Does the truth matter?

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I, Samuel Abel, confirm that the work presented in my thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

The truth matters. Or so believe most people, most of the time, about most things. That is, they believe it is better to have true beliefs than false ones, to seek accuracy over falsehood. They may disagree about *what* is true – what the truth 'is' – but they all agree that they want it, whatever it may be. Nobody ever says, 'It would be better to be wrong about this than right'. We believe the truth has instrumental value, as it helps us achieve our goals, and we believe the truth has intrinsic value, that it is valuable for its own sake. The prevailing view is that truth is one of those few ubiquitously sanctified, gold-plated, untouchably-valuable things.

The way my view differs from the norm is that I do not think there is anything particularly special about the truth. In what follows I place the value of truth head-to-head with another kind of fundamental value – quality of life, or *eudaimonic value*. I ask the question, *does having the truth improve our lives*? My answer will be that the value we assign to truth, both intrinsic and instrumental, is systematically and significantly exaggerated. I argue that we are often just as well off, if not *worse off*, with true beliefs as we are with false beliefs. I argue that the truth has been wrongly sanctified, and we have lost sight of the many instances in our lives where we would be better off sacrificing it for more important ends, like love, community and psychological well-being. At most, the truth *sometimes* matters. But in many cases, our lives go better when we disregard it entirely.

Impact Statement

Whether the truth matters is a question of central importance both inside and outside of academic philosophy. In academia, my arguments matter because they go against the prevailing view, which strongly defends, if not takes for granted, the view that truth is eudaimonically valuable. Most pertinently, the intellectual likes to think that the truth improves their lives, partly because their lives are to some extent devoted to finding the truth. Additionally, my arguments put pressure on those who advocate living an *authentic* life, and more broadly, on theories of well-being more generally. Outside of academia, likewise, there is the widespread assumption that the truth is precious – that our lives would go better if we could make sure all our beliefs were accurate. My argument matters because it objects to this conception of the good life. In reality, the things which make our lives worth living – loving relationships, social norms, psychological well-being, personal goals, even our understanding of the world – all these rarely benefit from a close adherence to the truth, despite what the intellectuals among us like to say.

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Introduction

The truth matters. Or so believe most people, most of the time, about most things. That is, they believe it is better to have true beliefs than false ones.[1] They may disagree about *what* is true – what the truth 'is' – but they all agree that they want it, whatever it may be. Nobody ever says, 'It would be better to be wrong about this than right'. Occasionally, we say 'I *hope* I am wrong about x', but this doesn't imply that we actually want to be *wrong* about x. We still think the truth matters and we still seek it, we just don't *like* it – we wish the truth was different. The prevailing view is that truth is one of those few ubiquitously sanctified, gold-plated, untouchably-valuable things. One reason for this is simply that if our beliefs are not true, then they must be false. And if we are to be level-headed, rational beings, we ought to avoid error and to seek *accuracy* and *correctness* in its place. We also believe the truth is *instrumentally* valuable: it helps us achieve our goals, either our everyday practical goals or our intellectual 'epistemic' goals. And we often go further and value the truth *intrinsically*: we believe it is valuable *for its own sake*. If only we could only get to the truth about ourselves, those around us, and the world itself, then our lives would go better for it. It is such a truism that even spelling out the words 'it is better to have true beliefs than false ones' sounds slightly odd: 'well obviously', most of us think.

Even I believe it is true that the truth matters – at least some of the time – otherwise I could not coherently ask the question that is the topic of this paper; namely, *does the truth matter?* However, the way my view differs from the norm is that I do not think there is anything particularly special about the truth. In what follows I will place the value of truth head-to-head with another kind of fundamental value – one's quality of life, or *eudaimonic value.* I ask the question, *is truth eudaimonically valuable?* Or colloquially, *does having the truth improve our lives*? My answer will be that the value we assign to truth, both intrinsic and instrumental, is systematically and significantly exaggerated. We often have false beliefs – that much is not controversial – but more than this, we often have no interest in the truth. And crucially, we are often just as well off, if not *worse off,* with true beliefs as we are with false beliefs. I shall argue that the truth has been wrongly sanctified, and we have lost sight of the many instances in our lives where we would be better off sacrificing it for more important ends, like love, community and psychological well-being. In short, I contend that it is not a truism that the truth matters. At most, the truth *sometimes* matters. But in many cases, our lives go better when we disregard it entirely.

We will be talking about

Before getting into our arguments, we need to get clear on what 'truth matters' actually means. We begin by briefly defining *truth*, *belief*, and finally the eudaimonic sense in which I use the term '*matters'*.

'Truth'

[1] For the same belief. In other words, we seek the truth as what Zagzebski calls an "intentional end" (Zagzebski, 2003, p. 142).
I believe this claim is prima facie plausible. Further, it is very widely defended by philosophers: (Lynch, 2004, p. 15), (Williams, 2002, p. 60), (Zagzebski, 2003, p. 141), (Zagzebski, 1996, p. 276), (Foley, 2012, p. 61), (DePaul, 2010), (Craig, 1990), (Frankfurt, 2006), (Sher, Forthcoming), (Blackburn, 2018), (Horwich, 2006).

Truth

In what follows I will assume a correspondence theory of truth. That is, I take the predicates 'is true' and 'is false' to refer to the *correspondence of a proposition p with a mind-independent state of the world s.* If there is such a correspondence, the proposition is true; if there is no such correspondence, the proposition is false. It will be of crucial importance throughout what follows to remember that the correspondence relation between a proposition (or belief or statement) and the world itself ('*the truth'*) holds completely independently of one's cognitive or conceptualising activity. This is to say, the truth is 'mind-independent' or objective. I also sharply distinguish between a proposition or belief's being described as 'true' or 'false', with '*the truth'* itself. The former refers to the correspondence relation between mind and reality; the latter means something closer to 'reality itself' or 'the way the world is'. I will not be explicating or defending the correspondence view further. It is worth noting, however, that it is the favoured view among philosophers and taken for granted by many as common sense.[2]

Mere truth

Briefly, I want to now rule out some crude ways of interpreting the phrase 'truth matters'. The most basic sense of 'truth matters' is that *the truth*, in the general, mind-independent sense set out above, is valuable in some way.

T1: The truth is valuable.

T1 implies that there is something of value about the state of the world itself, the mere existence of reality being as it is. Or otherwise put, there is something valuable about the sum of all true propositions, even if there is no one to *have* or who *could have* these propositions. This 'mere truth' is not what we are interested in. There are a few reasons for this.

Firstly, it is a prerequisite for truth's being valuable or not that it is *possible* for us to 'have it'. In this context at least, ought implies can. But 'mere truth' includes several things which are impossible for us to have. For example:

- Infinitely complex truths
- Truths that are unintelligible, nonsensical or unrepresentable, we might say, into a form that our cognitive capacities can comprehend.
- Infinite truths: all true propositions beyond the number which we have the cognitive capacity to handle.

One cannot have a 'belief' which is unintelligible or incomprehensible or infinitely complex, because then one would not be 'having' anything at all. Any normative arguments which follow from such 'beliefs' are automatically invalid. It would be unreasonable to argue, for example, that 'truth is not valuable because some true propositions are too complicated for humans to believe.'[3] Instead, it is only reasonable to consider the value or disvalue of truths that we do or can 'have' – or as we normally put it, the value of *true belief*.

[2] According to the following survey of philosophers: (Bourget & Chalmers, 2023), c.f. (BonJour, 1985, p. 4), (Lynch, 2004, pp. 10-12).
[3] (Lynch, 2004, p. 47).

Moreover, the subject of the idea that 'truth matters' must be true beliefs because 'belief' is the relevant form that a true proposition takes when it is 'had' or 'taken up' *by someone*.[4] Consider if what we meant by 'truth matters' were 'mere truths', or technically speaking, true propositions; truths which are completely *possible* for me to have in the form of a belief, but which I don't in fact have. These segments of reality may indeed matter, in the same way that there being a famine matters, or there being happy sentient beings matters. But when we say *'the truth matters',* we are not referring to *states of the world,* but to the significance of our *accurate representations* of that world.[5] In short, the truth only *matters* to us when we take it up into our consciousness as a belief, or as Zagzebski puts it, "what is good about a true belief is that the mind fits reality."[6] The question we are interested in is not whether a state of the world is valuable, but whether my *correct awareness of the state of the world* is valuable.

Lastly, the prima facie value of truth does not come from obtaining it via any old propositional attitude. What is valuable about truth is a product of our *beliefs* in particular, as Hazlett explains:

> *Consider the fact that there is nothing especially good, in general, about my getting at the truth via some propositional attitude or other. If I imagine that p, where it is true that p, this is no better than if I imagine that some false proposition is true. But the "intrinsic value of truth" would be present in my imagining that p just as much as it would be present in my believing that p. So, it's not the value of truth that we are after, but the value of true belief.*[7]

In light of these arguments, we can reframe our thesis as T2:

T2: True beliefs are valuable.

Belief

So far, then, we have followed the standard practice of translating the question 'does truth matter' into 'do *true beliefs* matter?'.[8] That is, is it valuable to possess some or all true beliefs. Before continuing, therefore, it is worth getting clear on what counts as a belief, as opposed to an attitude, emotion, proposition and so on. I will assume beliefs to have the following traits.

- A belief is a propositional attitude consisting of a "cognitive endorsement of information."[9]
- Beliefs are truth-directed, meaning that all beliefs are either true or false and to believe p is to believe that p is true.[10]
- By 'cognitive endorsement', I mean that believing that p is stronger than merely *accepting* that p, which is not truth-directed and is more passive, but weaker than actively *thinking* that p, or even ever having thought that p.[11]
- Affective dispositions are a characteristic result of having beliefs; for example, sadness at a break-up demonstrates a belief that a strong bond was broken.

[4] (Sosa, 2001, p. 49).
[5] C.f. (Hazlett, 2013), (Wrenn, 2017), (Zagzebski, 2003).
[6] (Zagzebski, 2003, p. 135).
[7] (Hazlett, 2013, p. 31).
[8] (Hazlett, 2013, p. 11), (Kvanvig, 2003), (Lynch, 2004), (Zagzebski, 2003, p. 135).
[9] (Kvanvig, 2003, pp. 28-29).
[10] (Foley, 2012, p. 59), (Lynch, 2004, p. 13), (Zagzebski, 2003, p. 136), (Horwich, 2006, p. 353).
[11] This is an unavoidably controversial point, which there is not space to defend here.

- Beliefs may be indicated by verbal or non-verbal actions.
- Beliefs have a "characteristic functional profile", meaning that having a belief that p produces the disposition to think and act in accordance with the belief that p.[12]

True beliefs over false beliefs

However, T2 is still too vague. It implies that if the truth matters, we ought to have true beliefs about everything; that is, we ought to have *all true beliefs.* This is immediately problematic, given that there are an infinite number of true beliefs that we *could* have, but which are 'trivial' or 'pointless'.[13] I call this the *triviality problem* (we will return to it later, but it is worth mentioning now simply to focus our inquiry slightly at this point).[14] For example, consider the exact number of grains of sand in your hand.[15] If having all true beliefs was a valuable state of affairs, then having this belief would be valuable. In fact, it would be valuable to know every trivial belief like it, perhaps increasingly so with each additional one we held. This seems absurd – it's not having 'more' true beliefs which is important to us in of itself, and if we had the power to acquire infinitely many (trivial) true beliefs, we likely wouldn't be motivated to do so.[16] Sosa sets out the fallacy being made here:

P1 I want Fs of sort G.

P2 I want that if I have an F of sort G, it be also of sort H.

C Therefore, I want Fs of sort H. […]

P1 I want beliefs that answer my questions.

P2 I want that if I have an answer to a question of mine, it be true!

C Therefore, I want true beliefs.[17]

Most writers agree that this is not the sense in which true belief matters, prima facie.[18] Instead, a better way of understanding the value of true belief is to say that true beliefs are valuable *as opposed to false beliefs.* That is, it is not valuable to simply 'gather all true beliefs'; what is valuable is that *the beliefs we have* be true.[19]

> *We may want true beliefs, in this sense: that if, for whatever reason, we are interested in a certain question, we would prefer to believe a correct rather than an incorrect answer to that question; but this*

[12] (Hazlett, 2013, p. 34).
[13] C.f. (Kvanvig, 2008), (Sosa, 2003), (Wrenn, 2017), (Hazlett, 2013).
[14] E.g. (DePaul, 2001, p. 173), (Baril, 2010, p. 215), (Kvanvig, 2008).
[15] (Sosa, 2003).
[16] (Hedberg, 2017).
[17] (Sosa, 2003, p. 158).
[18] Except perhaps (Lynch, 2004) and (Kvanvig, 2014).
[19] E.g. (Lynch, 2004, p. 17).

does not mean that we want, in itself and independently of our wanting our questions answered, that we have true answers to them simply for the truth this would give us.[20]

So our thesis can now be reframed a second time:

T3: It is better to have true beliefs over false beliefs.

T3 plausibly solves the triviality problem and captures the sense in which truth matters, prima facie. Truth is not valuable in the sense that the state of the world itself ('the truth') is valuable; it is our *beliefs* about the world that are valuable, in virtue of their being true. So we should accept going forward that it is not valuable to have *all* possible true beliefs. However, if I am considering in this moment the number of grains of sand in my hand, there is something plausibly valuable about having the *right* belief, as opposed to the wrong one, even if that belief holds not significance normally. Everything that follows will examine the value of truth within these general parameters.

'Matters'

We now have a more refined definition of what I mean by 'truth'; we will now briefly do the same refinement for 'matters'. A useful distinction has been made between *epistemic value* and *eudaimonic value* with respect to truth.[21] The former is the kind of value epistemologists place on truth, where truth is typically viewed as valuable as the *fundamental end goal* or 'good' of epistemic inquiry, whereas ignorance is fundamentally (epistemically) bad.[22] On the other kind, the truth has eudaimonic value if having true beliefs *improves our lives.* It is easy to see how these kinds of value can conflict: for example, it is always epistemically disvaluable to be ignorant, even if one is made better off by being ignorant.[23] This paper will consider the view that true belief is *eudaimonically* valuable.[24] We can now revise our thesis once again.

T4: Our lives are improved by having true beliefs over false beliefs.

This view goes back to the Socratic claim that that "the unexamined life is not worth living", which we can understand to have been drawing a link between the value of truth – in this case, philosophical truths – and the good life.[25] While I will use the phrase 'eudaimonic value', this should not be taken to be equivalent to

[20] (Sosa, 2003, p. 158).
[21] C.f. (Hazlett, 2013, p. 27).
[22] E.g. (Kvanvig, 2014, p. 354), (Foley, 1987, p. 155), (Horwich, 2006), (Brady, 2009).
[23] C.f. (Hazlett, 2013, p. 28), (Baril, 2010, pp. 238-240).
[24] I simply assume that human flourishing is a valuable intrinsic goal for the purposes of this paper. It is worth noting, however, that many others have argued that the significance of our beliefs should be explained, at least in part, in terms of eudaimonia (Baril, 2010), (Wood & Roberts, 2007), (Trout & Bishop, 2005), (Hazlett, 2013), (Zagzebski, 2003), (Zagzebski, 1996).
[25] *Apology*, 38a 5 (Plato, 2019).

the Aristotelian notion. For Aristotle, eudaimonia specifically takes the form of a kind of "virtuous activity" and is seen as the 'highest good', bound up with one's final end or telos.[26] Instead, I will use the term to paraphrase the value of *well-being*. That is, I take eudaimonia to refer to a person's overall quality of life. A few points of clarification need to be made. Firstly, it is standard practice to distinguish between three theories of well-being: hedonist, desire-fulfilment and objective list. The first identifies well-being with experiences of pleasure, the second with the satisfaction of one's desires, and the third with certain objective goods which indicate well-being. In everything that follows I try to avoid controversial disputes between these theories, and make references to the effects our beliefs have on our well-being which could be interpreted easily on all three theories.[27] Secondly, I will not use the term well-being in the sense of *physical* or *psychological* well-being, but rather in the evaluative sense of describing one's quality of life. Thirdly, I do not suggest, nor do my arguments about the value of truth require, accepting *welfarism*, the view that well-being is the only value. Being good *for* someone is, arguably, different from being good, full stop, and it is merely a matter of scope that restricts me from considering non-eudaimonic reasons for and against truth.[28] Lastly, when I talk about well-being I am referring only to *human* well-being, and human belief.[29] Thus, with these points in mind, here is a rough definition of what the well-being proponent would endorse.

Eudaimonic Value Claim = X improves a person's quality of life if and only if it makes that life more fulfilling, more happy. X worsens a person's quality of life if and only if it makes that life less fulfilling and less happy.

It is this claim which we shall be considering with respect to truth. To keep the scope of my inquiry as general as possible, I shall use interchangeably the above notion of a 'fulfilling' or 'flourishing life', with having a 'high quality of life', a 'good life', being 'better off', having 'higher welfare', having 'improvements to well-being', or simply 'being more happy'.[30] Eudaimonia is "thriving, flourishing, living well, in a characteristically human way, over a complete life": in short, a happy life.[31] It is true that the state of being 'happy' is colloquially understood as a temporary state of mind, and there is some debate as to what extent well-being, flourishing and happiness mean the same thing. I explicitly take all three as referring to the long-term, overall quality of a person's life, and not ephemeral moods or mental states.

There are numerous problems which arise from any discussion of well-being, and there is not space to consider or defend my use of all of them. However, one particularly problematic one concerns the conflict between considering what is eudaimonically valuable for a single individual, compared to a collective. Where possible, I try to avoid these conflicts, taking uncontroversial examples which avoid such conflicts. However, naturally, there are differences between what improves *my* well-being and what improves *your* well-being. Inevitably, therefore, I will make some generalisations across persons. Usually, I consider whether an individual's true beliefs are good for the individual, however chapter three also looks at how *shared beliefs* are good for the individual. Another important point is that I will be discussing eudaimonia with respect to the *average person* far more than the intellectual or even the ideal or most virtuous person.

[26] (Aristotle, 2014).
[27] However I note that objective list theorists may dispute the dismissal of the intrinsic value of truth in chapter I, if they belief it to be a brute fact that 'having true beliefs' inherently constitutes well-being. This objection seems question-begging, and this paper offers no rebuttal to it.
[28] (Haybron, 2020), (Hazlett, 2013, p. 5).
[29] This is not to say that one cannot or should not talk about the well-being of non-human animals, merely that my definition of well-being is specific to humans.
[30] I use similar equivocations for negative descriptions of well-being. C.f. (Crisp, 2021).
[31] (Baril, 2010, p. 225).

Examples of such goods include shelter, clothing, food and drink, physical and mental health, loving relationships, friendships, a sense of meaning and being part of social communities. By way of summary, I have made a conscious effort to answer the question 'does the truth matter' in a way which that would be understood and appreciated by the vast majority of people, such that if you stopped someone on the street and asked them '*does this sound right?'* they would be able to relate to my answers. As we shall see, one of the problems with defending the value of truth is that it often stems from a bias towards intellectual elitism.

We will not be talking about

There are several related topics to the question of whether the truth matters which we will not be considering and need to be carefully put aside.

Knowledge and Truth

One topic we will not consider is the highly-contested question of what distinguishes the value of *knowledge* from the value of true belief, which runs back to Plato's *'Meno Problem'*.[32] That said, what I have to say is likely to be very relevant to that discussion, and the value of knowledge or '*value problem'* more widely, simply because truth is usually seen as a necessary requirement for a belief counting as knowledge.

More problematic is the issue of *which* beliefs are true, which we will also not be considering. Wherever possible I will try to use uncontroversially true and false beliefs as examples in my arguments. However, where the truth value of the beliefs in question become controversial – such as religious beliefs or sceptical philosophical beliefs – I explicitly highlight this, and either appeal to the latest philosophical consensus,[33] or simply ask that the reader take my view for the sake of argument. Nonetheless, I accept that if the beliefs I claim are true or false are thoroughly unconvincing, this is a good reason to find my arguments unconvincing. Likewise, however, if and where they are plausible, this should strengthen my conclusions: false beliefs which obviously improve our lives are the most potent way of showing that truth isn't as valuable as we thought.

Other Propositional Attitudes

Another important topic to set aside is the value or disvalue of propositional attitudes *other than* beliefs. Many of the topics this paper will consider are usually discussed with regards to emotions, attitudes, dispositions and forms of bias which are indicated by these attitudes. I will also highlight several of our biases and use those to discuss the value of true belief, but only in the sense of *doxastic* bias. I will also discuss many beliefs which are closely related to these other propositional attitudes. It may be the case that the beliefs I do discuss are a rare occurrence in day-to-day life. It may also be that the eudaimonic value of, for example, having particular emotions or desires and so on is far greater, or indeed of an opposite

[32] E.g. (Kvanvig, 2014), (Foley, 1987, p. 155), c.f. (Pritchard, et al., 2022).
[33] This is always from (Bourget & Chalmers, 2023).

valence, than our beliefs. None of this matters, however, given that our topic is the value of a certain kind of *belief*, not of these other propositional attitudes, and so it is important to keep the latter sharply distinct in what follows. I do not argue that belief has *more* eudaimonic value than other propositional attitudes; indeed I make no comments on the value of those attitudes. Our question is simply: 'to the extent to which beliefs tend to or could reasonably feature in our day to day lives, is it eudaimonically important that they be true rather than false?'.

'Post-Truth'

'Truth' has become an increasingly politically-charged buzz-word in recent years, with claims that Western society is losing its grip on the concept and falling into a 'post-truth world' with little respect for the value of truth.[34] Those on the political right claim that the 'radical left' refuse to accept 'truths' about gender and the careers most 'suited' to women in the workplace. The left claim that the right refuse to accept 'truths' about the climate crisis and the benefits of immigration. Both sides fall victim to conspiracy theories and so-called 'fake news'. Although it would make an interesting book to dissect the causes, rights and wrongs of this web of political bows and arrows, this debate is orthogonal to my inquiry. For whether or not people disregard true facts and figures, this is not a dispute about the *value* of truth, but rather a dispute about *what* is true. It is true that politicians have a tendency not to *accept* the truth, especially when it contains something negative about themselves. But *endorsing lying* – 'saying falsehoods' – is not that same as *not valuing the truth*, as the next section will discuss: in fact, lying probably depends on valuing the truth. I would suggest that all those who make political claims *do* in fact value having true beliefs, they just disagree about the *content* of those beliefs.[35]

There is a similar accusation that the moral relativism which accompanies liberalism, the view that one ought to 'find one's own truth', involves a 'disregard for the value of truth'.[36] Like fake news, this is not really about the value of truth itself. The moral relativist still thinks it is *true* that moral beliefs are prescriptive and correct, even if they believe that their beliefs only apply to and / or are generated by their own subjective preferences. (As many have pointed out, they also believe it to be true that each individual ought to be tolerant of the moral beliefs of others.). Likewise, the moral objectivist thinks that *their* moral beliefs are prescriptive and correct, as well as believing that they apply to everyone. Once again, the misplaced criticism of truth conflates a disagreement about *what* is true rather than the *value* of truth itself.

