# A Puzzle about Epistemic Value and Steps Towards a Solution

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*Abstract*: This paper exposits and makes steps towards solving a puzzle about epistemic value. The puzzle is that several principles about the epistemic value of true beliefs and epistemic disvalue of false beliefs are, individually, plausible but, collectively, contradictory. My solution claims that sometimes false beliefs are epistemically valuable. I nonetheless show how my solution is not in deep tension with the Jamesian idea that true beliefs are epistemically valuable and false beliefs are epistemically disvaluable. I conclude by indicating how the results here are relevant to formulating and defending Veritism.

Key Words: Final Epistemic Value; Final Epistemic Disvalue; Veritism;

This paper discusses a puzzle about epistemic value. Specifically, there are several principles about the value of true beliefs and false beliefs that collectively generate a contradiction. First, many philosophers are sympathetic to a Jamesian idea that true beliefs are of epistemic value and false beliefs are of epistemic disvalue. But it is also plausible that some complex things—e.g. a set of beliefs—are of epistemic value despite containing some false beliefs. Finally, it is also plausible that the epistemic value of a set of beliefs is closed under conjunction—that merely conjoining beliefs does not change epistemic value. The puzzle is that the principles seem plausible, individually, but generate a contradiction, collectively.

The aim of this paper is to provide a solution to the puzzle. My solution utilizes a pair of distinctions. First, a distinction between beliefs in propositions that do not have other propositions as parts (simple beliefs) and beliefs in propositions that do have other propositions as parts (non-simple beliefs). Second, a distinction between having value *not* in virtue of having valuable parts (basic value) and having value in virtue of having valuable parts (non-basic value). My solution is that some false beliefs, despite being false, are actually epistemically valuable because they are non-simple beliefs that have many valuable true beliefs as parts. I then show how this solution is not in deep tension with the Jamesian idea.

In section I, I sketch the puzzle more carefully. In section II, I examine a potential solution that I call the "separate and compare" strategy. I suggest that this strategy fails to resolve the puzzle. In sections III-V, I provide my own solution. Section III further exposits the twin distinctions already introduced. Section IV argues that, given those distinctions, the idea that no false belief can be of epistemic value is implausible. Section V shows how to reconcile this solution with the Jamesian idea. Section VI proposes an alternative to the "separate and compare" strategy that both retains its plausibility while being consistent with my solution. Finally, section VII suggests that my solution indicates an alternative way of formulating "Veritism" which may give it additional resources for dealing with potential problems.

## I. A Puzzle about Epistemic Value

Many philosophers embrace a guiding idea suggested by William James. The idea has two parts. First, it is valuable to have true beliefs. Second, it is disvaluable to have false beliefs ("errors" as James put it). These parts are distinct, since one could avoid having disvaluable false beliefs by avoiding beliefs altogether; but such a strategy would clearly not provide one with valuable true beliefs. The kind of value here is epistemic as opposed to other kinds of value (e.g.

ethical or aesthetic). Additionally, having true beliefs is not merely epistemically valuable because it has as a consequence something else of epistemic value (though it may). Rather, to use some standard terminology, having true beliefs (false beliefs) is of *final* epistemic value (disvalue), where being of final epistemic value (disvalue) means roughly being valuable (disvaluable) for its own sake from the epistemic point of view.[1]

It would be useful to formulate this guiding Jamesian idea in terms of more precise principles. At first pass, one might formulate the idea as follows:

> Any true belief is of final epistemic value; that is, if a belief is true, then it is of final epistemic value.
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> Any false belief is of final epistemic disvalue; that is, if a belief is false, then it is of final epistemic disvalue.

One drawback to this formulation of the Jamesian idea is that it applies only to individual beliefs. But oftentimes in life we are concerned with the value (disvalue) of aggregates, collections, or sets of things. I will expand that formulation to include reference to sets of beliefs as follows:[2]

> *Valuable Truths*: Any true belief is of final epistemic value; that is, if a belief is true, then it is of final epistemic value. Any set of true beliefs is of final epistemic value; that is, if a set contains only true beliefs, then the set is of final epistemic value.
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> *Disvaluable Falsehoods*: Any false belief is of final epistemic disvalue; that is, if a belief is false, then it is of final epistemic disvalue. Any set of false beliefs is of final epistemic disvalue; that is, if a set contains only false beliefs, then the set is of final epistemic disvalue.

