argument.

truth condition has been met), a matter of "grasping" the connections among one's beliefs, then it is "luck-proof" in a way that knowledge is not. Hence, the analysis of understanding can be simple and straight-forward in a way that the analysis of knowledge cannot match. In essence a Gettier case involves a justified belief that is true by luck. It is extremely difficult to rule out the relevant sort of luck. Hence, the analysis of knowledge becomes complicated and unlovely, and knowledge is revealed to lack distinctive value. Since understanding is not messy, understanding can be distinctively valuable.

As sympathetic as we are in general towards Kvanvig's attempt to bring higher epistemic goods such as understanding back into the philo-sophical limelight, we will close by pointing out that his "luck-proof" account of understanding, too, is untenable. By our lights, it is fairly easy to show that, just like knowledge, understanding can be Gettier-ed: or, more carefully, that the mental states that have nearly all of the features of understanding can fail to amount to understanding for Gettier-style reasons.

Consider, by way of illustration, the following case: suppose that your source for World Cup soccer scores and analysis is a Jayson Blair style news reporter who simply makes up all of his reports about the Cup whole-cloth. You have no particular reason to suspect this about him, moreover, so from your point of view his reports seem worthy of your default trust. Your source then claims (in a particular moment of reverie) that the United States defeated Italy 2 to 1, and that the win-ning goal was scored by the U.S. because the Italian goalkeeper slipped in the mud, an account that you then accept as true.[10] In this case, moreover (what luck!), all of his claims turn out to *be* true; by chance, he has precisely described the way things actually unfolded during the game. Focusing now on the role of understanding, we can also add the following: not only do you come to accept (based on his account) that the United States scored the winning goal because the goalie slipped in the mud, but you also (in some appropriately internal sense) "grasp" or "see" the explanatory relationship described by the reporter; that is, you "grasp" or "see" that the winning goal was scored *because* the goalie slipped in the mud.[11] This is, to your mind, *why* the winning goal was scored.

According to Kvanvig, all the ingredients required for understand-ing now seem to be present: there is the internal "seeing," for one

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[10] This is, needless to say, to paint the explanatory story (some might say, the *causal* story) with quite a broad brush. Making it more complex, however, would not change the basic point.

[11] For an attempt to unpack these "grasping" and "seeing" metaphors, see Grimm (unpublished).

thing, and there is also the truth of the connection seen (that is, roughly, the truth of the explanatory story). But do you now genuinely understand why the winning goal was scored? It seems not. Because the details were invented whole-cloth by the reporter, even though the connection that you "see" or "grasp" actually obtains, you no more understand *why* the wining goal was scored by the U.S. than you know *that* the winning goal was scored by the U.S. Just as your belief about the winning goal fails to amount to knowledge because of its accidental relationship to how things stand in the world, so too your grasp of why the winning goal was scored fails to amount to understanding because of *its* accidental relationship to the world. Had the reporter claimed that the winning goal was scored in some other way—indeed, had he claimed that it was scored in the same way, but by the other team!—you would have "grasped" or "seen" this connection just as readily. But just as it is hard to see how genuine knowledge of the world can be based on a tissue of lies, so too is it hard to see how genuine understanding of the world can be based on such a tissue.

What all of this suggests, however, is that in addition to the internal "grasping" or "seeing" component of understanding and the external truth component, understanding also, and crucially, seems to require a non-accidental relationship between the two: that is to say, a non-accidental relationship between the internal grasping and the external connection grasped. If the relationship between the two appears to be a matter of chance, then we seem just as reluctant to honor such a lucky grasp with the title "understanding" as we are to honor a belief that just happens to hit upon the truth with the title "knowledge."[12]

Read back into Kvanvig's earlier critical argument, finally, what all this means is that—perhaps a bit depressingly—understanding too, and just like knowledge, turns out not to be distinctively valuable after all, for its analysis will need to include just the sort of rambling non-accidentality clause we are familiar with from our previous accounts of knowledge. Perhaps this is just another bitter pill we need to swallow. Then again, perhaps we would be better advised to take this as another reason to look more skeptically at the earlier argument.

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[12]   Kvanvig does, it should be noted, offer a case where understanding seems to be had in the absence of knowledge (see his Comanche case on 197-98). Grimm (2006) suggests that we seem to have just as much reason to ascribe knowledge in this case as we do to ascribe understanding; in other words, the two don't come apart after all.

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