Honesty and Integrity

Perhaps the most common error is to conflate the virtues of honesty and integrity with the value of true belief, and to try to defend the latter by appealing to the former.[37] If lying is deliberately claiming something to be true which you believe to be false (or vice versa), then I take integrity (or the lack of) to be a more profound version of this, involving speaking against the core principles which one holds or believes to be true.[38] Further, Lynch defines *intellectual integrity* as a specific type of integrity with regards to *what*

[34] For example, (Sher, Forthcoming), (Williams, 2002), (Taylor, 1991), (Frankfurt, 2006), (Blackburn, 2018).
[35] (Lynch, 2004, p. 2).
[36] (Taylor, 1991), (Williams, 2002).
[37] (Williams, 2002), (Lynch, 2004).
[38] C.f. (Smart & Williams, 1973), (Lynch, 2004).

one believes to be true. Thus, intellectual integrity requires that "one know what it is one thinks is right", and that one has the "intellectual courage to pursue [that] in the face of opposition."[39]

There are two reasons why the value we place on these character traits has no bearing on the value of truth. Firstly, it would be question-begging. It is tempting to justify the value we place on honesty and integrity by invoking the value of truth: 'it is important to tell the truth, because the truth matters'. This makes sense, because being dishonest often results in someone having false beliefs which, if the truth matters, is a bad outcome.[40] It is fine to make this claim on its own, but it is question-begging to then invoke honesty and integrity to support it. It entails saying: 'truth is valuable because it is valuable to tell the truth, because truth is valuable'. If we want to show that honesty is valuable *because* truth is valuable, then the value of truth must be independently demonstrated.

One can avoid this problem by arguing that honesty and integrity are valuable for some other, independent reason. That is, their value is not dependent on the value of truth *per se*, but because they involve a relation to truth, and are themselves valuable, the claim can then be made that truth itself must be valuable. This is a valid argument which avoids question begging, but has its own problems. For one thing, it is hard to see how 'intellectual integrity' is valuable without invoking the value of truth (surely one should 'pursue what is right' for the reason that 'right' = 'good'?). But even setting intellectual integrity aside, the premise which claims that there is a normative connection between the value of honesty and integrity, and the value of truth, is problematic. This is because honesty and integrity are really about what one *believes* to be true, not necessarily what actually is true. I can honestly say that I have 5 bananas in my kitchen when I actually only have 4. I can lie and claim I have no cash to give to a beggar in my wallet (believing there is some), when in fact I have none, as I used it up the day before. A religious leader displays the utmost integrity when he claims that women are 'less able' than men: this is precisely what he believes, but nonetheless it bears no relation to reality. Donald trump displays integrity when he consistently maintains that immigrants are harming his country – this is what he believes – yet there is plenty of evidence to the contrary. There is no necessary connection between honesty and truth, that therefore is it not obvious that the value of honesty adds anything to the value of truth in of itself.

One kind of integrity that purports to avoid these problems is *intellectual integrity*, or the disposition to *pursue the truth*, "to not just go along with the crowd or whatever happens to be fashionable or expedient", and defending the truth on that basis.[41] Nietzsche says something similar in the *Anti-Christ*: "what does it mean to be honest in intellectual things? That one is stern towards one's heart, that one despises "fine feelings", that one makes every Yes and No a question of conscience!"[42] But the same problem arises for intellectual integrity as for honesty. It is clearly possible to have intellectual integrity and have many false beliefs, because the true beliefs we *can* have are obviously independent of the true beliefs we *do* have. Many philosophical and political (or even religious) ideologies pride themselves on having such integrity, yet many of them seem either false or contradicting one another. Truth is not necessarily connected up with integrity, even for the kind of integrity that wishes it were.[43]

[39] (Lynch, 2004, pp. 133-134). Zagzebski argues for something similar (Zagzebski, 2003, p. 137).
[40] (Williams, 2002, p. 100), (Horwich, 2006, p. 347).
[41] (Lynch, 2004, p. 132).
[42] (Nietzsche, 1968, p. 50).
[43] It is because I view honesty and integrity as distinct from my question, that my title concerns '*the* truth' not 'truth'. Nonetheless, the reader can forgive me when I occasionally drop the definite article in what follows.

The Test for Truth

One last thing needs to be covered before we begin our investigation of truth. Namely, the dichotomy between true belief and false belief, and what result we are looking for to evaluate T4). We must ask what kind of conclusions would determine whether or not true belief is valuable. Some options include showing that, for a given belief or category of belief:

1. False belief is worse than true belief.
2. False belief is as good as true belief.
3. No belief is better than any true or false belief.

1) is completely flawed. Showing that a false belief is worse than a true belief does not necessarily show that true beliefs are valuable, because *there are lots of ways for a belief to be false*. Here my view differs from the norm. The conventional view is that there is only one way for a belief p to be true (namely, if p is so) and one way for p to be false (if p is not so). However, it seems intuitive to me that there may be multiple variants of 'p not being so', which are sufficiently connected to p's being so that they should be considered 'variants of falsehood'. For example, 'God does not exist' might be true, rendering 'God exists' false. But there are many versions of 'God exists', some of which might improve my life, and some which might make it go worse, for obvious reasons. This view partly stems from the 'thick' concept of belief that I employ: rather than being specific and unitary, my view is that most beliefs refer to a 'full picture', are complex and rest on multiple assumptions. This may partly explain my overall pessimism about the overlap between our beliefs and the truth. Alas, exploring this adequately would require another paper. It must suffice to say that on my view, falsehood can be both *worse and better* than the truth, but there is only one truth.

2) is successful test. If any false belief is 'as good as' the truth, ceteris paribus, then clearly there is nothing particularly valuable about the truth, and therefore, the truth does not matter. Things look bad for the defender of truth if tossing a coin is the only reason for choosing a true belief over a false one. As a result, I will appeal to this type of criticism several times.

3) simply does not answer the question 'is truth valuable' at all, and therefore fails to defend or defeat our thesis. A true belief could be more valuable than a false belief, or vice versa, but if someone has *no beliefs* about that matter, then the distinction necessarily has no bearing on their well-being. It is neither an argument for nor against truth – if anything, it might suggest a disdain for belief itself, which is a different matter altogether. Another scenario is where one considers different beliefs on a topic (both true and false ones) and decides that it is best for them to have no belief on this topic. But this has its own problems, for example, can one really 'decide' not to have a belief about something?

The golden bullet for the defender of truth, however, is 4):

4. No false belief is better than the true belief.

Only if the truth comes out on top *above all else,* can it be said to be at all preferential – it is not use it being relevant *some of the time.* Likewise, if 4) is wrong, and there *are* false beliefs that are better than the truth, then the value of truth is in trouble. We will come back to this question several times in what follows, beginning with the strongest defence of truth: the view that truth always matters.

I. Always Better

i) Ideal intrinsic value

T4: Our lives are always improved by having true beliefs over false beliefs.

The strongest view one can have on this issue is to say that truth is intrinsically eudaimonically valuable. To say that something has *intrinsic value* is just to say that it is *valuable for its own sake*, and therefore is valuable in all cases.[44] In the context of eudaimonic value, therefore, this view holds that true belief *always* increases wellbeing over false belief, whenever it is present in a given situation.[45] There can be no cases in which true belief is not eudaimonically valuable.

But this view is too strong, and should be quickly set aside. Clearly there are some cases in which *other factors* outweigh the value of true belief, even if we believe that the value of true belief weighs greatly on all situations. For example, consider the belief that Father Christmas exists, flies around the world in a reindeer-led sleigh and delivers us presents each year down our chimneys. Usually, this would be quite worrying to believe – it would be bad for many reasons for a normal adult to have such false beliefs about the world. But we do not and should not conclude that having true beliefs about this matter is *always, indefeasibly* better: that's why we are happy to give our children false beliefs about Father Christmas. We might still think that the truth is *defeasibly* valuable, while also holding that the happiness these beliefs give our children far outweigh the value of truth. Thus, we do not and should not defend the 'ideal' (i.e. indefeasible) eudaimonic value of truth.

ii) Pro tanto intrinsic value

T5: Our lives are always *defeasibly* improved by having true beliefs over false beliefs.

On this weaker view, the truth is always *defeasibly* valuable. Truth is 'always good', but defeasibly so, in just the same way that keeping your promises is always good, if defeasibly.[46] Or in other words, true belief has *pro tanto* eudaimonic value.[47] Truth is always valuable, but is nonetheless defeasible, because it can be 'outweighed' by other factors. Defenders of the pro tanto view can go about it in different ways. One view might simply state that truth has intrinsic value *simpliciter*. Another common route is to argue that truth is eudaimonically valuable because it is part of our human nature to be naturally curious: in general, we take

[44] (Lynch, 2004, pp. 46-47), (Zagzebski, 2003, p. 142), (Kvanvig, 2003, p. 42), (Kvanvig, 2008), (Williams, 2002, p. 60).
[45] Hazlett calls this kind of view a 'strong ideal' view, because it views truth to be indefeasibly valuable ('ideal'), all the time ('strong') (Hazlett, 2013, p. 110).
[46] (Lynch, 2004, pp. 46-47), (DePaul, 2010, p. 114), (Kvanvig, 2003), (Kvanvig, 2008), c.f. (Hazlett, 2013, p. 14), (Horwich, 2006, p. 348).
[47] Hazlett calls this kind of view a 'strong non-ideal' view, because it views truth to be defeasibly valuable ('non-ideal'), all the time ('strong') c.f. (Hazlett, 2013, p. 110).

great pleasure from 'having all the answers'.[48] Because truth is *always* valuable for its own sake on this view, the view still endorses the *intrinsic value* of truth. So in one sense the view is quite weak, because circumstances may entail that true belief is rarely a decisive factor – for example, if there are always more important factors at play, such that (all things considered) having the truth rarely improves our lives.[49] Nonetheless, the view is strong in the sense that it endorses a form of intrinsic value, where the truth or falsity of a belief *always* has a bearing on moral judgements. That is, evaluative judgement must necessarily take truth into account, even if it is not the decisive weight at play. For example, we can say about the Father Christmas case that true belief is always valuable, in the sense that it would be better, all other things being equal / for the majority of people in the majority of cases, to *not* believe that Father Christmas is real. However, being a child is an exceptional case, where there is no harm caused and much happiness to be gained by stimulating the child's imagination, *despite* having a false belief. We can say without contradiction that we want to encourage our children, as they grow up and become fully autonomous members of society in their own right, to have more accurate beliefs about what is real and what is made-up, as this will ultimately help them in life. So in that pro tanto sense, truth is always valuable.

iii) Triviality Problem (again)

However, at this point the triviality problem returns. There are a vast number of unimportant, trivial beliefs which we nonetheless hold, in order to get through our lives. Even if we think it is important for some of them to be accurate, it is far-fetched to claim that it matters whether *all* of them are accurate. There are simply lots of things that one doesn't care about, and there seems no (eudaimonic) reason to care about. As a result, whether our beliefs about them are true, also does not matter. If you detest history, knowing the correct date King Henry VIII was born may provide no eudaimonic value for you (it's quite possible that you will never benefit from having the correct belief on this matter, even if you have a rough idea of who he was, what century he lived in and so on). If you have thrown away your old phone and now misremember the precise model it was, it does not matter: whether it was an iPhone 5 or an iPhone 5s clearly has no bearing on your quality of life whatsoever. There are clearly cases where the value of having these true beliefs is not just small, it is non-existent. This is a problem for the defender of the pro tanto value of truth, who wants to maintain that truth *always* is a factor bearing on one's quality of life.

Some have responded that the reason we do not value having trivial beliefs is because our psychological and cognitive abilities are limited, and instead suggest that in a 'ideal world', e.g. if we had infinite time and omnipotent cognitive power, our natural curiosity *would* motivate us to have true beliefs rather than false ones.[50] Kvanvig argues that if we had the mental capacity, we would desire all true beliefs, as demonstrated by the fact that God – the most familiar kind of cognitive ideal – is omniscient: "Part of the cognitive ideal, whatever else it might involve, is knowledge of all truths; omniscience for short. But for omniscience to be part of the ideal, no truth can be pointless."[51] Similarly, Lynch argues that "There are all sorts of trivial truths that are not worth believing, given my limited intellect and time. Nonetheless, were these limits not in place – were it to be the case that believing the truth was cost-free, so to speak – then it would be good to believe all and only what is true."[52]

[48] We will consider this view in more detail in chapter VI.
[49] (Hazlett, 2013, p. 11).
[50] (Lawrence, 1993), (Kvanvig, 2003, p. 41), (Kvanvig, 2008), (Lynch, 2004), (Wrenn, 2017), c.f. (Hazlett, 2013, p. 9).
[51] (Kvanvig, 2008, p. 210).
[52] (Lynch, 2009a, p. 227).

However, the 'cognitive ideal' response misunderstands the triviality problem, and so fails to solve it. It seems to assume that, burdened as we are by our time constraints and lack of cognitive abilities, we are simply 'too busy' to appreciate the apparent – if small – value that true beliefs have. But the triviality problem does not just show that many true beliefs have *negligible value* (although this is undoubtably true); it also shows that many true beliefs have *literally no significance to us*. This is why, I suggest, most people would *not* bother to check whether their beliefs about Henry VIII or their old iPhone were correct, *even if* they were cognitively ideal. Some truths really add no value to our lives, and while some of us are more curious than others, we are certainly not curious *all the time*.[53]

Moreover, the 'cognitive ideal' response is problematic in that it responds to the triviality problem by arguing for a more extreme kind of 'all other things being equal'. Because to endorse the cognitive ideal we do not merely set aside exceptional cases where true belief is occasionally problematic – like the Father Christmas case. We must also set aside *our very human nature* and imagine ourselves as omniscient beings. Imagining ourselves as omniscient beings, if it is possible at all, is too far detached to be able to tell us what we value and what principles should guide us in the real world, where we are all too imperfect and human.[54] None of this is to say that our discussion should be based on an unchangeable or imperfect picture of human nature. We can and should consider the possibility that the truth has great value to us *when we are living our best lives*, for example. The point is merely that omniscience takes this conjecture too far. Similarly, highly exceptional circumstances are not convincing ways to decide the value of truth. The fact that we sometimes mistake false beliefs for true ones, or forget the (true) beliefs we once had, or are tricked into believing true beliefs occasionally, is clearly not good evidence for arguing against the value of true belief in our lives. The sensible approach to ascertain the value truth adds to our lives is to look at the all-other-things-being-equal picture of the value it provides across time and people. Given the abundance of insignificant truths and its appeal to supernatural qualities, the pro tanto view fails to take this middle-way approach and therefore fails to be convincing.[55]

iv) Disvalue Problem

A second problem with the pro tanto view is that there seem to be cases where truth matters, but it matters because it is bad. Recall that, on this view, truth can be valuable and still be defeated by other factors, without us needing to give up the claim that truth is 'always valuable', such that we should prefer a false belief over true belief. But in some cases true beliefs should be avoided, not because there are 'other factors which outweigh the value of truth', but because there is a problem with truth *itself*, which makes false beliefs preferable. I call this the 'disvalue problem'.

The most common kind of disvaluable true belief is that which results in some (eudaimonically) bad state of affairs. Naturally, these beliefs are incredibly common. Consider the case of the suicide bomber, who has several true beliefs which enables them to assemble and set off a bomb, causing murder and destruction. The terrorist's beliefs are true, and it seems like it is precisely *because* they are true that they are able to cause the harm. It is true that the abhorrent *moral* beliefs motivating the suicide bomber are also necessary for the murders to take place.[56] But non-moral true beliefs are also necessary (we can suppose

[53] I discuss the natural disposition that some people have to be curious about the world in chapter VI.
[54] C.f. (Hazlett, 2013, p. 9), (Hazlett, 2013, p. 120), (Baril, 2010, p. 223).
[55] Brady poses further objections to the Kvanvig – Lynch style of argument. Notably, he argues that the 'general curiosity' being invoked here, much like fear or anger or joy, is not 'open-ended' so as to apply to *all* beliefs we have, but instead "involve selective attention". For this reason, it is implausible to claim that it is always valuable (Brady, 2009, pp. 273-274).
[56] And there is a further debate, of course, about whether moral beliefs can be said to be true and false or not (I think they can).

that if the suicide bomber had *false* beliefs about bomb-making, the bomb might fail to detonate when triggered, or be less harmful). There are parallel examples from everyday life, for example when deciding whether to tell someone something which will upset them. Consider the case of a man who, minutes before death, reveals that he was having an affair for the last thirty years, unbeknownst to his wife. Would the wife benefit from the truth in this scenario? It seems that there are plenty of uncontroversial cases where false beliefs are better for us than true ones, where the truth would cause more harm than good.

In both examples, there is no 'value' here being 'outweighed' by other factors, it is precisely *because* the belief is true that the harm is caused. We can say that something has instrumental value when it is causally connected to something of intrinsic value.[57] Therefore, the true beliefs in this case are instrumentally *disvaluable*. It is not that the content of the belief itself is disvaluable; rather it is that the belief's being true *causes* something disvaluable to happen. This is not to claim that true belief is disvaluable *in every case*. True beliefs about bomb-making in the hands of a terrorism prevention expert are instrumentally *valuable*, as they aid them in the understanding and disarming of suicide bombs. The point is just that there are at least *some cases* in which truth does not weigh down on the 'better' side of the scales; rather in this case it necessarily *causes* the disvalue itself. This is problematic for the pro tanto view. If there are cases when a true belief causes harm, then there is no sense in which it is (pro tanto or otherwise) 'always valuable'. There is no sense in which it would be eudaimonically better for the belief to be true rather than false. This is another reason to suggest that true belief is not intrinsically valuable.

v) Normally Better

One problem with the pro tanto position which we haven't considered is just that it is not worth defending, because it is so weak. As it holds that truth is always valuable *yet defeasibly so*, it is therefore consistent with the view both that truth i) has barely any value and ii) is always outweighed by other factors, simply because circumstances in the real world are 'never held equal'. Thus the 'ever-present' intrinsic value it defends is (almost) as good as nothing. For this reason and in light of the triviality and disvalue problems, someone sympathetic to the view that truth matters would be better off avoiding this view. However, there is a stronger, more plausible defence of truth: this is the view that true beliefs are *indefeasibly normally valuable*.[58] That is, that true beliefs *normally* improve our lives. Hazlett argues that for true belief to be 'normally better', we must establish a "clearly identifiable pattern of cases", such that true beliefs is a "more reliable bet" than false belief.[59] I think the defender of true belief needs to go further. To show that it is 'normally better' to have true practical beliefs means showing that it is better *in a clear majority of cases*, that is, truth is *consistently* and *reliably* better than false belief, not merely that there is a 'pattern' or 'large proportion' of true beliefs which are better.

T6: Our lives are *normally* improved by having true beliefs over false beliefs. That is, true beliefs are *consistently* and *reliably* better, in a *clear majority of cases*, than false beliefs.

[57] (Sosa, 2003, p. 162).
[58] Hazlett calls this kind of view a 'weak ideal' view, because it views truth to be indefeasibly valuable ('ideal'), just not all the time ('weak') c.f. (Hazlett, 2013, p. 110).
[59] (Hazlett, 2013, p. 12).

In one respect, this view is significantly stronger than the pro tanto position, because it maintains that (most) true beliefs are *conclusively* valuable such that they cannot be 'outweighed' by other factors in the particular case. In this respect the view is the same as the 'ideal intrinsic value' view. However, it avoids counterexamples to both the ideal and pro tanto intrinsic value views, because it maintains that *some* true beliefs are *not valuable at all*, under any circumstances. This allows it to say, for example, that some kinds of beliefs – like trivial truths or truths which cause harm – are not valuable, while maintaining that most true beliefs are valuable. Thus, the view benefits from being slightly narrower in scope but much greater in strength. What it is not, however, is a defence of the intrinsic eudaimonic value of truth, because it does not maintain that truth is *always* valuable. What the counterexamples above show is that there are some situations in which truth is not at all valuable. Therefore, what remains for someone sympathetic to the value of truth is only that truth is instrumentally or constitutively valuable.

The bolder and more difficult part of this view, however, is that true belief is *normally* valuable, the suggestion that truth at least *consistently* and *reliably* improves our wellbeing. It still requires showing that our live go better when the majority of our beliefs are true, rather than false. As a result, this view is still an incredibly strong endorsement of truth, and has been widely defended in various forms.[60] The chapters which follow will focus exclusively on this view. I will consider several categories of belief, each time asking the question '*are true beliefs of this type normally eudaimonically valuable?'.* In all cases I aim to show that false beliefs are either better than true beliefs, or that it makes no difference whether your belief is true or false. I will conclude, therefore, that the glorified, gold-plated, prevailing view that truth is 'normally better' is in fact a gross exaggeration. Truth is, at most, *sometimes* better, and in many domains it is mostly *worse*.