The expansion is quite natural—if each individual true belief is valuable, then presumably their set would be as well. (And *mutatis mutandis* for false beliefs and epistemic disvalue.)[3]

To be sure, not every philosopher would accept *Valuable Truths* and *Disvaluable Falsehoods*. Some reject the guiding Jamesian idea. For instance, Stephen Stich (1990) rejects that anything is of epistemic value. Feldman (2002) accepts that some things are of epistemic value but restricts it to reasonable attitudes. But even those sympathetic to the guiding idea might reject *Valuable Truths* and *Disvaluable Falsehoods*. For both specify *sufficient* conditions for a belief to be valuable or disvaluable—being true and false respectively. Some might hold that being true (false) is *necessary* for a belief to be valuable (disvaluable) while requiring a further condition for being *sufficient.* For instance, the further condition might be that the subject matter of the belief is interesting, important, or cuts nature at its joints. These kinds of views are important. But in this paper I will ignore them. For the puzzle could always be restated in cases

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[1] Truth be told, James himself used more deontic language than value language (e.g. "commandments"). Given standard worries about deontic appraisals of beliefs, many philosophers refine James' ideas in terms of values or goals. David (2001) compiles around half a dozen sympathetic authors to these ideas; my (2019) compiles around another half dozen. For another half dozen or so not on either list see: Coady (2012: 4-5), DePaul (2001), Zagzebski (2003), Loewer (1993: 266f.), Horwich (2006), Haack (1993: 199ff.), Whiting (2013). To be sure, there are terminological differences between these authors and some offer important refinements. But I take them all to be broadly *sympathetic* with the guiding Jamesian idea, even if they fight over the details of precise formulation.

[2] Expanding these formulations assumes the existence of sets. But that assumption is independently plausible. One could hold that individual things—like beliefs—are valuable (disvaluable) but no set of things are. But that idea is one of the least plausible ones in axiology.

[3] Though I've formulated these principles using the terminology of "final epistemic" value and disvalue, for brevity's sake, I'll periodically drop that terminology in what follows. For, in what follows, I will not be concerned with other kinds of value (e.g. ethical or aesthetic) or instrumental epistemic value.

where these further conditions are met. So such views at best momentarily side-step the puzzle; they do not solve it.[4]

The other two principles are:

> *Imperfection*: There is a set of beliefs that has many true beliefs, at least one false belief, and is valuable.

*Imperfection* is quite modest; it merely says that one such set exists. Presumably there are many such sets (think, for instance, of various sets of your own beliefs!). Lastly, a plausible principle about comparing epistemic value:

> *Conjunctive Equivalence*: Epistemic value does not change under merely conjoining the contents of beliefs. That is, let us suppose there is a set S of beliefs *b1 …bn* and a set P where the elements of P are the contents of *b1 …bn*—propositions *p1 …pn*. Let P* be any set that results from a finite iteration of conjoining the elements of P. And let S* be any set of beliefs in the elements of P*. Then the epistemic value of S and S* are the same.

Though this principle is a mouth full at first, its plausibility can be seen by working through a simple example. Suppose S = {belief that *p*, belief that *q*}. Then {*p*, *q*} is the set whose elements are the contents of the beliefs of S. One finite iteration of conjoining those elements produces the set {*p & q*}. And S* would be: {belief that *p & q*}, the set composed of beliefs in the elements of that set. According to *Conjunctive Equivalence*, the sets {belief that *p*, belief that *q*} and {belief that *p & q*} have the same value, whatever value that might be. An alternative way to motivate this principle is to point out that, presumably, we should never fear that we might lose (or gain?) something of value by merely conjoining things already believed!

The puzzle is this: each of these principles is plausible, yet the collection is mutually inconsistent. Given *Imperfection*, there is a set composed of true and false beliefs that is also of value. Let's call this set Δ. Let us combine the propositions of the beliefs of Δ into a single proposition. Now consider a set, Δ*, that is composed of a single belief in that proposition. That belief is false, since it's a belief in a conjunction and one of the conjuncts is false. Thus, by *Disvaluable Falsehoods*, the set Δ* is of disvalue. But given the way Δ* was constructed, on *Conjunctive Equivalence* the sets Δ and Δ* have the same value. But they don't—Δ is of value, while Δ* is of disvalue. Thus, a contradiction.[5]

The inconsistency didn't require *Valuable Truth*; it was generated without that assumption. However, if *Valuable Truth* is true, it makes the inconsistency more puzzling. For we started with a set—Δ—that has many elements that are of value. And yet we ended with the conclusion that Δ is of disvalue. How is it that Δ ends up being of disvalue despite having true beliefs which, by the light of *Valuable Truth*, are valuable?

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[4] Proponents of this last view include authors like Alston (2005), Coady (2012), Finocchiaro (forthcoming), Goldman (1999), Haack (1993), Hurka (1993), Moser (1985), Sosa (2003). Some might object to *Valuable Truths* and *Disvaluable Falsehoods* for reasons that have nothing to do with epistemology. They might think that the primary bears of value are *states of affairs* not things like beliefs or disbeliefs (see, e.g., Feldman (1986), Zimmerman (2001)). Again, this objection can be sidestepped. Anytime someone believes something true or false there is a state of affairs consisting of them having that true or false belief. The discussion here could be rewritten, perhaps with a little difficulty, in terms of states of affairs instead of individual beliefs and sets.