II. Beliefs about Oneself

It is the view of many that it is eudaimonically valuable to have true beliefs about oneself.[61] The classic Delphic motto 'know thyself' is often cited, and indeed Socrates' 'the unexamined life is not worth living' can be interpreted as alluding to this idea. The trend continues through Descartes' *Meditations*, Rousseau and Diderot, and is prominent in existentialist philosophy.[62] Charles Taylor sums up the contemporary view that "the ideally strong character . . . would be able to face unflinchingly the truth about himself or herself."[63] This idea is endorsed most strongly in the literature on *authenticity*, which is often viewed as a central aspect of human flourishing. If you are sympathetic to these ideas, then beliefs about oneself is surely one of the most plausible candidates for demonstrating the true belief is *normally valuable.* This chapter will consider two ways in which having false beliefs about ourselves, while often criticised as a mark of inauthenticity, in fact *improve* our well-being. I begin by examining two forms of authenticity and draw out the way in which the value of truth is central to both (sections i) and ii)). I will then argue that the phenomenon of *self-enhancement bias* demonstrates one kind of prevalent and beneficial false belief. I then look at beliefs we have about our social identity, and make a parallel argument. Throughout, I contrast

[60] (Zagzebski, 2003, p. 141), (Zagzebski, 1996, p. 276), (Foley, 2012, p. 61), (Craig, 1990), (Kvanvig, 2003, p. 42) c.f. (Hazlett, 2013), (Lynch, 2004).
[61] I.e. about one's identity. E.g. (Taylor, 1991), (Williams, 2002), c.f. (Hazlett, 2013, p. 40).
[62] C.f. (Hazlett, 2013), (Taylor, 1991, p. 27), (Williams, 2002).
[63] (Hazlett, 2013, p. 40).

my defence of false beliefs with the way they are criticised by proponents of authenticity, especially in the existentialist sense, as a mark of *bad faith.*

i) Authenticity: 'being true to oneself'

"True to oneself", "faithful", to be "what it professes to be", to have a "reliable, accurate representation" of oneself and to "discover and articulate our own identity", and live in accordance with that: these are the ways *authenticity* is defined.[64] In short, one reason for thinking that having true beliefs about oneself is valuable, is because they are required for being an authentic individual.[65] How and why authenticity helps us live a more flourishing life, depends precisely on what we mean by 'living authentically'. One view is that living authentically – being 'true to oneself' – is intrinsically valuable, because it gives one a *stronger sense of self.* The thought is that to have a flourishing life requires *understanding what it means to live one's own life*.[66] Living with an understanding of and in accordance with that understanding, is "one of the important potentialities of human life…[which] allows a richer mode of existence."[67]

There is a certain way of being human that is my way. I am called upon to live my life in this way, and not in imitation of anyone else's. But this gives a new importance to being true to myself. If I am not, I miss the point of my life, I miss what being human is for me.[68]

If being an authentic individual is part of what it means to live a 'good life', authenticity and the self-understanding it involves have intrinsic value. Another common claim is that self-understanding has *instrumental* value with respect to well-being, because having an accurate understanding of oneself makes one more able to *act responsibly* or *morally*, which in turn has wider eudaimonic benefits for oneself and for society as a whole:[69][70]

Like all forms of individualism and freedom, authenticity opens an age of responsibilization … [b]y the very fact that this culture develops, people are made more self-responsible.[71]

Michael Lynch argues that having a strong sense of self is "part of" living authentically, which in turn is constitutive of living a flourishing life.[72] Thus, true belief has constitutive eudaimonic value. Lynch provides a detailed description of how authenticity connects true belief with a flourishing life. He argues that authenticity requires "identifying with those *desires* that effectively guide your action", which in turn requires reflecting on "what you care about", where knowing what you care about involves having true beliefs about oneself.[73] The basic connection being made between i) having accurate beliefs about one's psychological makeup, dispositions and desires and therefore ii) being better able to live in accordance with one's dispositions and desires (aka 'live authentically') is plausible, and mirrors Taylor's view.[74] The difference is that Lynch concludes that authenticity is *part of* – not a means to – a flourishing life, and

[64] (Guignon & Varga, 2020), (Taylor, 1991).
[65] Some philosophers talk about true belief, some talk about self-knowledge: for our present purposes, given that knowledge requires true belief in this context, the arguments work just as well with true belief as they do with knowledge.
[66] (Taylor, 1991), (Lynch, 2004, p. 124).
[67] (Taylor, 1991, pp. 71-74).
[68] Ibid. p.28.
[69] C.f. ibid.
[70] This section will focus on the eudaimonic benefits of true belief for the individual; I will consider the wider political benefits of true beliefs later on.
[71] (Taylor, 1991, p. 77).
[72] (Lynch, 2004, pp. 124-128).
[73] Ibid. pp.124-125.
[74] (Taylor, 1991).

therefore if we successfully achieve ii), then iii) we will living a more flourishing life. If we live in accordance with our desires (broadly speaking), if we embrace our nature rather than trying to resist it, we ought to be better equipped to plot out a fulfilling life for ourselves, and avoid those things and people which we are psychologically disposed not to benefit from. Thus, having true beliefs about oneself is valuable because it is an essential part of living a flourishing life.

ii) Authenticity: 'transcending oneself'

A second popular way to understand authenticity differs from the first in that it denies the existence of a 'true self', and instead proposes that to live authentically involves transcending one's nature.

To understand this different conception of authenticity, consider the case of *Rameau* in Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew*. Rameau is portrayed as a man with unashamedly "uninhibited expression" of his character, both the good and the bad.[75] And yet, there is "no self that is revealed on the spot. Rameau … is consistent, always the same, but that is because he freely and unashamedly expresses very different things at different times."[76] Rameau's honest self-expression is undoubtedly *authentic*, but equally there is clearly no underlying sense of self which can be 'discovered', as Lynch and Taylor maintain: at most, "the declaration at a given instant of self can be only a declaration of self at that instant."[77]

A different account of authenticity which better explains the case of *Rameau* is Sartre's account of authenticity.[78] Whereas Lynch argues that authenticity involves 'discovering who you really are', Sartre would object that this way of talking about the self "affirms of human existence precisely the kind of fixity and determination that it lacks."[79] Instead, Sartre argues that the self is constantly changing, just like the character of *Rameau*. On Sartre's account, we are perpetually negating the self we *are* (being-in-itself) towards the self we *will be* (being-for-itself), via a process called *transcendence*. There is no sense, therefore, in which we can just 'find' our identity or 'make-up', let alone 'act on it' and thus become 'more responsible', as Taylor and Lynch argue. Instead, we are radically free beings, who must necessarily *create* or *reaffirm* our identity in everything we do, and our moral decisions are just another upshot of this process of transcendence, of self-creation.[80] To be authentic I must "transcend [myself] from all sides" and "constitute myself as being beyond my condition."[81] We are fundamentally free beings, not fixed, and to

[75] (Williams, 2002, p. 189).
[76] (Williams, 2002, p. 190).
[77] Ibid.
[78] One objection to Sartrean authenticity is that there is no difference between authenticity and bad faith, and honesty and (self) deceit, the latter of which I have already rejected as an orthogonal question to the value of truth. However, this is a misreading of Sartre. Firstly, 'deception' is more explicit than bad faith. The liar "is fully aware of the truth he is disguising", it implies an *intention* to deceive, whereas bad faith does not involve a 'separation' of one's beliefs and what one is expressing in the same way. (Sartre, 1943:2018, p. 88) There is a "unity of a single consciousness", thus "the duality of deceiver an deceived is not present here." (Sartre, 1943:2018, p. 90) Secondly, Sartre believes that we have an intimate access ourselves such that we are always *able* to own up to our identity, even if we choose not to most of the time, so there is no possibility of being able to 'deceive oneself' *and yet* have true beliefs about oneself (by accident, for example). Rather, bad faith paradoxically entails that I "must know this truth very precisely, in order to hide it all the more carefully from myself…within the unitary structure of a single project." (Sartre, 1943:2018, p. 90) It is true that none of this shows that having true beliefs about oneself *is valuable*, but it does show that Sartrean authenticity doesn't fall foul of the problems that the character traits of general honesty and integrity face.
[79] (Cerbone, 2006, p. 93).
[80] (Cerbone, 2006, p. 94), c.f. (Sartre, 1943:2018, p. 147).
[81] (Sartre, 1943:2003, p. 83).

be authentic is precisely to embrace one's freedom, choose one's nature and one's projects: "You are free, therefore choose, that is to say, invent."[82]

However, although less obviously, Sartrean authenticity presupposes the value of truth just as much as Lynch and Taylor. For even though there is no 'fixed' self to have true or false beliefs about, Rameau must still accurately represent himself to himself *in each moment*, in order to be able to negate and transcend that representation in the first place. To 'invent' the self we want to be, to create 'projects' for ourselves, as Sartre tells us the authentic person does, we must have at least *some* idea of *what is within the realm of possibility for us* and what, conversely, resides in the backdrop of mere 'facticity'.[83] These are all true beliefs that the authentic individual must grasp for themselves. Moreover, we must surely have accurate long-term beliefs about the nature of those projects themselves, in order to 'reaffirm' or 'change' them when we are in the mode of the for-itself. Sartre defines transcendence as "that inner and realizing negation which *reveals* the in-itself while determining the being of the for-itself."[84] Presumably then, we must have some accurate beliefs about the in-itself in order to 'reveal' it, let alone determine ourselves as for-itself (even if the latter involves 'creation ex nihilo'). Therefore, true beliefs are still necessary for Sartrean authenticity, and are therefore still instrumentally if not constitutively valuable in order to live authentically.

To recap, we have looked at two very different accounts of authenticity. I have argued that, on both accounts, authenticity presupposes that the truth matters. It matters because having true beliefs is necessary for living authentically, and authenticity is plausibly part of living a flourishing life. Authenticity therefore appears to provide a strong case for having true beliefs about oneself. In the next section, however, we will consider an argument made by Allan Hazlett, looking at the psychological phenomenon of *self-enhancement bias*, which provides evidence to suggest that having true beliefs about oneself, contrary to what we have seen so far, can actually negatively affect our quality of life.

iii) The Problem: Self-enhancement Bias

The following argument paraphrases an argument by Allan Hazlett, which in turn draws on psychological evidence from the 1980s and 90s.[85] A *doxastic bias* may be defined as an unreliable way of forming beliefs. One prevalent form of doxastic bias is known as *self-enhancement bias*, the bias most of us have towards having an *overly positive conception of ourselves*. It stems from our desire to maintain a positive self-conception and wishful thinking to that effect, and in practice it involves forming lots of false beliefs about ourselves. We believe we are smarter than we really are, more attractive than we really are, more skilful than we really are and more healthy than we really are. We are overly optimistic about how our lives will go, and we have highly exaggerated beliefs about the extent to which we can control our lives.[86] For example, one study showed that "96% of cancer patients" think they are "in better health than other

[82] Ibid. p.43.
[83] Facticity being Sartre's term for the situatedness that I always find myself which necessarily limits what I can freely choose c.f. (Gardner, 2009, p. 99), c.f. (Sartre, 1943:2003).
[84] (Sartre, 1943:2003, p. 203).
[85] (Hazlett, 2013, p. 39).
[86] Ibid. pp.44-49.

cancer patients."[87] This bias is *ubiquitous*: "most people are overly positive in their self-evaluations. Their self-conceptions manifest self-enhancement bias."[88][89]

The curious thing about this bias is that the evidence shows that it makes our lives go better. Self-enhancement bias in all the forms just set out is correlated with *nondepression* and *high self-esteem*. This is partly explained by the fact happier people think about themselves less, and so easily develop a biased conception about themselves. Conversely, as one study writes, "subjects more disposed to think about themselves were more likely to be depressed than were subjects less disposed to think about themselves….[despite the fact that] private self-consciousness was correlated with more accurate self-descriptions."[90] As for high self-esteem, it ""strongly and consistently" predicts "self-reported life satisfaction and assorted measures of happiness," and predicts against anxiety, depression, and hopelessness."[91] The evidence seems to conclusively show that those with false (biased) depictions of oneself tend to be happier, whereas the self-reflective types (including most readers of this paper!), with more accurate self-conceptions, tend to be less happy.[92] If we accept that nondepression and high self-esteem are at least *part* of what makes for a flourishing life, self-enhancement bias mostly improves rather than detracts from one's quality of life.

Hazlett provides three explanations for why self-enhancement bias is correlated with increased wellbeing. Firstly, our optimistic attitude makes us *feel better* about ourselves, thus making us happier. Secondly, because we think we are more capable than we are, we feel more motivated to live our lives more confidently, which in turn improves our well-being (compare Hume: "fortune commonly favours the bold and enterprising").[93] Thirdly, our optimism helps us to cope with negative life events. Think of the cancer example again: when something is going badly in our lives, we are able to employ all sorts of false beliefs to help ourselves, including biased social comparisons and illusions of control (or lack of) to help ourselves. If we have a bad day, we just assume that it can't have been as bad as our partner's, and anyway it wasn't our fault. These explanations add further plausibility to the conclusion that self-enhancement bias leads to increased well-being.

Interestingly, philosophical exercises in authenticity have come to a similarly negative conclusion regarding beliefs about oneself. Rousseau, in his *Confessions*, aimed to create a completely transparent portrayal of himself, to reveal himself utterly to his readers and to the world. In doing so, he performed the ultimate act of authenticity, in the sense of being honest with himself. Yet, ironically, subsequently he became intensely bitter that no one seemed to understand him, despite his efforts. He ended up resenting that fact: "Since he was not deceiving others, and only desired to reveal himself to them, their failure to understand him could only represent malice on their part… his settled conclusion in his last years was that those who systematically did not understand him were wicked, members of an evil conspiracy."[94] His inwardness led to a feeling of isolation, which led to actual isolation, as he demonised those who did not

[87] Ibid. p.47.
[88] C.f. ibid. pp.43-45.
[89] One thing to highlight is that while this bias involves an 'illusory' conception of oneself, it is not *delusionary* because the studies show that we do tend to revise our beliefs when presented with appropriate evidence (something a delusional character would not do) (c.f. (Hazlett, 2013, p. 55).
[90] (Hazlett, 2013, p. 52).
[91] (Hazlett, 2013, p. 58).
[92] I should note here an important caveat from Hazlett that it does not follow from this that depressed people have an 'accurate picture' of themselves. Instead, they tend to either be 'less biased' in favour of their own self-image, or have a negative self-conception (Hazlett p.53).
[93] (Hume, 2007 [1739], p. 597).
[94] (Williams, 2002, p. 180).

understand him. This is not to say that self-reflection necessarily leads to the demonisation of others, but it is telling that his desire for the truth about himself and persistent self-reflection led Rousseau to isolation, a "crisis of moral egoism", and (unsurprisingly) great unhappiness.[95]

The evidence appears to show, therefore, that the accurate self-reflection which proponents of authenticity advocate, is often damaging. One would do better to ignore the facts, and indulge in the fancies of self-aggrandisement. If true, it seems that not only are true beliefs not *normally* better, they are consistently and reliably *worse,* for most people in most cases. We now move to consider some objections to this conclusion.

iv) Objections

One kind of objection views exceptional cases as evidence for their view.

> *[W]hile Taylor and Brown's experiments indicate that people who are depressed are often more accurate in their self-assessments, this doesn't show that there are no healthy people who are just as accurate, nor that there may be some severely unstable people who are very inaccurate.*[96]

This is a wrong move in either direction, because exceptional cases are precisely that: *exceptions.* The problem for the defender of authenticity remains that there remains a *correlation* between bias and better mental states. Whatever our view is, it should be informed by trends rather than anomalies.

Another objection argues that because *always* practising optimistic self-deception is bad for you, it follows that self-deception is *not* good for you.

> *Most important[ly], none of these studies supports the idea (nor do the researchers claim that they do) that someone who always engages in optimistic self-deception is going to be more successful or happy. Someone who always self-deceives is apt to get hurt fairly quickly and in fairly obvious ways.*[97]

This does not follow. Practising self-enhancement bias *all the time* may well be bad for you, but it may be good for you to practise *most of the time*. Or it might be beneficial to practise all the time, to a lesser degree. It turns out that a 'golden mean' of bias is optimal, with both extremes being bad for you: "the "optimal margin" lies between complete accuracy (correlated with depression) and delusional inaccuracy (which is assumed to lead to dangerously imprudent behaviour)."[98] In other words, consistently being *slightly* inaccurate is better. But even if bias is good just *most* of the time, then true belief is clearly not 'normally better'.

Finally, one objection appeals to the *moral necessity* of authenticity. The thought is roughly: 'it is impossible that we can improve ourselves let alone by *motivated* to improve ourselves, if we don't *ever* have accurate beliefs about ourselves. We *must* see ourselves as we really are, in order to improve ourselves / live authentically and so on.' This seems plausible, and it turns out that the evidence supports it:

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[95] Ibid. p.199.
[96] (Lynch, 2004, p. 49).
[97] (Lynch, 2004, p. 49).
[98] (Hazlett, 2013, p. 56).

More recent empirical work may have solved this puzzle: self-enhancement bias manifests itself when people are working on a task, but does not manifest itself when people are deliberating about what is to be done (§2.7). Self-enhancement bias, as it is manifested in most people, appears to be fine-tuned to the goal of increasing motivation: bias manifests itself when motivation and self-esteem are needed, and conspicuously drops out of the picture when accurate information is needed for planning and self-assessment.[99]

In other words, humans are very good at being biased most of the time, while magically being brought down to earth when it benefits them. Nonetheless, this does not affect our pessimistic conclusion, namely that false beliefs are *consistently and reliably* better than true beliefs. Exceptional cases there may be, but the overall case against viewing oneself 'as one really is' remains.[100]

v) Social Identity and False Beliefs

Self-enhancement bias reveals one kind of beneficial false belief about ourselves. I now want to consider a second kind: those beliefs we have about our *identity;* our roles in society, among our friends and all other social groups of which we are a member. In this section I try to describe the kinds of beliefs I am thinking of, and in the next section I discuss their eudaimonic value. Let us begin with Sartre's example of *the waiter*:

Consider this café waiter. His movements are animated and intent, a bit too precise, a bit too quick; he approaches the customers with a bit too much animation; he leans forward a bit too attentively, his voice and his eyes expressing an interest in the customer's order that is a bit too solicitous. Finally, here he is, on his way back, and attempting in his attitude to imitate the inflexible exactitude of some kind of automaton, while carrying his tray with the recklessness characteristic of a tightrope walker, holding it in a constantly unstable and constantly disrupted equilibrium, which he constantly restores with a light movement of his arm and hand. His behaviour throughout strikes us as an act. He concentrates on his successive movements as if they were mechanisms, each one of them governing the others; his facial expression and even his voice seem to be mechanical; he adopts the pitiless nimbleness and rapidity of things. He is playing, amusing himself. But what, then, is he playing at? One does not need to watch him for long to realize: he is playing at being a café waiter.[101]

There is something undoubtedly false about Sartre's waiter. It is Sartre's most famous example of *bad faith,* of deceiving or 'playing' oneself.[102] What is it that is bad about this? Sartre wants us to frown upon the waiter because the waiter is the epitome of what we might call 'fakeness'; he is 'adopting the role' of 'waiter-ness', he is being so complacent so as to have let himself believe (falsely) that his identity *really is* to *be* a waiter, rather than to be utterly free.[103] A such, the waiter has *deep-rooted* false beliefs about who he is. Thus the waiter's inauthenticity comes from a fundamental untruth about himself. The waiter wrongly assumes that his identity is unchanging – he rarely, if ever, considers the possibility that he might *not* be a waiter. He believes that he *is* a waiter. That he *moves* in a certain way. That he *talks* in a certain

[99] (Hazlett, 2013, p. 59).
[100] Moreover, there are other good explanations of how we can achieve our goals, even with the overwhelming majority of our beliefs being affected by bias. C.f. (Hazlett, 2013, p. 76).
[101] (Sartre, 1943:2018, pp. 102-103).
[102] C.f. (Cumming, 1992).
[103] (Gardner, 2009, p. 173), (Phillips, 1981, p. 26), (Cerbone, 2006, p. 92).

way. That he *should be* living and acting and speaking in these ways. He believes these features are decided by him when in fact he has decided nothing, in fact he chooses nothing. This is the very definition of what Sartre's *bad faith* is trying to capture. The shocking thing is that the waiter is familiar. The story of the waiter and the false narrative he tells himself about his life is one that can be retold a thousand times in almost every job role and walk of life.[104] In other words, the waiter represents a deep-rooted narrative in our society, about our jobs but also more generally about our *certainty* that 'we are who we are'. There is a widespread fatalistic outlook in society, that 'x was meant to be', where 'x' can be substituted for most of our life events. In other words, bad faith captures not just an *attitude* but a whole *belief system* about who we are. If Sartre is right – and I think he is – that it is prevalent, then so are the false beliefs which accompany it.

Another source of examples of false beliefs are the beliefs we have about the *social roles* we are defined as, including even our own *abilities* and *inclinations*. School classrooms, pub drinks and the average sitcom are filled with all-too-familiar tropes such as the 'quiet one', the 'funny one', the 'clumsy one', the 'cool one', the 'flirt'. We might call these our 'social roles'. Equally, we define people as the 'sporty one', or the 'logical one', all which bear some very loose resemblance to abilities that we all have. And of course there are contentious politically-layered beliefs, for example the kind of humour, beliefs, preferences and proclivities one is expected to have *as a 50-year-old*, or *as an 18-year-old*, or *as a Londoner*, or *a woman*, and so on. These beliefs about our identity are almost always false beliefs. Sometimes they are outright false beliefs, like many of the moral beliefs attached our identity. It is simply false that, as a young person, you 'ought to' like certain music or wear certain clothes. It is probably false that you *do* prefer the cultural symbols of your generation over others, in any strong metaphysical sense. It might be that you are more *exposed* to and more *familiar* with those symbols, and so have developed a preference for them. But, most likely, you could just have easily developed a preferences for 80s music and clothes, had you been (or if you were to be) introduced to those symbols. Of course, some young people – as with any age group – rebel against the social norms and do prefer those other things. So there is nothing *fixed* or 'true' about many of the things we take to be true and fixed. But we are very bad at distinguishing what is true and what is not, and that leads to many of our beliefs being false. People say things like '*I* never would have done x, or said y when I was 18', as if our identity is at once entirely known to us, and utterly fixed. The truth is probably far more complex. You probably *could* have been a completely different person, given the infinite number of ways that the circumstances of your life have shaped your existence (and could therefore have shaped it differently).

There are many other examples of false beliefs when it comes to social identity. It is probably false that it is 'because you are a woman' that you have a caring disposition, or are shy in social situations. Maybe *in a certain friendship group* you are the 'funny one', but in reality you're just as funny as anyone else. Maybe in one social setting you are the 'quiet one' and another setting you are the 'confident one'. Many of these beliefs have an 'element of truth', by which I mean there is some more moderate or nuanced view that is true (even though the belief you hold isn't). Perhaps you are *slightly* more clumsy than most people but, in reality (we can imagine measuring your 'clumsiness' with some simply tests and comparative statistics), you are hardly *a clumsy person* when compared to the average person, despite the jokes your friends make about it. So while we can acknowledge that some false beliefs are only *just* missing the mark, these beliefs are no less false than the obviously false ones.