[5] I've formulated the contradiction in terms of sets of beliefs. One might be able to formulate it in terms of some proxy. For instance, one might speak of the value of "having" a number of beliefs. A contradiction may possibly be derived from assumption like: it is valuable to have a number of true beliefs and one false belief; having one false belief is disvaluable; the epistemic value of beliefs does not change under conjunction. While one may be able to derive a contradiction in this way, I find it unnecessary and roundabout.

Something has clearly gone awry. Yet, each of our assumptions has at least an air of plausibility. So there is a puzzle about epistemic value. An adequate solution to the puzzle should do two things. First, it should identify one or more principles that should be rejected, lest one is still stuck with a contradiction. Second, it should explain why we should reject one of the principles, even if it is plausible. In addition to those two things, I will seek a solution that embraces a further constraint: it retains the guiding Jamesian idea. This further constraint will rule out potential solutions that merely reject the idea of epistemic value altogether (ala Stich) or the epistemic value of truth (ala Feldman).

## II. The Separate and Compare Strategy

Some philosophers might believe there is a strategy that is ready-at-hand for solving this puzzle. I'll call it the "separate and compare" strategy. It's unclear how widely endorsed the strategy is, though it has been recommended to me several times in conversation. I will consider it to clear the way for my own solution.

This solution offers a strategy for determining the value of any set of beliefs. First, *separate* the set into two subsets—one composed of just the true beliefs and one composed of just the false beliefs. Second *compare* the value of those two subsets. In comparing them, one utilizes a symmetry constraint: the net value of one true belief and one false belief is neutral or zero. A simple way to satisfy this symmetry constraint is to assign 1 unit of value to each true belief and -1 units of value to each false belief. Having assigned values to each subset, one simply sums the value of the two subsets. If the resulting value is above zero, the set of beliefs is valuable; if below zero, the set is disvaluable.[6]

The "separate and compare" strategy is first and foremost a strategy for determining the overall value of a set of beliefs. The strategy is relevant to our puzzle because it has results that are inconsistent with one of the principles that generated the puzzle, namely, *Conjunctive Equivalence*. A simple model will show the inconsistency. Suppose a subject believes *p* and *q* where *p* is true and *q* is false. Now consider the two sets {belief that *p*, belief that *q*} and {belief that *p&q*}. According to this strategy, the first set will have a neutral amount of epistemic value—since it has one true belief and one false belief—whereas the second set will be of negative epistemic value—since it has one false belief. However, given the way the second set was constructed, *Conjunctive Equivalence* implies they have the same value.

I am dissatisfied with this solution for a simple reason. It implies that *Conjunctive Equivalence* is false but does not explain why, besides having a simple model. But *Conjunctive Equivalence* is plausible. An adequate solution to the puzzle should do more to explain why the principle is false, even if plausible at first. Nonetheless, I recognize some will be drawn to this strategy. In section VI below I will give one way of retaining this basic idea of "separate and compare" that doesn't require rejecting *Conjunctive Equivalence.*

## III. Steps Towards a Solution I: Some Distinctions

My solution utilizes a pair of distinctions. The first is a metaphysical distinction about parts of propositions; the second is a distinction in value theory. I'll first briefly exposit these distinctions before discussing how they cut across each other.

### *A. Propositional Parts*

[6] I am not sure anyone has embraced this strategy. But see Easwaran (2016) for relevant discussion. One can periodically find views similar to this one (see, e.g., Hempel (1962: section 12)), but there are usually important differences between the view in the text and those.

Some propositions have other propositions as parts.[7] The proposition *p&q* is a proposition. It has *p* as a part and *q* as a part. By contrast, *p* and *p v q* are propositions, but the latter is not a part of the former.[8] To introduce a little terminology, let us say:

> A *non-simple proposition* =df. A proposition that has another proposition as a part.

From the fact that some propositions have parts it does not logically follow that there exist some propositions that do not have parts. (E.g., it is logically consistent that the propositional parthood relation induces a partial order but one without any lower bounds.) Nonetheless, I will assume for discussion here that there are some propositions that do not have other propositions as parts. Those who reject this assumption will have no grand objection to what I say below; they should merely think some of the cases I discuss are empty. But those who accept this assumption may want to know how my solution applies to such cases. So let us introduce the following term:

> A *simple proposition* =df. A proposition that does not have another proposition as a part.

Some philosophers wonder whether propositions can have concrete objects like you or me as parts. I will not be concerned with that issue here. Whenever I speak of the parts of propositions I have in mind its *propositional* parts—those parts that are themselves propositions.[9]

Since my focus is on beliefs I'll use the following terminology:

> A *simple belief* =df. A belief in a simple proposition
>
> A *non-simple belief* =df. A belief in a non-simple proposition.