Sartre's conception of the self as *unfixed* is very good at explaining why these false beliefs about our social identity are abundant. Of course, if something is 'created' or 'invented', then it is not *predetermined*, not

[104] And indeed Sartre makes reference to many other professions – the example is not intended to be specific to waiters in particular (Phillips, 1981, pp. 23-24).

becoming what it is 'made to be' in reality. Rather, our identity is more like a story we are telling, and stories are made up. Thus, Sartre's phenomenology already helps to explain why many of the beliefs we have about ourselves are false – because our identities are made up by ourselves. But earlier we concluded that even Sartrean authenticity relies on some true beliefs about ourselves, *in order to* tell these stories in each moment. But even this, we should be able to see, is far-fetched. There is nothing about making up a story which requires knowing where you are now, or even where you are going, or where you came from. For example, I might decide that I no longer 'identify with' (believe) the identity my school friends gave me. Perhaps I rebel, and adopt new values, a new sense of humour and new character traits. The thought was that, in order to do this, I must first 'get my bearing', do some 'self-reflection', see myself as I really am, and then act accordingly. But why should this follow? I can just as well begin a new narrative about myself based on a false view of myself, as I can based on a true view of myself. The cliché is that people 'find themselves' over time, but we could just as easily be move away from ourselves, or never move at all. Many books could be filled with examples of these kinds of false beliefs; hopefully these few have got the point across.

vi) Social Identity and Meaning

The curious thing about these beliefs about oneself is that they are *immensely meaningful* to us, and in being meaningful, also contribute to a flourishing existence. The beliefs we have been discussing are so important to make sense of and give meaning to our lives that I contend that, for most people and in most situations, if we didn't have these beliefs (and we had true beliefs instead), we would be far worse off. This is mostly because these beliefs are almost always harmless, but often have a small importance to us, and collectively therefore have immense importance. Believing that you are the 'funny one' in the group (even though, in reality, your friends have just labelled you this way) gives you an identity that you otherwise wouldn't have in that group, and shapes what you say and how you act, gives you a sense of orientation, a sense of 'identity'. Believing that you are a 'sporty person' (despite it being based solely off being good at football when you were 16) helps to motivate you to go running and join a football team in your twenties, and after a few years actually turns you into a *genuinely* sporty person.

One might object: 'weren't the false beliefs that the waiter had about himself *bad?*' Isn't that Sartre's point? Perhaps there is some truth in this. One can indulge too much in the roles that society give us – our job being a good example. And sometimes this can be very bad for us. And bad, indeed, because we are *not viewing ourselves as we really are* – as flexible, intricate, complex beings whose identity cannot be exhausted by the basic societal roles that, for example, job roles, provide us with. Even in the waiter example, we can image the kind of strange traps he might fall into. Suppose he sees some friends at the café; perhaps he would for a moment fail to recognise them and speak to them in the automated customer-facing tone that he gives to every other customer. Perhaps if presented with the opportunity to leave his job or if it were suggested to him that he might spend his time elsewhere, he might dismiss the idea too quickly. However, on the other hand, to some extent, the kinds of beliefs that we have about our position in society – just like the waiter – are so integral to being human we simply *could not comprehend the world without them,* such that to try to 'replace' them with accurate beliefs would far outweigh the negatives. It would be weird and counterintuitive, for example, to try to constantly question the (baseless but well-understood) idiosyncrasies which come with being a member of the 'boomer' generation. It would be hard, if not impossible, to truly belief, as Sartre would have us do, that *we are not the person our job tells us we are.* It is simply inevitable that human beings will 'decide' that, after 20 years of being a lawyer, that they *couldn't* have been anything else, that this is the *best* if not the *only* profession for them, and they will be very reluctant to question this. I think the philosophical reason for this result is that the truth is very *pure*. By 'pure' I mean that it is very complex, often too complex to fit with simple social norms, sometimes it

can be very counterintuitive, and it doesn't allow us to believe one thing about ourselves in one situation (think social group) and not in another, and it requires lots of painful thought and reflection to get to. Moreover, the thought that 'everyone should just reflect on themselves a bit more' rings of intellectual elitism, which Sartre's waiter passage has been accused of.[105] This is not to say that we should *never* question our false assumptions about our social identities. But I am claiming that our lives go better when we place a *limit* on our questioning, even when we haven't reached the truth. Often having a degree of oversimplification, and plain acceptance about the beliefs we have about ourselves, is far more pleasant for us, and comes with little or no consequences. The meaningfulness of these beliefs is just as strong, whether or not they are true. Our beliefs about our social identities are often as fulfilling as they are false.

vii) Conclusion

This chapter has set out two reasons for thinking that many of the beliefs we have about ourselves which increase add to our well-being, are false. The first were the product of self-enhancement bias: the widespread phenomenon of an exaggerated, positive representation of ourselves, which boosts our self-esteem and promotes a healthy mental state. The second were beliefs about our social identity, from our role as an individual in society to our personality traits, which help us make sense of the social world we live in, and add meaning to our lives. We should not conclude that the prevalence of these false beliefs entails that we are *always* better off having false beliefs rather than true ones. Clearly, sometimes we ought to make the effort to ascertain what we are *really like*, for example when we are reflecting on an argument we had with a friend, or which job sector we want to apply for. Sometimes the stories we tell ourselves about who we are become *too* fantastical, such that they become bad for us. In these cases, we certainly do benefit from 'grounding ourselves in reality'. There is a role for truth in this respect; the point is that it is rarely beneficial. And there are good reasons for this, some of which we will return to in later chapters. The truth can be very difficult to find, especially when it involves the unintuitive, painstaking process of introspection. The truth can be very complicated, so it is easier for us to resort to simplified beliefs about our social role and personal identities. Lastly, there are often few repercussions from missing the mark when it comes to beliefs about oneself, because one only *just* misses: we exaggerate our positive traits *slightly*, not wildly, and we simplify our social roles only to a certain degree, not wholly. The upshot is that rather than having the default, sanctified role that proponents of authenticity give it, having true beliefs about ourselves should instead be treated more like a 'regulatory ideal', which steps in at important moments, but is certainly not a *reliable* or *consistently* valuable feature in our lives. Sometimes it improves our lives, but by no means it is the norm, and often there is simply no connection between truth and what makes our lives worth living.

[105] One writer remarks: "If I am not mistaken about Sartre and those who think like him, I think they ought to be high on the list of those whom waiters refuse to serve." (Phillips, 1981, p. 31); c.f. chapter VI part vii).

III. Beliefs about Others

i) Introduction

This is the second chapter considering the view that true belief is *normally valuable*. Specifically, the view that true belief is indefeasibly valuable in a clear majority of cases. On this prevailing view, most of the time, our lives go better when we have the true belief instead of a false one. If true, the truth ought to retain its default, gold-plated status in our lives. Of course, we have already seen one category of belief where a false belief is consistently and reliably *better*: beliefs about oneself. This chapter will look at another type of belief: beliefs about others; specifically, beliefs about those we love. I will argue that these beliefs, just like beliefs about ourselves, are usually false, and better for it. If I am right, this further weakens the prevailing view that truth is normally valuable, will further remove the gold-plated status truth has acquired.

The kind of love I will be examining is love in the sense of *personal* love, the emotion and the accompanying beliefs we have about those *people* we love, as opposed to the things (foods, sports or places) or activities (studying or running) we love.[106] My arguments will not concern the subtler emotion of mere *liking*, as in when we say 'I love shepherd's pie',[107] nor will I consider the attitude or practice of holding *charitable belief*s about others in general, which although related, is distinct.[108] Instead, by personal love, I will mean the intensely strong feeling of liking and caring which we have for others, whether familial, platonic or romantic love, and the beliefs which precede and result from that emotion. I do take romantic love to typically have sexual as well as non-sexual causes and motivations, although this is not necessary to accept for my argument.

My arguments will conclude that false beliefs pervade our relationships with those we love, and that our lives are far better off for that fact. Section ii) will draw on everyday examples to illustrate the bias we have in favour of our friends and loved ones, and the (false) preferential beliefs we hold. Section iii) will develop an account of love to explain this phenomenon by arguing that love is fundamentally non-rational. Section iv) argues therefore that the nature of love is such that it fundamentally involves false beliefs, and that if this is surprising to us it indicates, not of a flaw with love, but rather of our infatuation with truth.

ii) Cupid's Arrow is Painted Blind

To love is to interpret another person with charity. It is to believe the best about them which is consistent with the facts.[109]

[106] (Helm, 2021).
[107] (Hazlett, 2013, p. 88).
[108] C.f. Ibid. p.97.
[109] (Armstrong, 2002, p. 114).

One, who is inflam'd with lust, feels at least a momentary kindness towards the object of it, and at the same time fancies her more beautiful than ordinary.[110]

Everyday observations attest to the fact that we are biased towards those we care about. This chapter will draw on and develop arguments made by Allan Hazlett, who highlights that beliefs about those we care about involve a *partiality bias*, and therefore consistently and reliably involve holding false beliefs. Relationships with those we care about involve a disposition to treat the person we love differently to a stranger. We are quicker to feel sympathetic to their faults, and quicker to feel proud of their praises. As Hume noted, this is partly because the positive and negative qualities in those close to us are reflected back on ourselves, in the form of pride and humility: we take pride when our child performs well at school, and are embarrassed when they make a fool of themselves.[111] There is a close connection between those we love and our own feelings.[112] In turn, the emotional response towards those we love also results in preferential *action*: we are both motivated to, and do in fact treat those we care about more favourably than strangers. We always choose to help a friend over a stranger, and even if we do help a stranger, we are likely to give a friend *more* help in a comparable situation. We might even expect – as part of what think constitutes our loving relationships – that those we are in loving relationships with act in this partial manner.[113]

In addition to preferential motivations and actions, we have preferential *beliefs*. Love causes us to *judge* those we care about preferentially, as well as feeling positively disposed towards them: this should be unsurprising, given that our beliefs often mirror our dispositions and actions. But a biased judgement, unlike a biased emotion, can be true or false, and many of our beliefs about those we care about are in fact false, either because they are embellished or completely unrecognisable. This "unreliable doxastic practice" is what Hazlett calls our *partiality bias*.[114] Consider this example from Stroud.

We will go to greater lengths in the case of a friend to construct and to entertain alternative and less damning interpretations of the reported [poor] conduct than we would for a nonfriend. We draw different conclusions and make different inferences than we otherwise would (or than a detached observer would). At the end of the day we are simply less likely to conclude that our friend acted disreputably, or that he is a bad person, than we would be in the case of a nonfriend.[115]

Hazlett uses the example of friendship to demonstrate partiality bias; it seems to me that romantic love demonstrates this bias even more clearly, because we have beliefs about those we are in love with that bear almost no resemblance to reality, and which are viewed by almost everyone as normal. We believe our beloved's beauty is unmatched, when they are likely average-looking. With almost 8 billion people on the planet, we nonetheless believe that they are 'the one' person we could be happy with. We believe that our relationship will never end, even though statistically it is highly likely.[116] We often believe that their serious flaws are minor problems, and that their positive qualities are nigh on perfect. We believe that various neutral or even ordinarily unattractive features or habits to be endearing, adorable, or downright

[110] (Hume, 2007 [1739], p. 254).
[111] (Hume, 2007 [1739]), *T II.i.*
[112] C.f. (Nozick, 1989, p. 68).
[113] This thesis has been defended by a number of contemporary philosophers, e.g. (Baker, 1987), (Keller, 2000), (Stroud, 2006), (Hazlett, 2013).
[114] (Hazlett, 2013, pp. 89-90).
[115] (Stroud, 2006, pp. 504-505).
[116] (Hazlett, 2013, pp. ix-xi).

beautiful.[117] When confronted by contrary evidence or when these beliefs are questioned, we claim that other people 'don't understand them like we do' (the irony being that it is often the opposite, thus the phrase 'blinded by love').[118] These kinds of false beliefs are manifestations of the strong emotional response we call falling in love.[119]

iii) Love and Rationality

The insistence that love may embrace and even celebrate flaws is one of the hallmarks of a non-evaluative romantic conception of love.[120]

To think of someone as a friend is to expect her to have one's interests at heart, to act on one's behalf, to take one's part, and to take one at one's word ... If one thinks that one cannot .. form such expectations ... it is hard to believe that the intimacy of friendship could be preserved.[121]

What does it say about love itself that we have biased beliefs about those we love? Are we better off embracing this kind of behaviour? In this section I want to begin to answer the first two of these questions by arguing that love is fundamentally non-rational. Drawing on Zangwill's *Romantic Theory of Love*, I want to defend the view that it is a necessary constitutive feature of love that it is non-rational. By non-rational I mean *not susceptible to reason,* as opposed to irrational, which implies a failure or error of reasoning (but still susceptible to reasons). By 'fundamentally non-rational', I am claiming the following about the nature of love:

1. We do not love for reasons. We do not have or use reasons which we use to justify our loving relationships. We do not 'choose' to love, we are caused to love.

2. We do not reason *about* love. In most cases our ability to reason about love is very limited, which is why, in the majority of cases, we fail to do so (love is non-rational). Occasionally, we do reason about love, and fail (love is irrational).

1) We do not love for reasons.

The first claim concerns the origin or original justification for love, if there is one. Proponents of such reasons argue that we do love based on some evaluation of the beloved.[122] I will argue, with the likes of Hamlyn and Zangwill, that love is 'love full-stop', where "to be loved full-stop is simply to be loved without there being anything that the love is for."[123] The practice of loving provides ample evidence to support this first type of non-rationality. Is there a *reason* that a parent loves their child? Why do they treat their child preferentially over another? (If one were to provide a list of reasons, this would seem very

[117] (Jollimore, 2011, p. 50), (Zangwill, 2013, p. 307).
[118] C.f. (Jollimore, 2011) for an opposing position.
[119] While some of these examples are particular to romantic love; many of them easily can be applied to familial and platonic love.
[120] (Zangwill, 2013, p. 307).
[121] (Baker, 1987, p. 10).
[122] (Keller, 2000), (Kolodny, 2005), (Velleman, 1999).
[123] (Hamlyn, 1978, p. 12) c.f. (Zangwill, 2013).

odd..). Zangwill raises the case of those with advanced dementia, who quite literally have no capacity to love for evaluative reasons, and yet "may be full of love, up to the point when they begin to forget who the object of their love is."[124]

We can go further, and ask whether there are cases where one *ought not* love someone, or whether it would be *irrational* to love someone. Suppose your child is quite difficult, or worse – does that give you *reason* not to love them? There is something absurd about even asking the question ('one thought too many', perhaps). For it to be *irrational* – as opposed to non-rational – to continue to love them implies that love is susceptible to reasons. The novel *We Need to Talk About Kevin* describes the journey of a mother coming to terms with her son committing a school shooting: at the end, she concludes that she still loves him.[125] If love were at all rational, this would surely be irrational, and we would have to conclude that it was an error, that she should have in fact stopped loving him. But it is not strange that she loves him, it is completely understandable, natural and intuitive. This is because her love is not based on reasons, but rather is an emotional response to her son as her human child, it is not based on or dependent upon his particular qualities or actions. Zangwill cites another, real-life example of the Austrian girl Natascha Kampusch, who was held captive in a basement for 8 years. When she escaped, aged 18, her captor killed himself. Much to the horror of the media, she said she wanted to mourn his death. Is this strange? Not on the view I am defending. Zangwill writes:

> *She had of course endured what she had endured, but she was dignified and could take her emotions for what they were, without being and feeling what so many apparently concerned onlookers thought she ought to be and feel… it is interesting and understandable that she felt that she wanted to mourn. It is to be expected that two people living in close proximity, even in those circumstances, should develop love for each other. Why not? (And it is hardly likely that she loved him as a result of finding some good in him – perhaps his autonomous rationality; no, she was caused to feel.) Therefore she should mourn him, even though he was a monster*.[126]

As well as there being everyday evidence from our behaviour which testifies to the non-rational nature of love, there are also good *causal explanations* for our love, which explain love just as well as those who claim that we love based on reasons. The distinction here is between *causes* of love and *reasons for* love: one source of confusion is that we often conflate 'reason' with 'caused by'.[127] The kinds of reasons we are rejecting are of course *evaluative reasons* – the idea that our love is the result of conscious valuations of a person's qualities.[128] Nonetheless there are clearly *causes* of our love, which are not evaluative. For example, we find ourselves in friendships or even relationships caused by circumstantial factors, like happening to spend lots of time with them, or because we happened to be introduced. Being in the same class at school is not the '*reason'* (in the evaluative sense) that I formed my strongest friendship, but the *cause*. Holding a child in your womb for 9 months is not the *reason* you love your child, but it may well be the cause: a mother does not consider or weigh up this fact and ask, 'should I love my child for *this reason*?'!

Even in romantic relationships, we should be careful to differentiate causes and reasons for love. We might decide to date a person for the reason that they are a hedge fund manager, or because they are very attractive, and then we might go on to truly love that person further down the line. We do not *love*

[124] (Zangwill, 2013, p. 309).
[125] (Shriver, 2010).
[126] (Zangwill, 2013, p. 307).
[127] It need not be the case that all causes are distinct from reasons, but many are, and that suffices for my argument.
[128] (Keller, 2000), (Kolodny, 2005), (Velleman, 1999).

someone for these reasons, it is merely that these things *caused* us to come to love them.[129] "An awareness of the distinguishing features of the beloved may cause love, in combination with various psychological factors, but that awareness does not make love rational, nor does love depend on thinking that those features are good. We are caused to feel."[130] We do not 'choose' who to love, instead we 'fall in love'. All the 'criteria' we might try to list when are looking for a partner (or indeed assessing a friend, to a lesser extent) falls by the wayside when we come to love them. Even if we did 'reason' about their various qualities and characteristics initially, the point is precisely that we 'let go' of these qualities when we fell in love with them.

There are two main senses in which we 'let go' of original reasons. Firstly, we let go of the *individuality* of each reason. We move towards seeing those we love not as a list of qualities (status, income, looks, fashion sense) but rather as a whole, a singular person on which we bestow our feeling. Secondly, we let go of the substance of our reasons: the sense we do have of their particular qualities become, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter, *biased*, and therefore often false.[131] They become enhanced, embellished, exaggerated, so that the representation of the beloved in our minds is no longer the same object before us when we first met them. This effect is apparent for familial and platonic love, too, and in all cases explains why we have a very different view of those we love, compared to other people. Our friend's jokes appear sharper and more appropriate than other people's – this is an indication of a true friendship. Our child's smile appears more serene than any other's – this marks out a mother from family friend. This embellished representation doesn't show that our feelings are any less 'real', however: rather our feelings are precisely so strong because they are directed at and responding to this slightly idealised, embellished object. In fact, the first kind of 'letting go' supports the second: it would be weird to reduce one's love to *mere* qualities, because this seems to downplay the strength of the love and to attach it to some specific part of the person rather than the person *as a whole*. Instead, to the extent to which we do compliment our beloved's qualities, we do so *because we love them*, rather than the other way round. This idealisation of the beloved also explains the especially strange phenomenon of *valuing flaws*: if anything is irrational, coming to love (and believe) a negative trait to be a positive trait is.[132] The best explanation for our love is that "Love is not subject to rational requirements. Love has causes but not reasons.[133]

2) We do not reason about love.

The above account of the origin of romantic love can be applied to all kinds of love, and this helps explain the second part of my claim that love is fundamentally non-rational: that we do not reason *about* love. Even before we consider examples, this claim is intuitively plausible: if our love is not the result of evaluation, but is caused by circumstance and feeling, it is prima facie plausible that *once we love someone*, we will often fail to reason about our love in the same way that we reason about other aspects of our lives. This is exactly the second sense in which love I claim that love is non-rational: it simply does not occur to us to reason about it.

One advantage of this account is that it explains why we do not find flaws in those we love to be problematic. Even if there is good reason to love someone less, we continue to love them just the same.

[129] Indeed, Frankfurt explicitly puts love down to evolutionary drives and selfish desires, c.f. (Frankfurt, 2004).
[130] (Zangwill, 2013, p. 312).
[131] Of course, not all beliefs influenced by doxastic bias are false – one can be right for the wrong reasons, or by accident – but it is far more likely, as these familiar examples illustrate.
[132] (Zangwill, 2013), (Hamlyn, 1978).
[133] (Zangwill, 2013, p. 309).

We stay loyal to our friends, even when they do bad things; we still admire them, even when they fail or are struggling. We love our partner even when they treat us badly, sometimes even when a relationship becomes abusive. We love our children, no matter how they turn out as adults.[134] Our failure to reason about flaws, and continue to love, is because our love is fundamentally an emotional response, or at least, not a rational one.[135] Crucially, on the rare occasion that we *do* reason about our love, it is very difficult to 'think straight' about it, not just because of the tension between our emotions and reason, but *because we have an embellished, idealised view of that person*. If a stranger commits a crime, we find them guilty without hesitation; if our friend commits a crime, we find it much harder to accept. In this way, love creates bias not just because of the *quality* of mental state it is (emotion-driven as opposed to reason-driven), but also the *quantity* (we are deeply attached so those we love, more so than their qualities merit).

Another advantage of this account is that it explains a major problem for reason-based views in the philosophy of love: the *trading up objection*.[136] The objection goes that, if love were rational, then as soon as we found a person who had the same characteristics as our partner, except they were all *better*, we would be rationally obliged to 'trade up' our current partner for that person. We can imagine the situation: two people with the same physical and psychological features, but one being slightly more pretty, more funny, more kind, less prone to anger, and so on. Why we do not trade up in these cases is easy to explain, on a non-rational view of love. We do not subject our beloved to these rational constraints because we do not reason about our love for them. And we do not reason about our love for them because our love is a precious, honed, very deeply developed, highly emotion-driven response, directed at a unified and rose-tinted representation of that person and our relation to them, not their individual qualities.[137] This is why even a far more 'impressive' individual is unlikely to be a threat to a loving relationship. That person is ordinary, still viewed at 'face value', just as the beloved was on the first date. But time has changed the representation of the beloved into something unique and special and unified, which the stranger's sets of impressive qualities has little chance of competing with. As Zangwill puts it, "Lacking reasons, love cannot by itself generate reasons to trade its objects."[138] It is in this sense the two kinds of non-rationality (reasons for love and reasoning about love) relate to one another. Perhaps this is why love is sometimes called 'unconditional': it is unconditional in the literal sense that it is not susceptible to normal 'conditions' for forming and breaking a relationship or weighing up the value of a particular course of action. Moreover, it is this non-rationality which makes it so unrestricted, volatile, potent and, as I will now argue, essential for living a flourishing life.

iv) Love and Truth

So far, we have established that it is a fundamental feature of love that it is non-rational, that we neither have reasons for loving nor do we tend to reason about our love. I now want to argue that it is this feature of love which causes us to have so many false beliefs about those we love. Moreover, since love usually brings the most profound happiness to all parties it touches, I will conclude these beliefs are another example of eudaimonically valuable false beliefs.

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[134] Obviously, these are generalisations, with obvious exceptions.
[135] I sometimes write as if we can neatly oppose reason and emotion. Perhaps this is what I do believe; nonetheless, that is not strictly what I am arguing for, and is not necessary to defend for my argument to succeed.
[136] (Zangwill, 2013, p. 311), (Nozick, 1989, p. 76).
[137] Nozick describes this depth of bond as a '*we*' as opposed to two individual '*I*'s. This 'unification' is part of the answer, but only part – the representation of the beloved is fundamentally changed, and this is a major reason why we evaluated the beloved. (Nozick, 1989, pp. 68-87).
[138] (Zangwill, 2013, p. 311).

Although love is an emotion, it is enabled by and gives rise to many beliefs. Beliefs about those we love, about those loving relationships, and even beliefs about ourselves. We began this chapter by looking at how many of our beliefs about those we love are false, the result of the unreliable doxastic practice called *partiality bias*. But now we can go further, and say that the reason we often have false beliefs about those we love, the reason we have this bias in the first place, is because *it is a fundamental feature of love that it is non-rational.* All the features of love we discussed in the previous section lead us to this conclusion. Instead of using reason to evaluate our beliefs about those we love, our beliefs about love are driven by feelings and desires, and if our beliefs are not governed by reason, it is not surprising that they are often false. Further, our idealised representations of those we love are apt to produce the false beliefs that we discussed earlier: of course we falsely *believe* our son is smarter than the other children, when our *embellished representation* of him is also inaccurate. It is not surprising that we do not notice evidence suggesting that our partner is mistreating us, because we have probably sugar-coated their faults to appear as idiosyncrasies. Instead, we believe that they are 'not to blame' or we downplay their faults, even in the light of good evidence to the contrary. In this way, the non-rational nature of love explains why we have false beliefs about those we love.

One might object to the latter part of my claim about non-rationality, that we *do* sometimes reason about those we love, even if it can be difficult to do so. People do file for divorce, end friendships and sometimes even estrange their parents: they do 'trade up'. More commonly, healthy relationships are characterized by discussions of each partner's flaws and how they can resolve their differences.[139] These facts all suggest that we *do* reason about those we love, and that love can be rational. It is true that there are some cases where we certainly to try to reason about love, and maybe there are cases where that reasoning succeeds. There are two points to make on this.

Firstly, most of the time, even if we are able to reason about those we love, we usually 'reason irrationally', not rationally. In other words, we make frequent errors in our reasoning. This is totally compatible with the kind of behaviour just mentioned: one can decide to break up with an abusive partner but still feel that they haven't done very much wrong (biased, as they are, by their attachment to that person), or help their child improve at school while still thinking they have above-average intelligence. It puts too much credit on our reasoning abilities to conclude that taking prudent courses of action to improve and correct one another's flaws that we have true beliefs about that person. Allowing that we *do* sometimes reason is not the same thing as allowing that we reason *correctly*. And my claim was not that we *never* reason about love, but that we do not *most of the time.* Further, even in the cases where we *do* reason about love, most of the time we are still significantly biased towards them, and have many false beliefs as a result. In short, love is usually non-rational, and where it isn't, it is usually *irrational.* Neither lead to an abundance of true beliefs.

The second point concerns the exceptional scenarios when we both i) do in fact reason about those we love, and ii) are able shrug off our biases towards them, enabling us to reason in a clear-headed, accurate manner. Don't these cases of true beliefs about those we love sometimes exist? I accept that there are clearly some cases like this, though rare. But there are a couple of reasons why this objection is limited. Take the classic case of a break-up. So immersed are we in the relationship, and so strong are our feelings about it, that it is incredibly difficult to reason about it, let alone reason *well* about it, even if there is good reason to end it. Because of this, we tend to require help, such as advice from our friends, in order to be able to 'see sense' in the situation. So the objection is weak in the sense that our ability to reason is often

[139] (Kolodny, 2005, p. 137).

only *indirect.*[140] Another reason is that it is simply rare that we reason well about those we love; it is an anomaly rather than the norm. In the case of the break-up, once we have made the decision, there is a high probability that the next week we will seriously regret it, which is why many couples 'get back together'. So even when we are able to get to the truth, it is usually very fleeting or temporary; in the round, true beliefs are not the norm when it comes to love.

Conclusion

I have defended the view that love is essentially non-rational, and when it isn't non-rational, it's *irrational*. In either case, false beliefs result in abundance. My aim is to show that true beliefs do not normally improve one's life, but this only follows if the false beliefs in question – about those we love – themselves *do* improve one's life. One might object: isn't having lots of false beliefs likely to be *bad*? One reason why it is *not* bad in practice, is that our false beliefs are very 'close' to the truth. There is a temptation to assume that by 'false belief' I mean to suggest that we hold *'wildly inaccurate'* beliefs. But this does not follow from my argument. If anything, it is highly likely that while most of our beliefs are false, they are still in some sense *very close to the truth*, because the more preposterous one's beliefs are the more likely one will notice (or have it pointed out) that they are false. For example, one might well comment that one's son is a great hockey player for his age, but saying that he's one of the best in his year is hard to square with the fact that he's in the second-tier team at school. Nonetheless, he is likely an average hockey player, a belief which is no less false than the more extreme belief. We might say that our beliefs about those we love orbit the truth, suspended by a metaphorical atmosphere of emotion-driven love. They occasionally spend a moment coming 'down to earth', before quickly spinning off back into an orbit of falsehood, never straying too far from the truth nor getting too close.

Some purists might still object that love is a misguided emotion to pursue, and that instead we would be better off pursuing calm, collected, cool-headed thinking about others. This certainly would involve seeking true beliefs about others. Likewise, a pro tanto defender of truth could argue that the value of non-rational love *outweighs* the value of truth. I want to make a broader point about the values of truth and love which will address these objections. I argued in section iii) that love would not be love if it were not biased, emotion-driven and non-rational. It follows from this that to hold entirely accurate, cool-headed beliefs about someone is simply not to love that person. This is why partiality bias is an integral part of what it means to having loving relationships.

The overwhelming reason why these kinds of false beliefs are not bad is due to the simple fact that *love is good.* To love others is one of the surest, least controversial routes to leading a more fulfilling life for yourself and for everyone around you.[141] When it comes to beliefs about those we love, the eudaimonic value of non-rational love is such *because* it leaves the truth behind, *because of* the errors of judgement it gives rise to, *because of* its falsehood. Their being false is a necessary condition (although not sufficient) for the goodness of loving.[142] It is because our beliefs about those we love are false that we are able to reap the rewards of loving other people, of viewing those we love as *better* than they are, more *beautiful* than they are, and reaping an aggrandised pleasure from that love, more than we do towards others, and even when others have the same (or better) qualities. There is something about the lack of reasons in love which

[140] (Zangwill, 2013, p. 311).
[141] (Nozick, 1989), (Zangwill, 2013).
[142] It is not that being false intrinsically leads to eudaimonic value – otherwise all false beliefs would be valuable – rather there is a necessary connection between this *particular* form of false belief and well-being.

makes it so powerful; something about the lack of rational constraints imposed on love which makes it incredibly difficult to break and incredibly potent, and therefore very special. It will be a recurring suggestion of this paper that this result is only possible because what makes our lives go well, and what is true, are far more independent than we might think. How should we respond to this? It must be this: we should value love, but more pertinently, we should value the truth less.

IV. Social Beliefs

i) Introduction

We have looked at the false beliefs we have about ourselves, and how they improve our lives. We have looked at the false beliefs about those we love, and how these beliefs make our loving relationships profoundly fulfilling. By demonstrating that several kinds of false beliefs add to our wellbeing and quality of life, we cast doubt on the prevailing view, namely that true beliefs are *normally* – in a clear majority of cases – better than false beliefs. With each counterexample, the prevailing view that there is something special about the truth, that having true belief should be the default view, that the truth is consistently and reliable worth pursuing, becomes less and less plausible. In this chapter, I want to glance at a third, more general kind of belief which I am calling 'social beliefs', and make a similar argument against this view.

By 'social beliefs' I am brashly grouping together several different kinds of beliefs, including cultural beliefs, political or nationalistic beliefs, and religious beliefs. What these kinds of beliefs have in common is that i) they are held collectively – by the majority or at least a significant minority of people in each society – and ii) they apply either to the entire society, as in beliefs about the Nation, or to significant proportions of it, as in cultural and religious beliefs. There is not space here to consider all the different kinds of beliefs that fall under this categories. Instead, this chapter will look at three case studies from each category. I shall argue that for each case study, holding a true belief is either just as beneficial as having a false belief, or actually far *worse* than a relevant false belief. If I am right, then it is implausible that, for these kinds of true beliefs, the truth is normally valuable. We may sometimes benefit from the truth, but it is not obvious that we need the truth in a clear majority of cases – it may well be the case that many of our social beliefs are happily false.

ii) Manchester United

'Manchester United is the best football team in the world.' Lots of people believe this. However, lots of people also believe that 'Liverpool F. C. is the best football team in the world.' In fact, everyone believes that *their* football team is the best. Naturally, it is logically impossible that all these beliefs are true – certainly not at the same time, at any rate. Even when a team loses, its supporters maintain that they are the

best team, sometimes bending or ignoring evidence to the contrary, and justifying their claims with poor or highly implausible evidence. They try to persuade others that their team are the best, and cannot understand why anyone would support another team. These beliefs are as deep-set as they are almost always false.[143]

At the same time, these false beliefs are incredibly meaningful. To believe that their team is the best along with fellow supporters builds a sense of community.[144] The chants in the stadium, the drinks in the pub, the endless gossip and speculation about the next match: these are obvious benefits which come from being an avid sports fan. To support a team no matter (or in spite of) evidence of failure gives fans the feeling that their team cannot be defeated, and a sense of enduring hope that they will eventually win. It dampens the sorrows of any lost match, and increases the exhalation of every win – 'of course they won', is the obvious response (why wouldn't they, they're the best!). That these valuable experiences are the result of this belief is evidence that sport is one of the most meaningful aspects of their lives, and by extension, essential element of what makes their life worth living.

But what is most clear, and most interesting for our purposes, is how the truth value of these beliefs is *totally irrelevant.* These beliefs are eudaimonically valuable for the reasons alluded to above – community, team-spirit, loyalty, love – not because they are *accurate*. This is obvious when we consider the absurdity of seeking accurate beliefs: consider a person who supported the football team based on the number of goals that they scored on average over the last 5 seasons, or the caps or athletic ability of each player. Presumably, given a number of defeats, such a person would simply 'switch teams' to the 'better team'. Well, given the right calculus, they would have the truth on their side: their team *would be the best.* But they would also have somehow missed the entire point of supporting a team, and would in a way be very strange. Further, if this person dared to suggest that another team was better than their home team, their family and friends would be quick to ridicule them, even by ashamed of them, for holding this (true) belief. Seeking the truth would probably make that person's life far *worse* than simply 'going along' with the crowd. Most human beings understand this: they understand that supporting a team and believing that they are the best *whether or not they actually are* is a good idea because of the 'non-truth-related' happiness it provides them with. As any supporter of Manchester United would tell you, even posing the question 'is it *true* that…?' is to miss the point of being a fan.

iii) The Nation

Beliefs about *the Nation* are often false, either because they are completely made up, or gross generalisations or exaggerations. Once again, we see the same logical contradiction as with football teams: each country thinks they are the best in the world. They think they cuisine is the tastiest, their landscapes the most beautiful, their language the most logical, their fellow citizens the most friendly. Although it would take more space than I have here to set out exactly how each of these beliefs could be justified, I don't need to. All I need to do is claim that it is at least *possible* to determine the right answer from the wrong answer with respect to these beliefs. It does not seem inconceivable that there should be *a* country with the best cuisine or friendliest citizens. And if we grant that, then most countries must be necessarily wrong about their beliefs, simply because not everyone can be the best.

[143] It could be the case that Manchester United *is* the best team in the world, so once again bias is not sufficient for being false. Nonetheless, only one team can be the best..
[144] By 'best' I mean 'best at football' or 'the best team to support'.

As well as the general belief that 'we are the best', we also have more specific false beliefs about *national identity.* Take cuisine, for example. We believe that it is part of India's cultural identity to have spicy food, just as Switzerland has chocolate, Argentina has beef and Italy has spaghetti in tomato sauce. But all of these are false. Tomatoes, chilli and cocoa only came to Europe and Asia after the Spanish conquered Mexico, and the only steak found in Argentina in the 15th century was from a llama.[145] I contend that people really do believe these identity claims, and they really are false. But if readers object that we really cannot claim that identity claims are capable of being true or false, we can easily rephrase them in other ways. For example, many hold the historical belief that 'spicy food *comes from* India' or that 'tomato sauce *originated in* Italy'. Neither of these are true, given that both spice and tomatoes originated in South America and was brought over by colonialists. However we want to phrase the specific belief, the point is that what we believe about our national identity often turns out to bear little resemblance to reality.

A final kind of false belief concerns the concept of the Nation itself. The Nation is not 'real' in the sense that it does not exist independently of human beings – there would be no such thing as national identity if there were no humans around. And given that our definition of truth requires independent existence, such claims that tell us anything about 'what Nation N *is'*, these beliefs cannot be said to be true. A good example of this is the post-colonial idea that newly-independent nations can return to their 'true culture'. For example, the belief that there are real, independent values, customs and traditions which are associated with each country before it was colonised, which that country can 'return to'. Indians, for example, are proud to be independent after a brutal partition from the British, and have pursued a policy of decolonialisation since. But the idea that India could ever return to its 'true state' – i.e. before British rule – is impossible. For as well as killing and persecuting the inhabitants of the subcontinent, the British also united many *different* kingdoms that already existed, as well as giving India its railway network, judicial system, democracy and language, not to mention love of cricket and chai (tea).[146] There is no 'true identity' towards which India can decolonise, without becoming an India which would be completely unrecognisable. Even if these changes to India's national identity *could* be 'reversed', to resemble the India before it was colonised, *that* India was in turn the result of being conquered by the Mughal and Gupta empires, and *those* empires were the result of previous conquest. What this demonstrates is that there is no such thing as an independent, 'true' national identity. Instead, the strongest beliefs about national identity that any nation can make are at best highly relative, something like: '*some* people within *some* (current) geographical parameters G hold the shared belief that 'property p applies to G'.' The point is that our beliefs about the Nation are always stronger than this claim, and anything stronger is false.

Despite being riddled with false beliefs, national identity is one of the great – eudaimonically great – fictions that humans indulge in. It matters because to be part of the Nation is to be part of a collective, a community. It is to feel secure and safe in being *united* with others by the same beliefs and customs, and to be *proud* of these. It is even fulfilling – when held in moderation – to be part of a collective which can pit oneself again other nations, whether in sporting competitions, or economic growth. It is not even necessarily bad to think that one's country is better than another, *to some extent.* Some level of partiality is probably required to, for example, be inspired to govern a country or be inspired to improve it. A popular view is that nationalism is bad for its citizens and the world, because it promotes an 'us vs them' worldview which pits one Nation against another, results in a selfish, protectionist economics, anti-immigration policies, reduced foreign aid and less international cooperation. However, there is nothing about holding overly positive beliefs about one's country which *necessitates* denigrating other countries or reducing international cooperation, providing that beliefs do not become '*too* false'. In other words, there is a middle ground between the extreme and false *populist* narrative of 'us vs them' and the radical and

[145] (Harari, 2014, pp. 188-189).
[146] Ibid. pp.228-229.

true *realist* picture of 'all countries are equal', or worse, that 'my country is worse than most'. If you do not think it plausible that nationalist beliefs can be positive, consider believing that last belief: how would it sit to believe that one's country is *worse* than other countries? Or perhaps worse, to believe that there is nothing particular interesting about one's country? Or that there is nothing which all citizens in one's country have in common? These would be damaging in their own right, leading to a sense of meaninglessness and apathy, a lack of community and even anarchy. The best option lies between these two extremes: the moderate (and false) *nationalist* narrative of 'pride in one's country'. This moderate view avoids all the problems of the extreme false and radically true views, and provides an incredibly potent, richly fulfilling tool for uniting people together. This is what Nations would be best off pursuing, in spite of being a fiction.

iv) God

67% of philosophers are atheists, and the Western world is increasingly becoming secular with each generation.[147][148] This is perhaps unsurprising from a philosophical perspective, given the host of philosophical problems and contradictions which feature in many religions. Belief in the Christian God, for example, requires resolving the existence of an omnipotent, omnibenevolent creator with the existence of evil. It requires explaining how there is both one God, and simultaneously three Gods (the Father, the Holy Spirit and the Son – Jesus Christ). It requires explaining the contradiction between a perfect, omnipotent God and the existence of the Devil (surely an omnipotent God would destroy the Devil?). But perhaps the best argument against belief in God is the same one that applies to sports teams and Nation states: namely, the thousands of incompatible beliefs in all the world's religions and each of their Gods; by definition, they cannot all be true. At most, one could be true, and all the rest false.[149] For these reasons, let us assume for the purposes of this section that the majority of philosophers are correct, and that belief in theism, let alone some of these highly challenging theological beliefs, is false.

While I am an atheist myself, it does not seem obvious to me that belief in God is always eudaimonically disvaluable. Whatever they were like in the past, the vast majority of contemporary religions are peaceful and peace-making, highly generous, often charitable, and provide moral principles not dissimilar to those provided by secular moral philosophers. They also have similar advantages to other fictional organisations (like the Nation) in providing a sense of community for individuals to be a part of. Further, while the symbols and stories, rites and rituals that characterise religious practice may not have a sound metaphysical grounding, they are nonetheless deeply meaningful to those who practice them, for the same reasons that symbols and rituals are valuable for the nationalist and the sports fan. If supernatural beliefs and superstitious rituals are the price to pay for a much-sought-after sense of community and meaning, along with strong moral principles and a disposition to be charitable, this may well be a price worth paying.

At this point, *anti-theists* such as Richard Dawkins pose the following objection. Why resort to false, superstitious stories and myths, when the secular world of *natural science* is even more captivating and wonderful? Why have made-up stories, when you can have the real thing? Why learn symbols and rituals when you can learn the most fabulous story of all: the explanations for how life came about on earth, or

[147] (Bourget & Chalmers, 2023).
[148] (Voas & Chaves, 2016).
[149] (Hedberg, 2017).

how our 100 million cells manage to work together to make our bodies work.[150] And isn't is patronising to suggest that we should ignore the truth, because humans prefer the comfort of a meaningful fiction? *'Reality'* – or, as I would say, *truth* – is just as beautiful, fascinating, intriguing and meaningful as any religion, if not more so.

I find this argument plausible, but only *all other things being equal*. Even if we accept the dichotomy Dawkins wants to draw between 'true science-based beliefs' and the 'superstitious beliefs of religion', there is a major problem. The problem for religious beliefs is that, as is frequently the case when it comes to true beliefs, the truth is often *difficult to attain.* For some kinds of belief, the more we investigate the truth, the worse off we are for our efforts. Because although attaining the truth *per se* may have little effect on our quality of life, there are other relevant factors to consider. For some kinds of belief, the problematic factors are *cognitive* – our cognitive limitations may make it difficult to attain the truth –, but the difficulty can also often be *cultural.* For example, imagine that you live in a relatively happy society that is highly religious. As a curious truth-seeker, you spend time thinking about whether religious beliefs are true, and eventually are led down the path of atheism. We might plausibly assume that your life goes just as well, and is just as meaningful, whether you are an atheist or a believer, all other things being equal, for the reasons discussed above. If so, you are just as well off having false beliefs as you are having true beliefs: truth does not matter. The problem is that sometimes all other things are not equal. In a highly religious society, you are likely to be at best looked down on, or at worst shunned by those around you for holding these (true) beliefs about the resident God. Seeking and gaining true beliefs just makes life harder for you, not easier.

This response may be criticised on the grounds that it is too ad hoc, and does not keep 'all things equal'. I would respond that I claimed from the beginning that my account of the value of truth ought to be something which normal people, living their everyday lives, could relate to. With this in mind, it does not seem to me ad hoc to say that 'becoming an atheist' is not obviously a path that many people can take without diminishing their well-being, even if, in an ideal society, there would be a slight cognitive eudaimonic benefit to doing so. Religious beliefs carry consequences in a way that beliefs about sports teams, ourselves, or those we love, do not. This ought to be reflected to make sure that our evaluation of truth genuinely is applicable to ordinary people. Therefore, once again, when considering the value to human life that religious beliefs bring, truth just seems an unimportant feature. The important features are how these beliefs affect the *quality of life* of those holding the beliefs, and the actions those people take as a result, and these seem particularly favourable. Providing that you are in a liberal society, a false endorsement of religion will probably be *no worse off* compared to endorsing an atheist view. On the other hand, if you're unlucky enough to live in an intolerant society, then having true beliefs quickly becomes a bad idea. In short, when it comes to religious beliefs, true beliefs are either no better than false ones, or are much worse. Either way, there is nothing special about true belief.

v) Conclusion

This chapter has looked at a range of social beliefs, from cultural to political to religious. While a very brief canvass, each case study revealed a prevalent form of eudaimonically valuable false belief, enough to further diminish the plausibility of the thesis in question, namely that the truth is normally better to have.

[150] (Dawkins, 1998).

As with previous chapters, I do not need, nor do I intend, to claim that we are *never* better off having true beliefs about the society and culture we live in. The political beliefs we have about our politicians and the economy, for example, had better be accurate in a democracy, otherwise that democracy fails to function properly. The same might apply to moral beliefs. But many of our beliefs about each other and about our culture need not be true; or better put, their meaning and culture significance does not depend on their truth value. I have argued that this is true for our beliefs about sport, the Nation and God. The common theme, which runs through all of the last three chapters, is that it is the *meaningfulness*, the *personal significance* of our beliefs which makes us happy, not their truth value. Having true social beliefs is not consistently and reliably valuable, as we originally thought. We may sometimes benefit from the truth, but it is not obvious that we need the truth *most of the time* – it may well be the case that many of our social beliefs are happily false.

V. Practical Beliefs

i) Introduction

The most obvious reason to pursue true beliefs is that believing the truth can get us all sorts of other things we want.[151]

So far, the defender of truth may object that I have ignored the best reason for believing that truth is normally instrumentally value: namely, that true beliefs improve our lives because they are *useful*, because they *help us achieve our goals*.[152] I will group together this category of true belief under the name *practical beliefs*. The interesting claim is not, as some suggest, that *if we have true beliefs, we can achieve our goals* – as we have seen, there are plenty of true beliefs which do not help us achieve any goal whatsoever, like the number of molecules in my pen.[153] Instead, many endorse the claim that *if we want to achieve our goals, we need true beliefs*.[154] The idea is that when we have chosen a particular goal and are trying to achieve it, then we are going to need to make sure our beliefs are as accurate as possible, in order to have the best chance of hitting our target. Specifically, true beliefs help us i) make the right choices, and ii) take the right actions. To cook my pasta, it is valuable for me if my belief that I have chillies in the fridge is true. To design an aircraft, it is valuable to have true beliefs about the laws of physics, or the dimensions and weight of each component. To charm a girl, I need to have true beliefs about what jokes tend to be well received, and what cocktail bars are most likely to impress. Conversely, having false beliefs can cause us lots of *damage*, as Lynch vividly describes.