(Again, the assumption that people can (or do) have simple beliefs is just an assumption; those who reject it will simply see some cases I discuss as unnecessary.) Now if one has a non-simple belief, it is entirely possible that one also has beliefs in the propositional *parts* of that proposition. So let us offer the following schematic definition:

> ψ is *believed propositional part of* φ = df. (i) both φ and ψ are believed by the same subject and (ii) ψ is a propositional part of φ

So a subject may believe a proposition φ and believe a propositional part ψ. Further, ψ is a part of φ. But what is the relationship between the *belief that φ* and the *belief that ψ*? I propose that the *belief that ψ* is part of the *belief that φ*. I cannot defend this proposal here. So I will simply take it on board as an assumption for my solution. However, I will note that this proposal naturally fits certain cases. For instance, I believe each of the axioms of arithmetic and I believe

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[7] Propositional parthood is distinct from compositional parthood. That is, in constructing a symbol (e.g. a sentence) we use a variety of symbols. These symbols are part of the larger symbol. Thus, in propositional logic, a symbol like 'p' is part of the symbol 'p v q'. But that does not mean that the proposition expressed by the symbol 'p' is part of the proposition expressed by the symbol 'p v q'. However, at the end of the day, I'm not overly wedded to the terminology of 'propositional part.' My discussion could be rewritten in terms of the terminology of 'content part' so that one proposition is a content part of another. The idea of content parthood has been studied by logicians normally in a logic for analytic containment. See, e.g., Angell (1989), Correia (2004), Fine (2016), Elgin (2020). Russell (1918: 37ff., 47ff.) and Wittgenstein (1921: 4.21, 4.221, 4.51, 5, 5.01, 5.3) also drew a similar distinction among propositions. But it is not clear to me that they carefully distinguished between propositional parthood and what I call compositional parthood. I discuss their views on this issue at greater length elsewhere.

[8] Because the puzzle I'm presenting abstracts from particular propositions, so have I. The clearest example of propositional parthood, so-abstracted, is logical conjunction. But there may be other examples of parthood that do not involve conjunction. For instance, I would argue that the proposition that Tish is a mammal is a part of the proposition that Tish is a cat; likewise, the proposition that Jupiter has a moon is part of the proposition that Jupiter has at least four moons. For further examples, see my (2018).

[9] This issue arises in Russell. There's a large literature on it. For some discussion see, e.g., King, Soames, and Speaks (2014), Merricks (2015), Keller (2013, 2019).

the axioms of arithmetic. In this case, it is plausible that each of the beliefs in the individual axioms is, itself, a part of the belief in the axioms themselves.

My solution utilizes the idea of propositional parthood. But I am not interested in giving a full theory of it here. However, one natural condition for propositional parthood is implication; that is, the following schema is correct: a proposition ψ is part of a proposition φ only if φ implies ψ. As I've indicated, *p v r* is not part of *p*, despite the fact that *p* implies *p v r*. So some further condition is needed for propositional parthood. However, since I do not think that extensive discussion of the further condition is necessary for my solution, I will not spend more time on the issue.[10]

*B. Basic and Non-Basic Value*

The second distinction is a distinction in value theory. This distinction is gestured at in Moore (1903, 1912) and has been further analyzed and discussed by others (e.g. Feldman (1986, 2000), Zimmerman (2001)). Though there are different ways of articulating the distinction precisely, crudely put the distinction is that some things have value partly in virtue of having valuable parts and some things have value but not in virtue of having any valuable parts. The former are of "non-basic" value and the latter are of "basic" value. The distinction is normally drawn for value but equally well applies to disvalue.[11]

By definition, when something is of non-basic value, it has some part that is of value. However, presumably when something is of non-basic value, it has some part that is of *basic* value. To be sure, if something is of non-basic value, it may have some parts—or sequence of parts—that are of non-basic value. But that cannot go on forever. Whenever something is of non-basic final value, then at least one of its parts is of basic value. Similar points hold for disvalue. Whenever something is of non-basic disvalue, then at least one of its parts is of basic disvalue.

An important question is the relationship between the overall value of a whole and the basic value and disvalue of its parts. Moore famously denied that the value of the whole is equal to the sum of the value (and disvalue) of its parts. Some might think that the overall value of a whole is not determined solely by its parts but perhaps by external relations. They too might hold that the value of the whole is not always equal to the sum of value (and disvalue) of its parts. However, notice that merely drawing a distinction between basic and non-basic value does not force one to take a stand on this issue. My solution to the puzzle will be consistent with several ways of aggregating the value of wholes, though I'll suggest a limited principle in section VI.

*C. Combining Distinctions*

I've drawn a pair of distinction: simple beliefs vs non-simple beliefs and basic value vs. non-basic value. Conceptually speaking, these distinctions cut across to generate the following categories:

- Simple beliefs that are of basic value (disvalue)
- Simple beliefs that are of non-basic value (disvalue)
- Non-simple beliefs that are of basic value (disvalue)
- Non-simple beliefs that are of non-basic value (disvalue)

[10] For what it is worth, I find Yablo's (2014) condition—in terms of subject matter—the most promising. Chisholm (1986) also provides a theory of parthood for states of affairs which, for him, just are propositions. It is worth noting that Chisholm's theory implies that any time a person believes a proposition that person believes all of the parts of the proposition. This implication is consistent with my solution, but not necessary.