[I]magine what would happen if I were to constantly form false beliefs in the real world. Walking out my door, I would fall down, since I would underestimate the depth of the step. I might put my car in drive

[151] (Lynch, 2004, p. 16).
[152] These could be *direct* eudaimonic ends, like knowledge, but more likely the idea is that the truth helps us achieve life goals which are *indirect* eudaimonic ends: cooking a meal, driving to work, teaching our children, and so on.
[153] E.g. (Foley, 2012, p. 61).
[154] (Foley, 2012, p. 61), (Foley, 1987, pp. 223-224), (Craig, 1990, pp. 132-133), (Lynch, 2004, p. 16), (Kvanvig, 2003, p. 30), (Zagzebski, 2003), (Horwich, 2006, p. 350), (Brady, 2009, p. 267), c.f. (Hazlett, 2013, p. 111).

when I meant for it to reverse; I could think the coast clear when cars are in fact hurtling down the road at me; or think that safe food was poisonous and poisonous food safe, and so on. In the vast majority of cases, in other words, the less accurate I am in my beliefs about just my immediate environment, the less likely I am to succeed in my goals—including my goal of surviving.[155]

If our everyday goals consist in some intrinsic good somewhere down the line, then my true beliefs have positive instrumental value by being causally connected to those worthy end goals, such that they help me bring them about.[156] This is the sense in which 'practical beliefs' can be said to be *normally better.* Henceforth, I use the phrases 'practical belief' and 'useful belief' interchangeably, to refer to 'those beliefs which help achieve one's goals'. The term 'practical belief' is simply to distinguish this kind of 'means-end' belief from the other kinds of true belief we have considered.[157] Such beliefs are plausibly valuable, because the goals I have in mind are not *any* old goal, but specifically the kinds of everyday goals we have that lead us towards a more flourishing life, however indirectly. Goals such as maintaining a healthy lifestyle, pursuing personal projects, and so on.[158]

To recap, the prevailing view is that we need to have *accurate* everyday beliefs in order to achieve our everyday goals, from doing the cooking to driving our cars. Therefore, it follows that the truth normally matters. Practical beliefs are valuable on account of their truth. This is the strongest argument in support of truth, and, if true, may help truth retain its gilded normative status. Section ii) makes some important clarifications to the discussion, before section iii) defends the prevailing view, that practical beliefs are valuable in virtue of being true. Section iv-v) sets out several types of prevalent practical beliefs which are exceptions to this rule. Lastly, sections vi-vii) consider explanations for, objections to and the significance of my conclusion.

ii) Clarifications

Before getting into the main argument, I want to clear up some misguided ways of defending the value of truth with respect to practical beliefs. One problem is that the kind of value sometimes appealed to is not *eudaimonic* value, but some kind of *epistemic* value. It might always be *epistemically* better to have true beliefs, in order to gain knowledge about whichever field you are inquiring about.[159] But our question is whether truth has *eudaimonic* value, so having epistemic value may or may not be relevant. As it happens, it often is not relevant. We discussed earlier the 'triviality problem', where many true beliefs seem to have little or no eudaimonic value, simply because they are uninteresting. It might be eudaimonically valuable for me to believe that I have chillies in my fridge today, because today I want to make some spicy pasta, and if my belief is accurate, then I am one step closer to knowing that 'I can make pasta today'. But it is not eudaimonically valuable to have true beliefs about what the resident of my house had in their cupboard when they lived here 100 years ago, *even if* it helps me to know that *they* could have made pasta: I just

[155] (Lynch, 2004, p. 48).
[156] (Sosa, 2003, p. 162).
[157] One does not have beliefs about those we love, or beliefs about oneself, or beliefs about society, in order to achieve one's everyday practical ends, like making dinner or driving one's car. This is why practical beliefs have their own chapter.
[158] The only relevant everyday goal that could be on this list, but isn't, is the end goal of *knowledge* itself. I devote the next chapter to considering whether having true beliefs has eudaimonic value with respect to knowledge.
[159] If you believe that the 'epistemic' "fundamentally has something to do with treating truth as a good, or end, or goal", as many people do (Hazlett, 2013, p. 28), e.g. (David, 2014), (Horwich, 2006).

don't care whether they could make pasta or not! Lots of things are epistemically; we are considering the claim that practical beliefs are *eudaimonically* valuable.[160]

Secondly, it is not enough for the critique to merely point out that there are *some cases* where true practical beliefs do not produce as much eudaimonic value as a false belief. One obvious kind of circumstance is simply the context, which can feature rare or extreme versions of a case. Suppose you are taking a long bus journey, from 12-4pm. When you get on the bus, you are caught in traffic, so you are two hours late arriving at your destination. Now suppose you had had the false belief that your bus was at 1pm. Suppose that by taking the later bus, you would avoid the traffic, and arrive earlier than if you had left at 12pm. In this case, your false belief would have made you better off.[161] However, this is not a strong argument against the value of true belief, because it appeals to an ad hoc and unlikely scenario. We do not and should not need to appeal to extreme disaster cases or the world ending to show that true belief is valuable. Likewise, what is interesting and relevant is whether the defender of truth can show that it is *normally* better for us to have a true practical belief over a false one, setting aside extreme and ad hoc cases.[162] The key question is whether true practical beliefs are *consistently and reliably* valuable.

Lastly, the *moral status* of our practical goals may seem to overturn the otherwise plausible value of having true practical beliefs. Eudaimonic value depends on the *nature* of the practical goal being brought about, the *intentions* of the moral agent, and their *moral beliefs*. If I intend to prank my sister by putting super hot chillies in my pasta, then my having the true belief that I have chillies in my fridge is, if anything, enabling me to do something disvaluable. My true beliefs about the laws of physics are beneficial if am designing a plane for commercial use, but not if I am designing machines of war to attack innocent nations with. Practical beliefs about bomb-making are epistemically valuable and eudaimonically valuable in the hands of a terrorism-prevention expert, as they aid them in the understanding and disarming of bombs. But in the hands of a suicide bomber, while these beliefs are also epistemically valuable (they aid them in knowing how to assemble the bomb), they are eudaimonically *disvaluable*, for obvious reasons. This may suggest to some that true beliefs that help us achieve our goals are eudaimonically disvaluable. However, this objection misses the point of our inquiry. We are trying to ascertain whether, generally speaking, it is better to have true beliefs over false beliefs as the means to achieve our ends. Specifically, where the 'ends' we are considering are *those goals which are eudaimonically valuable*. We are not answering the question 'does the truth matter' if we show that it matters for a terrorist or criminal; we want to know if the truth helps us achieve the kinds of goals that most people would strive for and which contribute to a flourishing life. Thus, asking these questions about truth with respect to eudaimonic value requires making some assumptions about the value in question.[163] We have to assume that we have *some* broad conception of what 'eudaimonic value' is, which easily rules out suicide bombing and machines of war as relevant goals. If anything, these examples show that true practical beliefs are not *intrinsically* valuable, but we already set that possibility aside earlier. What the defender of truth has to show is that true practical beliefs, most of the time, *help them achieve their goal of having a fulfilling life better than false beliefs.*

iii) The rule: utility and truth

[160] Again, the end goal of knowledge and understanding itself is an exception, to be discussed in chapter VI.
[161] C.f. (Wrenn, 2017).
[162] (Foley, 1987, pp. 223-224), (Zagzebski, 1996, p. 100), c.f. (Hazlett, 2013, p. 12).
[163] C.f. the Introduction.

Truth → utility

Traditional pragmatist theories of truth hold that the truth of a belief consists in, and is explained by, its practical utility. Beliefs simply "become true just in so far as they help us get into satisfactory relation with other parts of our experience."[164] Beliefs are true if they result in the consequences which we desire, at least "durably and over the long run."[165] Thus truth is instrumentally valuable, relative to our goals. So if we accept that usefulness is valuable, and truth is valuable in virtue of its utility, then we appear to have an argument for the value of true beliefs.

Unfortunately, the pragmatist gets the order of explanation wrong. Saying that 'true belief is valuable because it is useful' doesn't provide an argument for why 'useful belief is valuable in virtue of its truth'. One might as well say 'value is built into the definition of truth'. But we said right at the beginning that the kind of truth we were concerned with was a *mind-independent*, correspondence type of truth. Pragmatists, on the other hand, define truth *in terms of* utility, thus making it relativistic. William James gave a thought experiment about a man chasing a squirrel round a tree. Does the man go round the squirrel? Yes, relative to the ground north, south, east and west of the squirrel. No, relative to the squirrel itself. So it is with truth – something is true relative to whether it "leads us to interact with reality in a beneficial way."[166]

Utility → Truth

So why bring up pragmatism at all? Because there is pragmatist-style defence of practical beliefs worth considering. It goes like this. Let us accept that truth is mind-independent, unlike the pragmatist. Let us acknowledge once again that useful beliefs are valuable, in that they help us achieve our goals. But then let us claim that the *reason* useful beliefs help us achieve our goals is because, in most cases, *they are true*. This is the argument made by Lynch:

> *Consider my belief that the brakes in my pickup are in good operating order. This is a useful belief for me to have. Its usefulness consists in the fact that by believing that the brakes are working, I can make various small predictions in order to guide my future action (if I press the brake pedal, the truck will stop). But obviously it is useful for me to believe that my pickup's brakes are working only if they are working—if it is true that they are working, in other words.*[167]

We can think of endless other examples. The laws of physics are useful when designing an aeroplane, because when the aeroplane is built, *it will actually fly*. It is useful for me to believe that I have two tins in my cupboard *when I do in fact* have two tins in my cupboard – if I had none, I wouldn't be able to make dinner, and this belief would be useless. This is not to say that practical beliefs are *never* false – as we saw with the bus example, there are exceptional cases where a false belief can help us achieve our goals better than a true one. But normally, the argument goes, we are better able to achieve our goals when we have a true belief. In this way, truth is so obviously a prerequisite for having a useful belief that we almost forget its importance. This way of defending practical beliefs has several advantages. It doesn't beg the question we are trying to ask, by assuming a pragmatist theory of truth. We can accept a correspondence theory of truth where truth is mind-independent, and still explain the value we place on practical beliefs in terms of

[164] (James, 1975, p. 115).
[165] (Lynch, 2004, p. 65).
[166] Ibid. p.64
[167] Ibid. p.67.

that mind-independent truth. It's as simple as it is plausible: it is *because* my belief is *true* that it is useful; aka it is because my belief is true that I can achieve my eudaimonic goals.

iv) Exceptions which disprove the rule

The defender of truth must show that it is better to have true practical beliefs *in a clear majority of cases*, not merely that there is a 'pattern' or 'large proportion' of true practical beliefs which are better than false practical beliefs. It is my contention that this bar cannot be met. The problem is that useful beliefs are *not* necessarily true. Yes, a lot of beliefs are useful because they are true. But it is not the case that beliefs are useful *only* or even *often* because they are true. There is no necessary requirement for a useful belief to be true. And, as I will argue, there are many cases where beliefs are incredibly useful but false. Moreover, there are several good explanations for why beliefs can be useful to have without being true; i.e. why their value does not *result from* their truth/falsity.

Consider the following types of belief. Shortcuts, summaries, simplifications, cheats, approximations, estimations, predictions, selections, idealisations, exaggerations, and generalisations. All of these terms are general ways of grouping large swathes of the beliefs we have in everyday life. We use simplifications all the time. We are constantly making estimations and predications. We are *always* looking for shortcuts. Why do we employ beliefs which fall into these categories? Because they often help us in achieving our goals in the most efficient and least complicated manner. So the first point is that humans like simplicity and shortcuts. The second point is that simplicity and shortcuts are usually optimal things to look for to achieve one's goals – they conserve time, money and mental and physical energy. In short, the beliefs which fall into these categories are *useful* – they are the bread-and-butter beliefs we use in our day-to-day activities.

Yet while we *believe* all these practical beliefs are true, they are in fact often false. More importantly, they often give rise to false beliefs. A summary of an argument is not the same as the argument. Generalisations and approximations are – by definition – filled with holes. Idealisations and exaggerations are literally *super-reality*. Simplifications necessarily miss out on crucial detail. I am not claiming that a generalisation can't be true. I am claiming that while we believe we are accurately depicting reality, and that *this* is why our beliefs help us achieve our goals, in fact we often have limited and flawed depictions of reality, which nonetheless 'work well' for achieving our goals. We believe we have all the facts when actually we have a very limited viewpoint. We believe we are working with a detailed picture when actually we've simplified it massively. We believe we are precise when actually we estimate. We mistake an accurate summary with what is really a stereotype. In short, I want to argue that we can explain the success of many of our (false) beliefs at achieving our goals for reasons *other* than their truth.

Interestingly, this argument parallels those made about the *epistemic* value of truth, for example in the philosophy of science. Catherine Elgin argues that many of the most successful scientific theories are simply not true, even while they increase our understanding and actively lead us *towards the truth*. "Not only are [scientific theories] plagued with anomalies and outstanding problems, but where they are successful, they rely on laws, models, idealizations and approximations that diverge from the truth."[168] While Elgin's subject is scientific theory, she mentions in passing that even in "everyday discourse", we

[168] (Elgin, 2004, p. 113).

"convey information and advance understanding by means of sentences that are not literally true."[169] It is this idea that I want to explore here, with regards to the *eudaimonic* – not epistemic – value of truth.

Elgin calls the fictions employed in the process of doing science 'felicitous falsehoods', where they are felicitous because they contribute to one's understanding.[170] We might equally call the above examples of false practical beliefs *felicitous*, but felicitous in a different way. They are not valuable because they improve our understanding, as epistemic goals are, but because they *help us achieve our eudaimonic goals*, just as well as, if not better than, a true practical belief would. We will now turn to examining some of these examples in detail.

v) Examples

Some practical beliefs are nowhere near the truth – they bear no resemblance to the truth – they are just **downright false**. Nonetheless, we are able to live our lives just as well whether or not we employ them. I'm thinking of harmless old wives tales such as 'touch wood' and 'make a wish when you cut your birthday cake'. Some are even less 'superstitious', but simply come from ignorance, such as when people hold their phones and TV remotes up into the air or closer to the TV to 'get stronger signal', even though it makes no difference to the functioning of either device. A fantastic example I came across is the belief that carrots help you see in the dark. This widespread belief is in fact a myth, first promoted by the British Government during World War II, in an effort to promote local, easy-to-grow carrots as a "viable substitute for rationed items", which sounded particularly appealing at a time where there were nightly blackouts, to make it harder for German planes to hit targets on the ground.[171] It was highly effective, with British carrot production soaring by 300% throughout the war. The lesson is: sometimes, the truth of our beliefs does not matter; what matters is that they *work for us*. I suggest that many of our everyday activities – particularly complicated, new or technical ones – are permeated with downright false – but very helpful – beliefs not unlike these.

Other useful falsehoods that we believe are not 'downright' false, but are in some sense 'close' to the truth. What exactly 'close' means is difficult and complicated to explain, so I shall try to elucidate it through some examples. One kind of inaccuracy which is 'close' to the truth is our habit of constantly making rough **estimations** and **predictions** of things in our lives. While false, these are nonetheless *accurate enough* to help us, and make little or no difference to achieving our goals (sometimes they even help us, if getting a more accurate answer is laborious). A banal example is food in one's kitchen. I estimate that I have 3 courgettes in my fridge, when in fact I have 4. My belief is false. But it is *close to the truth*, so it doesn't matter. As long as I can estimate the number of vegetables I have at any time and be *mostly* accurate, or accurate within a certain degree of error, I will always have the vegetables I need to make dinner. I can, in fact, *always* be wrong about the number of vegetables I have, and the belief can be just as useful to me. If I am an investor, and I predict that the value of my portfolio will increase by 12% this year, and it increases by 10%, I am a good investor. What matters is not that my beliefs are true; it is sufficient that they are *almost* true, *most of the time*. Being a few percentage points off makes no difference to my well-being. We can think of endless examples of estimations and predictions that we make in everyday life that follow this pattern: predicting the weather at the weekend, the number of people expected to come to the party, when the next tube will arrive, or how many grams of flour I need for a baking recipe.

Similarly, we often **simplify** beliefs about ourselves and our lives to help us achieve our goals. By 'simplify' I mean things like ignoring certain features, being less careful to assign different weight to

[169] Ibid. p.114.
[170] Ibid. p.126.
[171] (Plackett, 2020).

different elements of a situation, and so on. Sometimes, we simplify because vagueness about reality isn't important; it only matters whether we are *roughly correct.* For example, I might say that I have three or four criteria for choosing a holiday destination, such as 'near the sea, not too expensive, has art galleries'. But it would be false to say that these three criteria spell out all my preferences. I simply choose three of the biggest and *treat them as if* they represent my entire thoughts on the matter, in order to save the time and hassle of researching and weighing up the huge number of options from my many different preferences. Equally, if I have spent several weeks looking for a flat, and I end up with a few left which looks promising, I might say to my flatmate: 'we have a choice: flat A or flat B'. This is a 'false choice' – literally as well as philosophically, as we could go on flat-hunting for weeks more; we may nonetheless come to believe this in order to achieve our goal: getting a flat.

Similar to simplification is the mental **categorisation** and **generalisation** of objects within a domain to help us achieve our goals, often by leaving out difficult cases or honing in on a specific segments of the domain that is most relevant. I mean this with regards to our life goals, but it parallels the effect in scientific theory:

> *[W]e can construe seemingly divergent phenomena as variants of a common scheme, or as perturbations of a regular pattern, or as deviations from a simple norm, we see them and their relations to one another in a new light. We can discern systematic interconnections that direct inspection of the facts would not reveal.*[172]

Elgin here wants to show that our fictional categorisations allow us to *understand* the world better. My point is that it helps us to *act* within the world more effectively. We believe all birds lay eggs, all wild mushrooms are poisonous, old people are always worse with technology, men are always stronger than women. Naturally, there are exceptions to all of these – that's what makes them generalisations and stereotypes. Yet we often genuinely believe these statements (and not the more complex, true versions of them), proven by the fact that we are often surprised when we come across the exceptional cases (some men really are weaker than some women..). Yet stereotypes can be very useful – they provide a 'rough picture' of the world which parallels the truth, so even if we are sometimes caught out, our generalised worldviews are accurate enough that they help us understand the world most of the time.

We also simplify things not because lack of information 'doesn't matter' but because it *doesn't matter to us*, because 'we don't need to know it' (to achieve our goals). This is true even if we could know it, and even if at some point in our lives we might *need* to know it. For example, when I go to the optician to get contact lenses, I get my vision assessed. The optician tells me that my eyesight has changed from -2.00 to -2.25. This makes sense to me, because during the eye test the optician puts various lenses into a pair of fancy optician's glasses, until the slightly blurry letters on the far wall became clear to me. Therefore, I believe that the lenses in the glasses we ended up with must have started with -2.00 and ended with -2.25, representing my eyesight. But in reality, because the optician was using *glasses*, not contact lenses, and because of the length of the room, actually the numbers were slightly different. The optician, understanding this, had factored this into their calculation before telling me my prescription. I might be curious to have the true belief, if given the opportunity (for example if the optician explained this to me), but in practice this accurate practical belief makes no difference to me at all. If anything, it just makes my life easier to have a simplified view of how an eye test works, even though it involves having a false belief. I submit that many of our beliefs about the world are like this one: beliefs about physics, economics, nutrition, meteorology, business, medicine, and so on.

Lastly, we live our lives based on inflated versions of reality or **ideals**, which act as a guide to inspire and direct us towards a given goal, even when such ideals do not exist or could not exist. For example, one

[172] (Elgin, 2004, p. 128).

may have the goal of being someone who is always kind, or always does the right thing. To achieve this goal, one needs to believe that it is possible to become this sort of person. However, not only does such a person not exist, but it would probably be very strange – if not unsettling – to be around them.[173] We actually like to see that someone has faults. Nonetheless, most people would agree that this is an ideal worth believing in, even if it helps us to become a *bit* more kind. In someone sense, we believe that such an ideal is possible (we wouldn't like to think that we are aspiring to something inconceivable). Ideals are essential beliefs to have to achieve our personal goals, and to judge others by, even though they do not reflect reality accurately.

vi) Explanations for this result

How can we explain the seeming tension between the prevalence of beneficial false beliefs? I have hinted at several explanations for why is it that useful beliefs are often false. I want to finish by examining a few of these in a bit more detail.

Truth is only needed by *some* people, at *some* times

We do not need to have accurate beliefs, when we can rely on experts to provide us with them when we need it, and – by definition – most people are not experts about most things. Further, there is often little reason to change this state of affairs: providing we know what we are expert about, and when to ask for help, we can get by just fine with many rough, often inaccurate beliefs. Moreover, false practical beliefs help give us *epistemic confidence*. We feel as if we 'know' about the world even when we don't know half as much as we think, and this epistemic confidence is necessary to a certain degree to give us the confidence to make life decisions, estimate risks, and have confidence in our own intelligence and abilities.[174] Conversely, we are able to live without feeling guilty, uncertain, or unable to make decisions. This is not to say that we should *never* be epistemically humble, and doubt our beliefs (and certainly this is lacking in several areas of belief, such as political or religious beliefs); nonetheless, the majority of our beliefs are not morally problematic, and accordingly inaccuracy matters less. One might respond that we do need to have true beliefs about important matters in our lives to make important decisions, such as which school to send our children to or what career path would best suit us. But even in these cases, we only need to have the correct information for a short period of time. How many times have you heard someone talking overconfidently about 'the facts' of some topic they studied at school 20 years ago, or their experiences in Spain when they visited in their 20s? We are content with, and can get by with, only delving into the detail every once in a while, or when we care to do so. Sometimes the details matter; a lot of the time, they do not.

Epistemic Limitations

Another reason we can get away with (and benefit from) so many false beliefs is because *we are accustomed to doing so*, and the reason for this is because we are often not able to access the resources needed to get accurate beliefs about things. Either that, or we are not able to find the time or muster the effort to check that our beliefs are accurate. There are a vast number of things one *could* have accurate beliefs about, which we come across throughout our lives. And even if the evidence was sitting in front of us, it would take a monumental effort to recall and consider all of it in each possible instance. As a result, we reserve the effort for a few beliefs, and suffice with estimations and assumptions for the rest. For

[173] (Wolf, 1982).
[174] C.f. chapter II.

example, for almost any subject you can think of, there is a set of (mostly true) beliefs about that subject, as held by experts, and there is a set of (often false) beliefs about that subject, as held by ordinary people. More often than not, having a basic outline of complex topics is *more than satisfactory* for achieving our everyday goals, even if it involves false beliefs. So none of this strikes me as necessarily a bad thing – as the above examples demonstrate, most of these estimates are either harmless (a false belief is as good as a true one), or because they save us effort, actually *better* at helping us get through life, and achieve our everyday goals (a false belief is better than a true one). In either case, having true practical beliefs is not consistently or reliably better.