[11] This distinction is consistent with certain meta-epistemological explanations about value. If something is of basic final value, there still might be an explanation of the value it has—just not in terms of its having valuable parts.

(Since the discussion of disvalue will parallel the discussion of value, I'll omit it.) Of these cases, the second and fourth deserve the most comment.

The second category is empty. A simple proposition is a proposition that does not have any other propositions as a part. But if a simple belief is of non-basic value, then some of its value is derived from its parts. While I do not have a conclusive argument, I am unsure how the non-propositional parts of a proposition can explain the (purported) epistemic value (or disvalue) of believing that proposition. (I am unsure how this can be *even if* we concede that concrete objects are part of propositions.) So I propose the secondary category is empty and will thus ignore it in what follows.

The fourth category occurs only where one believes a proposition, believes some of its propositional parts, and both beliefs are valuable (disvaluable). For instance, suppose an agent believes *p* and *q*, both beliefs are valuable, and *q* is a propositional part of *p*. In such a case, believing *p* is of non-basic value and some of its value derives from believing *q*. However, as indicated before, non-basic value does not go on forever. So if a subject's belief that *p* is of non-basic value, then there is some set of propositions S such that each element of S is a propositional part of *p*, the subject believes it, and it is of basic value. To be clear, it is possible that those beliefs are simple beliefs or non-simple beliefs. My solution does not take a stand on that. However, my solution *does* require that anytime a subject has a non-simple belief that is of non-basic value, that subject has beliefs of basic value where those beliefs are part of the non-simple belief of non-basic value.

## IV. Steps Towards a Solution II: Rejecting *Disvaluable Falsehoods*

With these distinctions drawn, *Disvaluable Falsehoods* is not plausible and has counterintuitive results. First, it is possible for there to be a non-simple belief that has some believed proposition parts that are true and some believed propositional parts that are false. In virtue of having a false believed propositional part, that non-simple belief will be false. But it is entirely possible that the number of believed propositional parts that are true outnumber the number of believed propositional parts that are false.

*Disvaluable Falsehoods* would imply that such a non-simple belief is disvaluable in virtue of being false. But that's implausible. For that non-simple belief has many parts that are true and valuable. But, given *Disvaluable Falsehoods*, such parts are not relevant to determining the value of that belief, once it is determined that it has a singular false part. Worse yet, compare two non-simple beliefs, each of which has a singular false part but one of which has far more true parts that are of value than the other. Once again, *Disvaluable Falsehoods* will implausibly imply that each is of disvalue.

To be sure, it is *logically* consistent to hold that the disvalue of any single false belief is so great that it could never be overcome by any number of valuable true beliefs. Thus, any non-simple belief that contains a single disvaluable false belief will *always* be of disvalue no matter how many other valuable true beliefs it may have as parts. But such a view has nothing to recommend itself beyond mere logical consistency.

So I reject *Disvaluable Falsehoods*. Some non-simple beliefs can be valuable in virtue of having many true parts that are valuable—even if those non-simple beliefs also have some parts that are false. This way of rejecting *Disvaluable Falsehoods* means rejecting a simple view about the relation between the semantic value and epistemic value of beliefs. On this simple view, a necessary condition for a belief to be valuable is being true and a necessary condition for a belief to be disvaluable is being false. Thus, on this simple view, knowing the semantic value of a belief could at least tell you what kind of value property it could or could not have. However, I

reject this simple view. Being true is not necessary for being of value. Both true and false beliefs can be of value.

Earlier I said that an adequate resolution to the puzzle should reject at least one of the principles. My solution does reject one of the principles—*Disvaluable Falsehoods*. Second, it should explain what went awry in finding the principle plausible—I have just done that. Finally, I accepted a constraint of staying faithful to the guiding Jamesian idea that there is something correct about saying that true beliefs are valuable and false beliefs are disvaluable. My solution so far has not done that.

## V. Steps Towards A Solution III: Retaining the Guiding Idea

*Valuable Truths* and *Disvaluable Falsehoods* are one potential attempt to formulate the guiding Jamesian idea. However, I reject *Disvaluable Falsehoods*. I haven't explicitly criticized *Valuable Truths*. But it is not formulated in terms of the distinctions I have introduced so far. So it is preferable to supplant it with a principle that is formulated using those distinctions. Thus, I propose, in their stead, the following two principles:

> *Basic Valuable Truths*: For any belief φ of final epistemic value, the believed propositional parts of φ are of basic final value only if they are true.
>
> *Basic Disvaluable Falsehoods*: For any belief φ of final epistemic disvalue, the believed propositional parts of φ are of basic final disvalue only if they are false.

These principles help capture—or perhaps refine—the guiding Jamesian idea. They recast that idea not about any old true or false belief but about the valuable believed parts of true and false beliefs. To be clear, these principles make no assumptions about the compositional structure of these believed propositional parts. It is consistent with these principles that they are simple beliefs. It is also consistent with these principles that they are non-simple beliefs. (Indeed, it is consistent with these principles that there are *no* simple beliefs.)