True enough

Lastly, I take many of the above examples (particularly generalisations, simplifications, estimations and predictions) to exemplify another instance of a common theme throughout this paper, that a false belief which is 'close' to the truth can be as good as, if not better than, a true one. Elgin refers to this phenomenon when she argues that scientific theories only have to be '*true enough'* to be useful at gaining understanding in science. "My point is rather that epistemic acceptability turns not on whether a sentence is true, but on whether it is *true enough* - that is, on whether it is *close enough to the truth*. 'True enough' obviously has a threshold."[175] This is the same phenomenon we have been considering: just as theoretical beliefs only need to be 'true enough', so do our practical beliefs with regards to their effectiveness at achieving our everyday life goals.

vii) Objections

Belief vs Epistemic Acceptance

Elgin explains our seemingly contradictory acceptance of falsehoods while claiming to pursue the truth by distinguishing between *epistemic acceptance* and *belief*. Only the latter is intrinsically truth-directed, and she therefore explains that sometimes we can epistemically accept something without necessarily *believing* it to be true. This is a potential problem for my argument: if we do not *believe* the everyday things I claim we do, then my argument against the value of true belief doesn't hold water, but merely talks past it. But whether or not this is true regarding beliefs in the philosophy of science, I do not think it is true for non-epistemic practical beliefs. It seems obvious to me that we *really do* believe the generalisations that we use to achieve our evaluative goals in our day-to-day lives. There is good evidence for this. For example, stereotypes are constantly referred to in social settings and across the media, unquestioned. We are surprised when 'exceptions to the rule' are presented to us, indicating prior assent. And we are quick to accept that we were wrong (if with the grumbling 'strictly speaking, I guess you're right') when it is explained to us that our simplified beliefs are wrong. For these reasons, it is clear that we really *do* believe these practical beliefs, and therefore we really *do* employ false beliefs to get us through life and help us achieve our goals.

Understanding vs Truth

One objection is that I have not been charitable enough to the original view, namely that true beliefs are incredibly useful in everyday life. Surely it is obvious that having accurate beliefs about the world helps us in both our careers, our personal life, and our general understanding of 'the way the world works'. Any *detailed, reliable* understanding of this necessarily requires true beliefs, even if we do not need or do not

[175] (Elgin, 2004, p. 114).

claim to know very much, and so might employ the kinds of generalisations and approximations mentioned above.

I have one final explanation for why we think true beliefs are (more) valuable than they are, even in these kinds of cases. The explanation is that we conflate i) the need for truth with ii) the far more valuable need for *understanding*, when it comes to achieving our goals. Consider the career example. When someone says 'I want to *understand* the fashion business', they do not want to know all the names of every employee or the number of files for each business. They do not even want details about the styles and quantities and revenue of *lots* of fashion businesses – at best, there are decreasing marginal returns on gathering this information. While all of these facts are true beliefs 'about fashion businesses', they do not provide *an understanding of* the fashion business. This is because to understand fashion is to understand the *structure* of a fashion business, a few select aspects of each successful brand which makes each one unique, and which allows each business to boost its sales and most effectively market its latest styles. Hazlett defines understanding as "knowledge of causes and principles."[176] Elgin describes it as a "network of commitments", saying "It is not obvious that an aim of the network must be an aim of every, or indeed any, sentential node in the network. A goal of the whole need not be a goal of each of its parts."[177] My claim is that our approach to the nature of the world around us is much the same.[178] We want to uncover its 'structure' (to the extent that we think it has one) and to know whether each part of reality interacts with another. Merely having lots of true beliefs about something is of little or no use to us. This is one reason why truth is mistakenly thought to be valuable to us: because it is confused with understanding.

One might still object that understanding requires *some* true beliefs, even as instrumental means to achieve the end goal of understanding? I would respond that we are often misled into thinking that truth is significant because we fail to realise how complex and enormous a full analysis of the facts would actually be, and that when we seek to understand something, we fail to realise how *few* true beliefs are actually required. We are very good at gaining a great understanding of something with very little information. Take the example of getting to know someone (a colloquial way of saying 'understand that person'). There are almost infinite beliefs I could have about that person. But to *understand* them I really just need to be correct about very few beliefs, such as their age, job, gender, upbringing, residence and so on, because I can cross-reference with everything I know about people in general, and everything I know about those few facts I have ascertained about them already. Conversely, it would be odd, and more importantly, laborious and counterproductive, to check that all beliefs I have about that person are precisely accurate, in other words, to make *no assumptions* about them. Assumptions and estimations are precisely what allow us to form highly accurate 'first impressions' of a person. I may, for example, use a few true beliefs (mixed in with a swathe of assumptions) which I have gathered on a first date with someone to decide that I like them, and want to see them again. Further, the journey from this initial 'fact-finding' becomes less and less important, when I come to 'get to know (read: understand) them' better, so the value of truth has diminishing significance. Consider the case of studying economics, where one learns case studies. Endless reels of facts about particular businesses or recessions or government policies in the past. These are the true beliefs. But why do we use case studies? In order to gain an *understanding* of economics. To achieve this end goal, we actually require only a few true beliefs, i.e. in order to *understand how things are interconnected*, the effect of action A on scenario B, so that we can predict the future, analyse the present, and so on. These examples show two things. Firstly, the intuition that true practical beliefs help us achieve our goals can be partly explained instead by the role of understanding, not truth. Secondly, this matters

[176] (Hazlett, 2013, p. 22).
[177] (Elgin, 2004, p. 120).
[178] Even Lynch acknowledges this (Lynch, 2004, pp. 53-54).

because understanding only *partly* and to *small extent* is useful in virtue of its truth, in addition to the *kind* of beliefs in question.

Why does this matter?

A final objection to my argument might be: *why does this matter?* Suppose we accept that we often have beliefs that aren't true, but are nonetheless useful. Isn't this an unimportant thing to discover? Here are two reasons why this conclusion does matter.

1. '**Cynic's Worldview**'. We are familiar with the worldview of the cynic, not in the philosophical sense, but the everyday sense, someone who is wishes to 'party-poop' everything we believe which isn't strictly accurate, to be perfectionist about the things we say, even it what we do believe works just as well as (or even better than) the truth. I'm thinking of the people who love to correct grammatical errors, to be *overly* precise with facts and figures, to take pains to analyse, remember and point out all the details (especially when you have made a mistake!). There is a patronising undercurrent to the cynical attitude, a sense that they believe everyone else is stupid to be so careless. But in actual fact, if my argument is successful, and if we assume that it is not 'stupid' to want to live a flourishing life, then there is nothing stupid about having the kinds of beliefs we have been considering. There is nothing *bad* about not measuring the precise amount of flour in a recipe, or 'grammatically wrong' language, or misremembering precise dates or times, or using crude references to refer to things one cannot remember. While these beliefs may often be false, they *get the job done.* In attempting to criticise these commonplace idiosyncrasies, the cynic has no ground – insofar as well-being is concerned, anyway – to stand on. Put another way, what my argument shows is that the cynic is right – and we are wrong – but that *being right doesn't matter.* The cynic unwaveringly values the truth; the rest of us realise that there is not always a need to do so.

2. **Unorthodox.** To the suggestion that there is something 'trivially true' about my conclusion, I would say the following. It may seem obvious that many of our beliefs are beneficial yet false, but this is not *obvious.* As I said at the start, it is *not* obvious to most people that practical beliefs do not normally need to be true – indeed it is the mainstream prima facie viewpoint that they *do* need to be true, if not all the time then certainly in the vast majority of cases.[179] The idea that true beliefs are necessary for achieving one's practical goals, is the strongest argument to defend the view that truth normally matters, as it seems uncontroversial that false beliefs lead to errors in practical reasoning and action. If I have persuaded you that the truth is at least far less valuable than what common wisdom holds, therefore, then this is a significant shift in mindset.

viii) Conclusion

True practical beliefs are eudaimonically valuable in virtue of their being true: this is the strongest argument in defence of truth. Are they valuable in a clear majority of cases for this reason? I have argued that they are not. Sometimes the truth is useful, but often it is unnecessary, and evidence from our everyday practical beliefs indicates that being *true enough* is often enough in practise. This and several

[179] (Foley, 2012, p. 61), (Foley, 1987, pp. 223-224), (Craig, 1990, pp. 132-133), (Lynch, 2004, p. 16), (Kvanvig, 2003, p. 30), (Zagzebski, 2003), Horwich 2006 p.350, c.f. (Hazlett, 2013, p. 111).

other explanations for this phenomenon make this evidence even more plausible. The upshot: that the process of *achieving our goals* does not necessarily require valuing the truth. The two are independent, and indeed we might reasonably say that we should *expect* the value of utility and truth to diverge because of this: "why should we think that the 'straightforward' [accurate] route to a practical solution…is superior, from the perspective of wellbeing, to the route …. involving biases and rationalisations?... Which route is better, the 'epistemic' [true] route or the pleasant [false] route?"[180] The defender of truth inclines towards the former; I believe that the evidence often points towards the latter.

VI. Philosophical Truths

i) Introduction

If we can say anything about philosophers in general, it's that they love truth. Someone who purported to be a philosopher, but lacked a passion for truth, would be a fraud.[181]

[H]aving true beliefs is part of one's natural end, living a life of eudaimonia. Good cognitive activity contributes to the natural end of human life in the same way as good moral activity.[182]

The practical beliefs we considered in the previous chapter were those beliefs which useful, action-guiding means to achieving our (ultimately) eudaimonically good goals, whether cooking pasta, staying healthy, or building an aircraft. The one end goal we did not look at, was the goal of *knowledge itself.* The thought is that knowledge is eudaimonically valuable, as an end in itself – knowledge contributes to living a flourishing life. However, where the end goal is knowledge itself, true belief is no longer a *'means to an end'*, but a *necessary constitutive feature*, because, as most epistemologists accept, knowledge involves true belief.[183] Therefore, it follows that true belief is eudaimonically valuable, in virtue of its connection to knowledge. To maintain our focus on true belief instead of knowledge, we can call these beliefs *epistemic beliefs.*

Now, strictly speaking, if knowledge is always eudaimonically valuable, then all true beliefs would always be necessarily constitutively valuable. However, in chapter I we saw blatant exceptions to this kind of broad-brush argument – pointless 'trivial' truths are not eudaimonically valuable, even if they are *epistemically* valuable. So there are clearly cases where epistemic and eudaimonic value come apart. Moreover, the reason previous chapter have grouped together types of true beliefs under their own headings, is because their value is predominantly explained by things *other* than knowledge *per se,* even if knowledge added something to their value: self-awareness, beliefs about the beloved, about society, and about our everyday goals. This chapter is different in that it will examine the intuition that *some* true

[180] (Hazlett, 2013, p. 67).
[181] (Hazlett, 2013, p. 2).
[182] (Zagzebski, 2003, p. 140).
[183] E.g. (BonJour, 2010, p. 23), (Foley, 1987, pp. 8-11), (Kvanvig, 2003, p. xii), c.f. (Hazlett, 2013, p. 131).

beliefs are *primarily* eudaimonically valuable, not for any of these reasons, but because *they provide us with knowledge*. Our interest in truths in physics, philosophy and human nature are often and most easily explained, not because they help us in our day to day lives, but primarily because they provide us with *knowledge*. Thus, this chapter asks the question, *to what extent is the epistemic value of truth also a source of eudaimonic value.*[184]

One immediate problem with this question – fascinating though it would be to explore in detail – is that there is not space for us to consider whether and to what extent each of the various fields of knowledge that humanity has explored provide us with eudaimonic value. We could easily have a chapter on scientific beliefs, historical beliefs, psychological beliefs, and so on. Instead, I will limit the domain to just one kind of epistemic belief: *philosophical beliefs.* However, the general question should be kept in mind throughout what follows, for we can make significant progress in answering the general question about epistemic beliefs, by considering the narrower one. Thus, what follows will effectively be an attempt to answer some of the most important metaphilosophical questions: is it part of our human nature that we flourish when we are pursuing knowledge? Do we often seek truths for their own sake, even if not all the time? How deep-rooted is the intellectual curiosity which anthropologists and philosophers often hail to be essential to homo sapiens? Several times in this paper have sharply distinguished epistemic value from eudaimonic value; in this chapter I want to examine the extent to which a belief's being valuable in the former sense, is also the reason it is valuable in the latter sense, through the lens of philosophical belief.[185]

The eudaimonic appeal of epistemic beliefs

ii) Curiosity

Aristotle infamously proclaimed at the start of the *Metaphysics* that "*All men by nature desire to know*."[186] Although this sounds like an endorsement of the value of epistemic beliefs in general, Aristotle did not mean knowledge in general but rather knowledge of the "fundamental causes or principles in metaphysics": i.e. all men desire *philosophical knowledge.*[187] And if we accept that true belief is an intrinsic part of knowledge, then the thought goes that all men desire true philosophical beliefs. Applied to our restricted domain, the claim is that:

For any subject S, and for any proposition that p that answers a philosophical question in ethics and metaphysics, S wants to have a true belief that p or a true belief that not-p.

This claim point could equally be made more generally, with respect to scientific, historical or sociological beliefs. The basic idea is that there is something in our human nature, our 'essence', which desires knowledge for its own sake, not for any other practical end. Colloquially, we might say 'humans are naturally curious'. This is the general descriptive claim.

This is quickly followed by the general prescriptive claim, that if it is part of our nature to desire true belief, then we *ought* to seek the truth, because possessing the truth gives us pleasure and makes our lives more fulfilling. In this sense epistemic beliefs can be said to be instrumentally eudaimonically valuable, in that they contribute to our well-being, or even are a *constitutive part* of our wellbeing. The general idea is that if we *want* something as part of our human nature, then this is a good reason, at least prima facie, for

[184] C.f. (Hazlett, 2013, p. 27).
[185] C.f. (Hazlett, 2013, p. 21), (Baril, 2010, p. 238), (Zagzebski, 2003, p. 141).
[186] (Aristotle, 2005), *980a20.*
[187] (Hazlett, 2013, p. 22).

thinking that it is eudaimonically valuable. Of course, there may be exceptions – where there are conflicting natural desires, or desires which are bad for us in the long term, etc. But the *love of knowledge*, if indeed we have it, seems harmless in a way that other things we natural desire (sex, sugar, or adrenaline) may not be. It does not come with obvious side effects, and unlike many of our desires, lends itself to long-term fulfilment, rather than short-term pleasure. For these reasons, many have thought our natural curiosity for knowledge provides a plausible reason for thinking that having true epistemic beliefs improves our lives as a whole, sometimes praising this disposition under the name of *intellectual virtue*.[188]

Additionally, the *process* of 'uncovering' the truth is itself eudaimonically valuable, as any academic will tell you. Admittedly, there are many different projects that one might pursue which are equally fulfilling, but nonetheless pursuing knowledge is one of them. This is another way in which philosophical or scientific beliefs have been thought to be instrumentally eudaimonically valuable, and it also explains why we 'seek answers' in regardless of the practical utility the answers provide us with. If we set ourselves the task of investigating some particular field for its own sake, the reason is simply that 'it is in the job description' to seek these answers; their value as such is provided by the value of 'being a good intellectual'.[189]

iii) Epistemic Beliefs and Understanding

There is also a specific reason why true philosophical beliefs might have eudaimonic value, concerning the significance of *understanding* over true belief, that we considered in the last chapter. I argued in the last chapter that one of the reasons we mistakenly value true belief so highly is because we confuse it with *understanding.* Understanding, which is relative to our goals and involves knowing a few select truths such as 'basic' and 'connecting' principles, is often very valuable to us. But understanding a subject x only requires having a few true beliefs about x – far less than what we would be interested in if having true beliefs were normally valuable.

We can now add to this explanation. For it turns out that true philosophical beliefs are *precisely* the kind of select beliefs that one needs to have in order to *understand* many topics. Understanding is all about fundamentals: it requires knowing the basic principles about the world and the way we think, which *ground* or *give rise to* other many other beliefs. Philosophical beliefs are clearly fundamental in exactly these ways. Philosophy asks whether and what actions are right and wrong. It asks whether and how our beliefs are justified. It questions whether we have free will. It considers the principles governing our knowledge of the external world. It demands valid arguments for asserting that there is a God. It is not hard to see how these questions are relevant to those things we want to *understand* about the world, in day-to-day life. For example, if I want understanding on the subject of *what I ought to* do, I might think about what I am trying to achieve this month, or this year. I might think about what parts of my life make it worth living, and what projects I could pursue to increase my well-being. It is not far until I am led to consider what principles should guide my life as a whole: philosophical truths. Thus, given that understanding requires knowing fundamental things about a topic, we are very likely to encounter, and depend on, having true philosophical beliefs. In short, philosophical truth is instrumentally valuable with respect to understanding.

[188] (Baril, 2010, p. 228), (Hume, 2007 [1739], pp. 287-288), (Lynch, 2009a, pp. 225-226), (Lynch, 2004, p. 130), (Zagzebski, 1996, p. 174), (Zagzebski, 2003, p. 137), (Sosa, 2001, p. 49), c.f. (Hazlett, 2013, p. 25), (Horwich, 2006, p. 352), (Brady, 2009, p. 268).
[189] (Kvanvig, 2008).

But why is this *epistemically* significant question (how best to gain understanding) *eudaimonically* significant for us? Well, because while epistemic and eudaimonic value are independent, it is also the case that they are related. There is clearly something satisfying about *understanding* the world, being able to make sense of things, to situate oneself within the world more accurately. We might say that the true beliefs involved in many forms of understanding are a specific kind of philosophical true beliefs, and are both valuable in the same way, not as a means to some other goal, but because they themselves make our lives more fulfilling. Understanding is also instrumentally valuable, if it helps us reason better and make better choices in our life decisions. Either way, the argument goes, understanding has eudaimonic value, and philosophical truths are instrumentally valuable with respect to understanding, therefore, philosophical truths have eudaimonic value.

Why we don't care about the truth

My objection to the lines of argument we have just heard can be summed up simply as: *they don't apply to most people*. If we really valued philosophical truths, most of us would pursue epistemic projects, even if they were very difficult (or very easy).[190] We would accept the truth, no matter how distasteful. We would seek the truth, even if it made little or no difference to our lives.[191] But the vast majority of people do not. Instead, for all these reasons, most people are not naturally disposed to be curious about the truth, but are either indifferent to it, or find it positively difficult and distasteful. The remainder of this chapter will examine the main reasons why I think that most of us lack the Aristotelian disposition, and why philosophical truths are not, therefore, eudaimonically valuable.

Moreover, I will argue that resistance to counterintuitive and radical, sceptical philosophical truths could demonstrate that *even among intellectuals,* the value of true belief is easily outweighed by other factors. Factors such as the appeal of common sense beliefs over difficult or distasteful conclusions, and the desire to *pursue* the truth, rather than to actually have it. The combination of these alternative explanations for our behaviour shows that even among the minority who have Aristotelian proclivities, there is good reason to think that the truth is not as valued as it initially seems. In turn, the case for valuing these true beliefs becomes weaker still.

iv) Truth is difficult

That most people don't care about philosophical truths, and in fact, most epistemic truths, seems to be demonstrably obvious to everyone except those who are interested in them. Despite the initial plausibility of the Aristotelian characterisation of human nature, it seems obvious that if you were to go up to a random person on the street and ask 'have you ever thought about whether you have free will?', or 'what principles do you suggest we use to decide what actions are right and wrong?', or 'what arguments do you have for holding your particular aesthetic / political / religious beliefs?', you would be laughed at, if not angrily rebuffed. Most people are simply not curious to answer these questions, and some people are positively

[190] I.e. *even if* every opportunity was given to people to learn philosophy, I do not think they would do so, and nor would they benefit from doing so.
[191] Horwich rightly notes that "we display our attachment to this ideal [of truth] by our curiosity, by mounting investigations by bothering to acquire further evidence, by acting to increase the range and certainty of our beliefs." (Horwich, 2006, p. 355).

irritated when asked to defend their views, even though these questions are manifestly of deep epistemic value.[192] (For what it's worth, it strikes me that asking 'what were the main causes of the French revolution?', or 'why is the sun's atmosphere layer so much hotter than the sun's surface?', or 'are there an infinite number of primes?' would receive a similar response).

One simple explanation for our lack of curiosity is the immense difficulty of attaining true beliefs about such questions. It's all very well saying that intellectual pursuit is fulfilling and rewarding, but only if you have the *intellectual capability* to make such a pursuit viable. For one thing, philosophy requires a huge amount of background information, which most people never had have the time or opportunity to acquire. But even setting that aside, it requires a very high IQ to be able to think about difficult and highly abstract questions, to come up with arguments and to form objections, each to an increasingly rich and sophisticated array of contributors. In philosophy, the problem is especially difficult, as there are few new fields, and most of the 'old questions' remain, making it increasingly difficult for new contributors to come up with new answers. As a result, if you are not already at the intellectual level of a scientist or a philosopher, you are unlikely to be 'curious' about any of the 'significant' epistemic questions that they are curious about. Even if one is mildly curious about such questions, it is easy to be overwhelmed by the complexity of the arguments, or the amount of information one needs to know.

Moreover, despite what Aristotle claimed, philosophical beliefs can be highly counter-intuitive, even for those 'naturally disposed' to thinking in abstract ways at a high intellectual level.[193] It is not intuitive for most people to ask whether an animal could have the same moral status as your newborn baby, or ask whether numbers exist. Even philosophers struggle with philosophical questions. Sceptical problems are a prime example. Suppose that it is true that we cannot justify our belief that there is an external world independent of our perceptions. There is a legitimate cognitive issue of *how to comprehend that*, given that it goes against our every instinct. After defending external world scepticism, Hume remarks:

> *[W]e can humour our reason for a moment, when it becomes troublesome and solicitous; and yet upon its least negligence or inattention, can easily return to our vulgar and natural notions. Accordingly we find, that philosophers neglect not this advantage; but immediately upon leaving their closets, mingle with the rest of mankind in those exploded opinions, that our perceptions are our only objects, and continue identically and uninterruptedly the same in all their interrupted appearances.*[194]

I contend that our dispositions often work *against*, not for, philosophical contemplation. If trained academics struggle with philosophical truths, it is not obvious that they could add value to the lives of everyday people.

v) Truth is distasteful

I have argued that few people have a natural curiosity for philosophical truths. Another explanation for this is that they can be downright *repugnant*. I use this word deliberately to describe the kinds of truths which are not just counterintuitive, but are so contrary to our natural intuitions, that they can be deeply unsettling.[195] As a result, they are often very difficult to accept, for intellectuals and non-intellectuals alike. Of course, there are plenty of unpleasant truths, which are incredibly *useful*. Philosophical truths are often not like this – they can be just plain unpleasant. Unfortunately, examples of distasteful truths range from controversial to highly controversial, simply because philosophers disagree about what *is* true.