My proposed principles *Basic Valuable Truths* and *Basic Disvaluable Falsehoods* do not conflict with *Valuable Truths* and *Disvaluable Falsehoods* in certain cases. For instance, consider:

> *Case 1*. A true belief of basic value.
>
> *Case 2*. A false belief of basic disvalue.

In *Case 1*, *Valuable Truths* will imply that the true beliefs are of value because they are true. In *Case 1*, *Basic Valuable Truths* will imply that the beliefs of basic value are true because they are of basic value. And while the two principles license different inferences, there is no conflict between them for beliefs like those in *Case 1*. (And *mutatis mutandis* for *Case 2* and the principles *Disvaluable Falsehoods* and *Basic Disvaluable Falsehoods*.)

The pairs of principles do not conflict in some cases of non-basic value. Consider:

> *Case 3*. A true belief of non-basic value.
>
> *Case 4*. A false belief of non-basic disvalue.

In *Case 3*, *Valuable Truths* will imply that the true belief is valuable because it is true. In *Case 3*, *Basic Valuable Truths* will imply that the belief has, as parts, true beliefs that are of basic value. Again, while the two principles license different inferences, there is no conflict between them for beliefs in *Case 3*. Similarly, in *Case 4*, *Disvaluable Falsehoods* will imply that the belief is of disvalue because it is false. And in *Case 4*, *Basic Disvaluable Falsehoods* will imply that the false belief has, as parts, false beliefs that are of basic disvalue. Again, there is no conflict between the principles.

The important case for the pairs of principles is:

*Case 5*. A false belief of non-basic value.

*Disvaluable Falsehoods* implies that such a case is impossible. For it implies that false beliefs are disvaluable—not valuable, non-basically or otherwise. By contrast, neither *Basic Valuable Truths* nor *Basic Disvaluable Falsehoods* implies that this case is impossible. Indeed, they leave open this case. Further, it is a good thing they leave open this case. I think that there are such beliefs which is why I reject *Disvaluable Falsehoods*. To use a metaphor, the truth-value and value of non-simple beliefs are hostage to their parts, but in different ways. A single false part ensures that the non-simple belief is false. But a single disvaluable part does not. A full reckoning of the belief's value would need to consult its other parts.

So my solution to the puzzle is to reject *Disvaluable Falsehoods*. And I have meet the constraint of retaining the guiding Jamesian idea by proposing the principles *Basic Valuable Truth* and *Basic Disvaluable Falsehoods*.

## VI. Revisiting the *Separate and Compare Strategy*

In section II I objected to the separate and compare strategy—it required rejecting *Conjunctive Equivalence* without explaining what was wrong with it. Nonetheless, I concede the strategy is promising. In this section I will briefly indicate how to capture the plausibility of that strategy in a way that is consistent with *Basic Valuable Truths* and *Basic Disvaluable Falsehoods*.

What is promising about that strategy is that it separates the things that are valuable from the things that are disvaluable and then compares their value. Given *Valuable Truths* and *Disvaluable Falsehoods*, the valuable things are the true beliefs and the disvaluable things are the false beliefs. However, with the distinction between basic and non-basic value, what should be compared are not just *anything* that is of value or disvalue, but those things of *basic* value or disvalue. (Indeed, there are standard reasons for thinking that, when determining the value of some complex whole, counting the value of non-basic things may lead to overcounting—see Zimmerman (2001: 154-5)) So, to stick to this type of strategy, one would need to separate the things of basic value and disvalue in a set of beliefs.

For any belief of value or disvalue, I will identify the *basic value set* as all of the believed propositional parts of it that are of basic value. Similarly, I will identify the *basic disvalue set* as all of the believed parts that are of basic disvalue. In the case of belief that is of basic value, its basic value set is just its singleton; similarly, for a belief that is of basic disvalue. For a true belief of non-basic value, the *basic value set* will be all those believed propositional parts that are of basic value. The *basic disvalue set* for a true belief of non-basic value will be the empty set. For true beliefs have no propositional parts that are false, and *per Basic Disvaluable Falsehoods* only false beliefs are of basic disvalue. A false belief of non-basic value may have both a *basic value set* and a *basic disvalue set*.

Here then is a simple proposal for the overall value of a set:

> *Simple Proposal*: The overall value of a set of beliefs is the sum of the value of two sets: first, the value of the union of all of the basic value sets for each element and second, the value of the union of all of the basic disvalue sets for each element.[12]

[12] It is possible that two non-simple beliefs have overlapping parts of basic value or disvalue. (E.g., the beliefs *p&q* and *q&r* overlap with the belief *q*, which might be of basic value or disvalue.) Because this proposal takes the *union* of the basic sets, any overlapping parts of basic value or disvalue will not get counted twice.

This proposal retains the promising idea of separating things of value and disvalue. However, more plausibly, what it separates are things of basic value and disvalue, not just any old true or false belief. Finally, it is consistent with *Conjunctive Equivalence*, which recall was:

> *Conjunctive Equivalence*: Epistemic value does not change under conjoining the contents of beliefs. That is, let us suppose there is a set S of beliefs *b1 …bn* and a set P where the elements of P are the contents of *b1 …bn*—propositions *p1 …pn*. Let P* be any set that results from a finite iteration of conjoining the elements of P. And let S* be any set of belief in the elements of P*. Then the epistemic value of S and S* are the same.

Indeed, given a further assumption, *Conjunctive Equivalence* follows from *Simple Proposal*. The further assumption is that, given a set of beliefs, its basic value and disvalue sets do not change under conjunction. To illustrate, the basic value and disvalue sets of {belief that *p*, belief that *q*} is the same as the basic value and disvalue sets of {belief that *p&q*}. Thus, unlike the separate and compare strategy of section II, *Simple Proposal* is consistent with *Conjunctive Equivalence*.

## VII. Potential Ramifications: Veritism

It is nice to avoid contradictions. Thus, it is nice to resolve a puzzle and thereby avoid contradictions. But it would be interesting if a solution to a puzzle had ramifications for other things as well. My solution to the puzzle may have some interesting ramifications for other issues beyond this puzzle, as I'll briefly gesture at here to be more fully developed at a later time.

There is an important position in contemporary epistemology that is sometimes labelled "Veritism" (Goldman (1999)) or "Epistemic Value T-Monism" (Pritchard (2010)). Although precise formulations of this position differ from author to author, the overall idea of the position is to accept the guiding Jamesian idea and propose that there is nothing else that is of epistemic value or disvalue. Thus, one way of formulating this position is the conjunction of three theses: *Valuable Truths*, *Disvaluable Falsehoods*, and the view that nothing else is of epistemic value or disvalue. (For instance, this is how Berker (2013) represents the position in a now well-known discussion.) I'll call the conjunction of those three theses *Standard Veritism*.[13]

*Standard Veritism* implies *Disvaluable Falsehoods*. I reject *Disvaluable Falsehoods*. Thus, I reject *Standard Veritism*. Proponents of *Standard Veritism* might try to respond by finding some other way of resolving the puzzle of section I. But they don't have to. Instead, they can use my solution to produce a more sophisticated position that I'll call *Sophisticated Veritism*. *Sophisticated Veritism* include the theses *Basic Final Value* and *Basic Final Disvalue*. It includes the further claim that *only* true beliefs are of basic final epistemic value and *only* false beliefs are of basic final epistemic disvalue. This position is still "monistic" in that it only permits one kind of thing as being of basic final epistemic value—true belief—and as being of basic final epistemic disvalue—false belief. But it also does not get embroiled in the puzzle mentioned in section I. But *Sophisticated Veritism* may also have superior resources to respond to objections that are raised to *Standard Veritism*, as I'll now gesture at.

[13] Ahlstrom-Vij (2013) defends a similar position to *Standard Veritism*. He is noteworthy in drawing a distinction between (as I call it) basic and non-basic final value. Drawing this distinction is good for, as I've argued elsewhere, any adequate theory of value should recognize this distinction (Perrine (2018)). However, his discussion is not as complete as mine. He does not discuss final epistemic disvalue or the disvalue of (some) false beliefs. Nor does he draw a distinction between simple and non-simple beliefs. For these reasons my discussion of *Sophisticated Veritism* improves upon his discussion. Sylvan (2018) also formulates a version of Veritism. However, as I've argued elsewhere (Perrine (2020: 96 fn. 52)), when we play closer attention to Sylvan's terminology, it will turn out that his position is not a version of epistemic value monism. That's not an objection to his position; but insofar as Veritism is supposed to be a version of epistemic value monism, Sylvan's formulation does not capture that.

Other people also reject *Standard Veritism*. Here is one influential objection, following the presentation of DePaul (2001: 173-4). One compares two sets of true beliefs—say, true beliefs about a well-supported empirical theory and true beliefs about simple arithmetical truths and one's immediate consciousness. An intuition is then pumped that having one of those sets of true beliefs is clearly more epistemically valuable than the other (presumably the first one). But each has the same number of true beliefs! Thus, the argument goes, to explain the difference between the value of the two sets we must appeal to something other than true belief. Since *Standard Veritism* does not countenance anything beyond true beliefs being of epistemic value, *Standard Veritism* must be false. Sometimes this objection is called the objection from "trivial truths" since the objection is more persuasive if one of the sets contains trivial truths and the other does not (see Pritchard (2014: 119) for this presentation of the objection). But I will call it the "uniformity" objection since it assumes a uniformity principle: that if true beliefs are epistemically valuable, then *each* true belief is of as much value as any other true belief.[14]