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[192] (Baril, 2010, p. 221), (Hazlett, 2013, p. 24).
[193] Probably more so than other kinds of epistemic beliefs.
[194] (Hume, 2007 [1739], p. 143).
[195] I imagine this is the case with other epistemic beliefs as well, but it is particularly problematic in philosophy.

Nonetheless, I take it that no matter your philosophical perspective, there are *some* examples to be found. For my part, examples include the view that many animals have a similar moral status to humans, or that no single human life can be more important than two human lives, such that in the classic thought experiment, we always ought to save two people over our wife from drowning. Other more radical options include the belief that we are not free to choose, that we cannot be certain that the external world exists, that there is no reason to do good over bad, or that humans are fundamentally selfish or flawed such that they cannot or will fail to do what is right. If any of these are true, they seem very disturbing indeed.[196] Many people find conclusions like these very upsetting, even though, in my view at least, many of them are true. And it is their being *true* that makes them so distasteful, rather than the mere concept itself. Consider a film which portrayed some group of humans as lacking all sense of common decency, or behaving in an extremely selfish manner: this would not be nearly as distasteful as if it were true in the real world. It is the fact that it might be really *true* that human nature takes this form which makes having the belief so disturbing, and we would much prefer to think that all these propositions are false. This is one reason why philosophical beliefs are less eudaimonically valuable than they seem: we might say, because 'the truth hurts'.[197]

Once again, the phenomenon of repugnant truths provides a good explanation for why sceptical conclusions are not taken seriously. Naturally, sceptical conclusions could face strong counterarguments, and the sceptics could be wrong. Our intuitions would accord with the truth. Alternatively, it could be the case that there are very strong arguments for scepticism, and the sceptics are correct. In this case, our intuitions would not accord with the truth. The tensions seem relevant in light of the fact that, even though there are fantastically strong arguments for sceptical conclusions, surveys show that very few philosophers believe any of these conclusions. For example, PhilPapers surveys show that 26% are moral anti-realists, 11% believe we do not have free will, and less than 5% believe in scepticism about the external world.[198] If, like me, you believe the arguments for scepticism are convincing, we can make much better sense of this once we realise that our natural dispositions to endorse these harsh philosophical truths are very weak, and towards our natural instincts, very strong. We all *instinctively* believe these sceptical conclusions to be false. The difference is that philosophers are forced to grapple with the fact that there are few, if any, strong arguments showing them to be so, while the rest of the world are content with never considering the question in the first place. Distastefulness weighs strongly against any initial eudaimonic value that truth may have on such beliefs.

vi) Makes no difference

A third explanation for why most people don't care about philosophical truths is that they don't make a meaningful difference to their lives.[199] This response is so common that it is a constant joke within philosophy departments: most people think philosophy 'makes no difference to one's life'. Is this a reasonable view? Not necessarily. There may be reason to think that philosophy can and does have an impact on people's lives. However, it is a big jump to say that it is therefore better for most people to study or read about it, or any other branch of academia for that matter, to achieve the end of living a flourishing life. It is precisely because intellectual pursuit is the pursuit of knowledge *in of itself*, not because it helps us achieve some secondary eudaimonic goal, that it is hard to make a eudaimonic case for it. Add to that the fact that it is immensely difficult and occasionally distasteful, and that there are plenty of more

[196] You may think all of these are false. Many people don't. I think they are probably all true. It does not matter which of these views you hold providing that you accept that this *type* of belief exists.
[197] C.f. (Lynch, 2004) Ch 4.
[198] (Bourget & Chalmers, 2023).
[199] The same could be said for countless questions and debates across academia.

fulfilling and much easier eudaimonic projects that one can spend their time doing, and there seems to be no case whatsoever.

Moreover, even for philosophers themselves, the truth does not seem to matter very much. Scepticism, again, a good example of this. It seems as if the philosopher, as much as anyone else, can get by without having knowledge or justification for the external world. Even if true, then, it seems to make no difference to their lives. The same is true in meta-ethics. Mackie wrote that our "first order judgements are not necessarily affected by the truth or falsity of a second order view", even while defending one of the most radical sceptical views in moral philosophy.[200] Hare posed the following thought experiment to demonstrate the seeming insignificance of Mackie's argument:

Think of one world into whose fabric values are objectively built; and think of another in which those values have been annihilated. And remember that in both worlds the people in them go on being concerned about the same things - there is no difference in the "subjective" concern which people have for things, only in their "objective" value. Now I ask, "What is the difference between the states of affairs in these two worlds?" Can any answer be given except "None whatever"?'[201]

Making a real practical difference to our day-to-day lives has to be one of the main reasons why something is eudaimonically valuable. Hare's acid test shows that many philosophical truths do not provide such a reason. If we are uncertain whether a sceptical conclusion is true or false, and this uncertainty has no effect on our lives, then this surely shows us that *many of truths we think are the most important, are in fact value neutral* with respect to our lives. Or better phrased: if a false belief works just as well as a true belief, then the truth has nothing special to offer us. The quagmire we call 'arguments for scepticism' indicates this is precisely the kind of situation the intellectual finds themselves in.

vii) The Intellectual's Bias

At this point, one might object: surely *some people* have incredibly fulfilling lives pursuing philosophical truths? Surely *some* forms of philosophy are immune to these problems of difficulty, distastefulness and indifference? The above explanations do not seem to address the positive value that philosophical truths clearly *can* have. Some people genuinely do value understanding and truth – not just philosophical truths but all the epistemic truths which humans have come across.

Nothing I have said so far precludes this from being true. Some people would and *do* benefit from having true epistemic beliefs, in the sense that they subjectively value knowledge more than most people. But my point is that this kind of person is the exception rather than the rule. Moreover, I would suggest that this kind of person is actually quite a strange and abnormal kind of person, simply in virtue of the fact that they are in a small minority.[202] To complete the picture, I want to spend a moment considering what it is that causes this strange phenomenon, a phenomenon I call the *intellectual's bias.*

By intellectual bias I mean the curious proclivity that some people feel that *it is always better to get to the bottom of things*, to figure things out, to know the answer, to justify their beliefs, and so on. People with this proclivity are more curious than most people, and they are more eager than most people to follow through on their curiosity, and defend their conclusions against others'. In short, they desire to 'be

[200] (Mackie, 1977, p. 22).
[201] (Hare, 1972).
[202] I consider myself among these!

right'.[203] This should not be surprising, since people tend to desire doing the things they are good at. This initial disposition, as we saw earlier, is greatly increased by environmental factors, such as choosing to *study* the subjects they have a proclivity to be interested in, which in turn leads to being surrounded by other individuals with a similar proclivity, and being constantly tested to defend their beliefs further in an academic setting. Hume makes this point at the beginning of the *Enquiry*:

> *And though these researches may appear painful and fatiguing, it is with some minds as with some bodies, which being endowed with vigorous and florid health, require severe exercise, and reap a pleasure from what, to the generality of mankind, may seem burdensome and laborious.*[204]

In short, we can acknowledge this curious disposition which provides fulfilment to some, while still concluding that "the generality of mankind" do not feel motivated to 'find all the answers' as the intellectual does. At best, to deny this latter point is to neglect the "vast variety of inclinations and pursuits among our species."[205] At worst, it is plain intellectual elitism, where those trained and suited to philosophical reflection disparagingly advise everyone else that they would benefit from 'paying more attention' to truth in their lives.[206] Moreover, the intellectual bias may explain why this discussion needs to be written. For curiosity about truth is effectively a precondition for becoming an intellectual,[207] and given that only intellectuals write about philosophy (including on the value of truth), it is unsurprising that almost all the literature on this subject defends the value of truth.[208]

viii) The Hunt for Truth

Lastly, even among intellectuals, there are still several factors which outweigh the value of truth, in particular, its *pursuit*. Of course, difficulty, distastefulness and indifference are far less of an issue for the academic, who is cognitively well equipped and naturally more interested in truth. However, academics are not infallible, and there is good evidence to show that even those in academia are affected by cognitive biases, and that academics are disproportionately left-wing.[209] Another factor which is often valued more than truth itself, and is mistaken for it, is the *pursuit* of truth. By this I mean the intellectual 'back and forth', the adrenaline rush to make overcome difficult problems, to 'win' an argument, or even make the strongest points. It is often the "passion and pursuit" of truth which we take pleasure and fulfilment from, not truth itself.[210] Hume compares this pursuit of truth to hunting an animal:

> *[T]here cannot be two passions more nearly resembling each other, than those of hunting and philosophy, whatever disproportion may at first sight appear betwixt them. 'Tis evident, that the pleasure of hunting consists in the action of the mind and body; the motion, the attention, the difficulty, and the uncertainty. 'Tis evident likewise, that these actions must be attended with an idea of utility, in order to their having any effect upon us. A man of the greatest fortune, and the farthest remov'd from avarice, tho' he takes a pleasure in hunting after patridges and pheasants, feels no satisfaction in shooting crows and magpies;*

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[203] The Intellectual's Bias could be interpreted as a slightly embellished, narrower and updated version of the disposition towards curiosity which Aristotle discusses.
[204] (Hume, 2007 [1748], p. 7).
[205] (Hume, 1985 [1775]).
[206] Sartre's waiter example from chapter I, for example, which accuses workers of self-deception, has been accused of such elitism c.f. (Phillips, 1981, p. 31).
[207] In fact, I would go so far as to say that there are some in academia who lack this quality, and as such lack an essential quality for being a genuine philosopher, whatever else that might mean.
[208] C.f. (Lynch, 2004, p. 15), (Williams, 2002, p. 60), (Zagzebski, 2003, p. 141), (Zagzebski, 1996, p. 276), (Foley, 2012, p. 61), (DePaul, 2010), (Craig, 1990), (Frankfurt, 2006), (Sher, Forthcoming), (Blackburn, 2018), (Horwich, 2006).
[209] (Pinker, 2021), (Carl, 2017).
[210] (Hume, 2007 [1739], p. 228).

and that because he considers the first as fit for the table, and the other as entirely useless. Here 'tis certain, that the utility or importance of itself causes no real passion, but is only requisite to support the imagination; and the same person, who over-looks a ten times greater profit in any other subject, is pleas'd to bring home half a dozen woodcocks or plovers, after having employ'd several hours in hunting after them.[211]

A target and its pursuit are, naturally, not the same thing, as demonstrated by the fact that if there were no hunt, then far fewer people would care to pursue the truth.[212] Indeed, Hume goes so far as to say that we merely *imagine* that truth is valuable, as a source of amusement:

Human life is so tiresome a scene, and men generally are of such indolent dispositions, that whatever amuses them, tho' by a passion mixt with pain, does in the main give them a sensible pleasure. And this pleasure is here encreas'd by the nature of the objects, which being sensible, and of a narrow compass, are enter'd into with facility, and are agreeable to the imagination.[213]

We do not have to accept this latter claim, to see the general problem for the intellectual's love of truth: we conflate the value of *pursuing* the truth, with truth itself. It is striking that one of the main arguments we began the chapter with was that it is the *project of pursuing truth* which is eudaimonically valuable. Hume's point is that this is distinct from, and does not contribute to, the eudaimonic value of (philosophical) truth itself.[214] Once again, the utterly independent and pure nature of truth, and the far more fulfilling nature of other activities, shows its eudaimonic value to be far less than we initially perceived, even those with the requisite dispositions.

A final, more general point. For the above reasons, it strikes me that the intellectual bias is also an explanation for some of the resistance to the kind of arguments made in this paper. In some sense it is the philosopher's *job* to be interested in truth, and as we have seen, they are likely to be far more interested in truth than a non-intellectual. Add to that the fact that this entire paper defends the contrary view – that truth is far less valuable than we normally think, and it becomes likely that those most likely to critique my argument are also the people most likely to read it. It is not a coincidence, it seems to me, that it was Aristotle – a man educated in Plato's Academy and philosophy tutor to kings – who thought that 'all men desire to know'. I am not saying that there are not good objections to my arguments, or that the intellectual's bias cannot be overcome. But I am saying that the intellectual one of hardest to convince that that the truth lacks value.

ix) Conclusion

The above arguments explain how and why the intellectual curiosity that Aristotle praised is a strikingly rare phenomenon. I have argued that features of truth, particularly intellectual truths, are such that for most of us, most of the time, they are not naturally appealing. Given that we *do not* care much for the truth, we must still ask: *should we?* My answer has been that, for most people, we should not. This follows in the same way as Aristotle's curiosity argument. If it is part of our human nature to be intellectually curious, then intellectual truth has eudaimonic valuable; if not, it doesn't. If philosophical truths are usually

[211] Ibid. pp.228-229.
[212] (Hume, 2007 [1739], p. 287). Occasionally the inverse scenario applies, namely that 'spontaneous' truths can be interesting, *because they are spontaneous* (not because they are true) c.f. (Brady, 2009, p. 280).
[213] (Hume, 2007 [1739], p. 289).
[214] I would suggest that the same phenomenon applies across many kinds of truth, certainly for all epistemic beliefs.

difficult, distasteful, rarely revered, and make little or no difference to our lives, *we should not expect their eudaimonic value to be great.* The limitations of our cognitive faculties, our ability to form beliefs, our predisposition to believe certain things and not others, our subjective propensity to take pleasure from gaining knowledge; all of these factors we should expect to affect the question of whether truth makes our lives more fulfilling. Having looked many of these, I conclude that the 'appeal of knowledge' is not widespread enough to support the claim that truth normally matters. Nevertheless, it will always charm a select few of us, even if it seems bizarre to everyone else.

VII. Value of Belief

The conflict between "epistemic" and eudaimonic value is a pervasive feature of ordinary human life.[215]

i) Recap

This paper has presented a series of negative arguments in answer to the question *'Does the truth matter?'*. In chapter I, we saw that any view defending the idea that truth is *always* valuable, even if defeasibly, is prone to strong counterexamples. There are plenty of uncontroversially *unimportant, useless* or even *morally distasteful* truths which provide us with no eudaimonic value whatsoever. In chapters II-VI, we considered the much more plausible claim that true belief, while not always valuable, was *normally*, in the vast majority of cases, indefeasibly valuable. After considering several types of belief, my conclusion is that even this is too strong – there are simply too many examples from our everyday lives where the truth simply does not matter, or makes our lives *worse*.

To what extent, therefore, does the truth matter? The answer is, not that much. That is, truth is valuable only *sometimes* (not normally, and certainly not always), and *defeasibly* so (inconclusively, and dependent on a host of other factors).[216] *Sometimes,* the truth improves our lives; a lot of the time, our lives go better when we disregard it entirely. This conclusion matters for two reasons. Firstly, because it strongly argues against the prevailing view. As we have seen, the vast majority of philosophers, and indeed common intuition, holds that the truth is one of those few ubiquitous, gold-plated, untouchably-valuable things, such that it has profound, fundamental eudaimonic value, in the vast majority of cases. If my arguments are successful, I have shown that the value of truth is in fact been systematically and significantly exaggerated. The truth is, at most, *sometimes* valuable; it is not obvious that, and should not be our default position to claim that, having true beliefs will improve our lives. The second reason my conclusion matters is that my arguments reveal just how *independent* the value of truth is from the value of well-being, of living a flourishing life. Pursuing the truth all the time is simply *not* a sure route to living a flourishing life, for most people. As we saw in chapters II-IV, when it comes to beliefs about ourselves, those we love, and beliefs about society, it is clear that false beliefs often *improve* our lives. Even the claim that the truth helps us achieve our goals, is not obviously true, as we saw in chapter V. As for our natural 'intellectual curiosity', chapter VI showed that, while this can be valuable for some, most people are not interested.

[215] (Hazlett, 2013, p. 107).
[216] In this respect my conclusion is similar to that of Allan Hazlett (but, so far as I can tell, no one else); c.f. (Hazlett, 2013, p. 125).

Demonstrating the independence of eudaimonia and truth is important, because it can help us focus on what *really matters* when it comes to promoting well-being; it shows us that we are often justified in ignoring the truth of our beliefs, and focusing on pursuing other things, such as love, community and psychological well-being.

ii) Explanations and Alternatives

How do we explain the widespread view that, contrary to my conclusion, the truth is very eudaimonically valuable? Throughout the paper I have discussed several explanations for why false beliefs can be just as beneficial for us as true beliefs. These explanations matter, because the strength of my conclusion depends in part on the strength of these explanations: if there is a good explanation for our *false* intuitions, then a counterintuitive conclusion, in turn, becomes a more appealing bullet to bite. It is insightful, therefore, to briefly list them once again.

1. True enough. Many false beliefs, especially those 'close' to the truth, are just as useful, if not better than, the truth itself.[217]

2. Truth is difficult. False beliefs are easy to end up with, especially as there are many options – there is only one truth, and it can be cognitively challenging, counterintuitive and laborious to get.[218] We also do not need to have true beliefs when we can rely on others to have them for us.[219]

3. Truth is distasteful. Some truths are so counterintuitive that they are positively repugnant, and unpleasant to retain.[220] By contrast, some are completely unimportant, or *trivial*.[221]

4. We conflate the value of true beliefs, with other things, such as the *pursuit* of truth (c.f. chapter VI), *telling* the truth (c.f. Introduction) or *understanding* (c.f. chapter V).

6. Intellectual's Bias. Those who *do* have a favourable disposition to value the truth, assume that everyone others will as well.[222]

7. Other things are eudaimonically valuable. I hope that one of the main lessons of this paper is that the positive value truth has, on close inspection, is not intrinsic but instrumental: it is valuable only where it *helps us achieve some other eudaimonic goal.* But this value is, at best, minimal. Thus, often it is these goals – love, community, psychological well-being, and even the assumptions and simplifications which allow us to better understand our world – which we should focus on, not the truth.

I want to end with two remarks which add to the above explanations, which are too broad to fit into any particular category of belief. The first concerns the relationship between truth and the good life. One question we could ask is*: why should we expect truth and eudaimonia to usually line up in the first place?* Consider the nature of truth itself, which we glossed as 'the way the world is'; i.e. utterly independent of any human have beliefs about it. Consider also that *eudaimonia*, the good life, is the opposite: as it is

[217] C.f. esp. chapter III and chapter V; the term comes from (Elgin, 2004).
[218] C.f. esp. chapter III, V and VI.
[219] C.f. chapter V.
[220] C.f. esp. chapter I, II and VI.
[221] C.f. chapter I.
[222] C.f. chapter VI.

defined *in terms of* our nature, its features are dependent on and often argued for by appealing to our all-too-human dispositions and desires. Crudely put, we have been examining the extent to which our awareness of the former positively impacts the latter. But perhaps it is not surprising that the two diverge greatly, given that the *metaphysical nature* of both also diverge: the first is utterly independent, and the second utterly *dependent*, on human nature. My suggestion is not that truth is 'cognitively inaccessible' to us. Rather, it is the suggestion that *even though we can have true beliefs*, to greatly benefit from the truth presupposes that we can easily bridge the gap between an utterly independent world and an all-too-human quality such as well-being. My suggestion is that the nature of each makes this bridging *difficult*, in a sense more metaphysical than can be captured in terms such as 'laborious' or 'complicated'. This fact can help explain also the *discomfort* we feel with some truths, and the indifference we have to others: the independent nature of truth makes it often a foreign object, not something easy – and often not *good* – for us to uncover.

Lastly, I want to make a positive argument to explain our intuitions in favour of truth. There is still an objection that I have not *quite* explained our desire to be *correct*, or perhaps, our desire not to be *wrong*. Why does the conspiracy theorist stubbornly refuse to accept flaws in their evidence? Why do we believe that our football team is the best, even if it isn't? When accused of having false beliefs, people are rarely indifferent, and often respond by insisting that their beliefs are true, notwithstanding good evidence to the contrary, and whether or not they will be better off. Does this not show a *desire* for truth in some sense, even it wrongly executed in practice? The answer is, no. A person who *desired* the truth would also desire the route most commonly sought to get to it – some form of justification (and would be far less likely to be wrong – let alone stubbornly so – in the first place).[223] In fact, what this epistemic stubbornness – some might say, epistemic *arrogance* – shows is not that we take fulfilment from having true beliefs, but that we take fulfilment from *the belief that our beliefs are true*. In other words, *merely having beliefs* can improve our lives.

Why is this? Hume perhaps has an answer. Hume observed that the *certainty* and *unchangeability* of a belief gives us pleasure, whereas the *uncertainty* of doubt or lack of belief gives us pain.[224] In other words, there is something fundamentally pleasurable about having a belief, about *endorsing* something to be the case, whether or not it actually *is* the case.[225] In short, there is something fulfilling about the *feeling of being right*, which beliefs can provide us with. Thus, perhaps the only sense in which true beliefs can be said to have intrinsic eudaimonic value is in the sense that they are fundamentally pleasurable, in of themselves. But this pleasure is not *because* they are true, as a false belief would have the same effect as true one. Instead, the pleasure comes from *mere belief*, the belief '*as such*'.[226] Another way of describing this phenomenon is by saying that we all value the following 'meta-belief': the '*belief that my belief is true'*.[227] One might even think that 'mere belief' *requires* having this meta-belief, for if we accept that belief is necessarily truth-directed, then to merely have a belief perhaps *requires* endorsing the belief that your belief is true: that is just what it means to have a belief.

[223] (Horwich, 2006, p. 355).
[224] (Hume, 2007 [1739], pp. 289-290).
[225] For Hume, the very notion of a belief is a mental concept (idea) which "acquires a force and vivacity" from a corresponding sense impression (impression): belief is literally a particularly stimulating kind of mental idea (Hume, 2007 [1739], p. 133).
[226] (Zagzebski, 2003, p. 144).
[227] The same could be said for mere justified belief, but justification takes effort, and a mere belief has the same certainty as a justified belief, but without the effort.

Either way, even if *mere belief* consistently provides a temporary pleasure, it is clearly not eudaimonically valuable, all things considered. One is often better off in the long term to *doubt* one's beliefs, or *withhold* from forming a belief on a given topic, precisely if and when having a true belief affects one's quality of life. This is not inconsistent with our conclusion: just because the value of true belief is overrated does not mean that the truth is *never* important, and, as examples of conspiracy theorists demonstrate, it is dangerous to indulge in the pleasure of *merely believing,* when there is a cost to being wrong. The interesting point, however, is that 'mere belief' is one of the most potent ways of explaining our false intuitions endorsing the value of true belief. It may *appear* that our convictions demonstrate a love for truth. We can now see that the seeming desire to be correct shows that *something else* – in this case, belief itself – is the source of value. But once again, when it comes to living a flourishing life, we do not find that the truth itself really matters.

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