There are several responses to the "uniformity" objection. Some might respond by objecting to the uniformity principle by claiming that some true propositions are more important or interesting than others (see, e.g., Ahlstrom-Vij and Grimm (2013: 332-334), Pritchard (2014), and Hu (2017)). And, as noted above, some philosophers already embrace this position independently of *Standard Veritism*. However, it is controversial whether or not this response is ultimately consistent with *Standard Veritism*; while those authors cited just now think so, others are more likely to disagree (e.g., Haack (1993: 199)). A further problem is that most authors paper-over what exactly makes some propositions more interesting or important. Alternatively, Treanor (2013: 580-591) challenges an assumption of the argument—that we can measure beliefs by counting them, i.e. assigning them a number. If is not possible to count beliefs, then we cannot compare two sets of beliefs *with the same number*. But we—at least I!—might desire a response to the uniformity objection that doesn't turn on skepticism about counting beliefs.[15]

*Sophisticated Veritism* allows a different response to the uniformity objection that need not rely on claims about importance and interest or Treanor's metaphysical doubts. Given *Sophisticated Veritism*, some true beliefs may be of basic value; other true beliefs may be of non-basic value. Further, many true beliefs of non-basic value will likely be of more value than many true beliefs of basic value. After all, many true beliefs of non-basic value will contain, as parts, many more valuable true beliefs than some true beliefs of basic value. Thus, given *Sophisticated Veritism*, we should expect that true beliefs are *not* of the same uniform value. Further, this sketch of a response does not make appeal to importance and interest or doubts about counting beliefs. Rather, this sketch of a response relies upon what is plausible regarding the value of true beliefs, once we have drawn a distinction between basic and non-basic value for true beliefs.

*Sophisticated Veritism* is immune to some quick objections that have been raised against *Standard Veritism*. Specifically, the following argumentative schema might be pressed against *Standard Veritism*.

- φ is of final epistemic value.
- φ is false.

[14] The uniformity objection may appear more apt if *Standard Veritism* is committed to the separate and compare strategy of section II.

[15] Treanor (2013) was not the first to raise worries about counting beliefs in this context; see also Latus (2000: 30-1). Treanor (2014) offers a *different* response. Simply put, he argues that sentence grammar is an unreliable guide to number of propositions expressed by that sentence. Thus, versions of the uniformity objection that compare individual sentences are unlikely to succeed. While I'm sympathetic to his point, it doesn't go very far. For one can present the uniformity objection *without* relying on a comparison of individual sentences.

- Therefore, *Standard Veritism* is false.

(For instance, Elgin (2017: chapter 2) utilizes this kind of argumentative scheme in criticizing *Standard Veritism*.) The analogous argumentative schema for *Sophisticated Veritism* would be:

- φ is of final epistemic value.
- φ is false.
- Therefore, *Sophisticated Veritism* is false.

However, instances of this argumentative schema will be invalid. *Sophisticated Veritism* allows for some things that are false to be of value. Once again, given *Sophisticated Veritism* we cannot simply use semantic value to identify epistemic value. We have to pay closer attention to the valuable parts of things.

A final comment. Sometimes *Standard Veritism* is analogized to hedonism in ethics. Sometimes the analogy is for expository purposes (e.g., Coady (2012)), sometimes it is a prolegomenon to an objection (e.g., DePaul (2004), Berker (2013)). The analogy is tempting: *Standard Veritism* specifies necessary and sufficient conditions for something to be of final epistemic value—being a true belief. And it specifies necessary and sufficient conditions for something to be of final epistemic disvalue—being a false belief. Likewise, we can consider a position *Standard Hedonism*. *Standard Hedonism* specifies necessary and sufficient conditions for something to be of final ethical value—being pleasurable. And it specifies necessary and sufficient conditions for something to be of final ethical disvalue—being displeasurable.

A further interest in this analogy might be based in meta-normative concerns. Specifically, some philosophers have thought that something like *Standard Hedonism* could be combined with a *reductive* proposal. Specifically, *Standard Hedonism* is formulated in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions and this has a nice logical form for a proposal to reduce one property (final ethical value) to another (pleasure).[16] *Standard Veritism* is formulated in the same way, in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, and has the same nice logical form for a reductive proposal. And while a reductive proposal is not normally advanced with *Standard Veritism*, it is worth remembering that one of its main flagbearers—Goldman—has been interested in advancing reductive theories in the past.

One might doubt, for entirely general reasons, that these reductive proposals could succeed. But waiving those doubts, the view here complicates such proposals. For I've argued against *Standard Veritism*. And I have rejected that there is a simple relation between the epistemic value of a belief and its semantic value. While this does not refute such proposals, it does mean they must become more complicated. At the very least, those interested in reductive proposals and *Standard Veritism* may have more work for themselves than they realized.

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[16] Or, more realistically, proposing that the ontological commitments of one of the terms—the English phrase 'final ethical value'—can be reduced to the ontological commitments of the other term—the English phrase 'pleasure.'

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