Seek the Joints! Avoid the Gruesome!
Fidelity as an Epistemic Value*

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Abstract

A belief is valuable when it "gets it right". This "getting it right" is often understood solely as a matter of truth. But there is a second sense of "getting it right" worth exploring. According to this second sense, a belief "gets it right" when its concepts accurately match the way the world is objectively organized – that is, when its concepts are joint-carving, or have *fidelity*. In this paper, I explore the relationship between fidelity and epistemic value. While many philosophers (especially metaphysicians) acknowledge fidelity's value, they overlook just how much it may disrupt our understanding of epistemic value. To tease out this disruption, I draw on the Jamesian balance between seeking the truth and avoiding the false. A similar balance must be struck both within the pursuit of fidelity itself ("seeking the joints" and "avoiding the gruesome") as well as between fidelity and truth. Arguably, there is more than one permissible way to strike a balance between these values. If so, this value pluralism suggests to a new sort of permissivism about rational belief formation.

Keywords: Epistemic Values, Fidelity, Fundamentality, Permissivism, Theoretical Virtues, Metametaphysics, William James

Introduction

Some beliefs are more valuable than others. These differences in value may be traced to a multitude of sources. But I want to focus on just one particular source. Some beliefs are more valuable others insofar as the former are right and the latter are wrong.

Traditionally, this value in "getting it right" has been called epistemic value. Many a fight has started over the precise nature of epistemic value and its relationship to other forms of value. Some philosophers, for instance, contest that epistemic value is entirely reducible to some other value, like moral value. Along those lines, some would say that "getting it right" is valuable only insofar

as it contributes to the well-being of the individual or their society. Others philosophers balk at such reductions. They think that "getting it right" is valuable on its own, independent of any connection it may have to the moral domain.

Rather than engage in these long-standing fights, I'd like to start a new one. I'd like to complicate the notion of "getting it right" and its attendant epistemic value.

Many philosophers, myself included, understand "getting it right" as a correspondence between the world and what is believed of the world: to "get it right" is to have an accurate sense of how things are. It's easy to take this notion of accurate correspondence as equivalent to that which we call truth: a belief "gets it right" insofar as it is true.

But I think that doing so overlooks a crucial part of the story. I think that there is a second sense of "getting it right" that is not merely a matter of truth. Consider the following example. While catching up over a pint, Zhang San shows off her new jade bracelet to Li Si. The bracelet is green. Because the bracelet has been observed before the (arbitrarily chosen) year 3000AD, it is also grue.[1] It would be better if Li Si came to believe that the bracelet was green rather than believe that the bracelet was grue. The first belief would "get it right" in a way that the second would not. This is so because the concepts that would be employed in believing the former more accurately match the way the world is objectively organized.

This second sense of "getting it right" should sound familiar to many philosophers, especially those who are familiar with contemporary metaphysics. But, as it currently stands, no one seems to fully appreciate its connection to epistemic value. If "getting it right" is partially determined by the concepts one employs, then epistemic value is determined along at least two dimensions. Consequently, we are confronted with a number of pressing questions, including questions about how we should understand these dimensions in relation to each other and how we should balance them.

In this paper, I will flesh out these questions and offer some preliminary answers to them. I begin in section 1 by more precisely detailing this second sense of "getting it right" – what I call fidelity. Then, in section 2, I explore the ways in which fidelity may have epistemic value. Supposing that

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[1] In the spirit of Goodman (1955), let's say that x is grue iff either x is green and observed before 3000AD or blue and not observed before 30000AD. The particular year on which the definition rests is of course entirely arbitrary. As the definition suggests, I do not assume that the truth conditions for beliefs about grue bracelets demand the existence of some property, *grueness.*

it does, we must consider how to weigh its value, especially in relation to the more familiar value of truth. I explore some approaches to this issue in section 3, drawing on the Jamesian balance between seeking the truth and avoiding the false. Finally, in section 4, I point to some contexts where a balance between truth and fidelity must be made, and suggest that they motivate a sort of rational permissivism about how we form beliefs.

1   Fidelity: A Primer

There are two senses in which a belief can "get it right". The first sense of "getting it right" is truth. A belief "gets it right" when it is true and does not "get it right" when it is false. The second sense is what I call *fidelity*. A belief "gets it right" when it has fidelity and does not "get it right" when it lacks fidelity.

Fidelity is not some newfangled philosophical posit, though it has at times been presented as such. Philosophers have acknowledged it, in one form or another, for millennia. Plato, in the voice of Socrates, spoke admirably of carving each kind along its natural joints while avoiding any splintering indicative of bad butchery. The medieval scholastics fiercely debated whether the categories (e.g. substance, accident) accurately divide the world or rather reflected conceptual or linguistic biases. More recently, David Lewis stressed the importance of interpreting the words and thoughts of others as tracking the comparatively more natural properties of the world, and Theodore Sider has discussed the importance of employing ideology that matches the world's metaphysical structure.[2]

These philosophers are all, more or less, articulating the sense of "getting it right" that I call fidelity. (Personally, I favor the nuances behind Sider's articulation of fidelity. But that's not important here.[3]) In each case, the posited correspondence is a form of representing the world. What that representation precisely consists of differs. But, loosely speaking, the representation is organizational. Because the correspondence is to be evaluated by the accuracy of its representation, its success is essentially sensitive to how the world is organized. Furthermore, the way this correspondence "gets it right" is not equivalent to the way truth "gets it right" – not obviously so,

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[2]See, *inter alia*, Nehamas and Woodruff (1995): 265e; Pasnau (2011); McDaniel (2014); Pasnau (2014); Lewis (1983): 370–377; Sider (2011): i, 1–3.

[3]For more on these nuances, see [blinded for review].

anyway. To use an imperfect, but hopefully illuminating, slogan: matters of truth are decided by 'yes's and 'no's, whereas matters of fidelity are decided by 'these's and 'those's.

That's the basic idea behind fidelity. Beyond that, there are more complex questions to address. For instance: does fidelity come in degrees, and if so, how fine-grained is the measurement? I will assume, without argument, that fidelity does come in degrees and that there are two factors that figure into this gradation. First, beliefs typically employ more than one concept, and so a belief can have greater or lesser fidelity insofar as some of its concepts match the world and others do not. Second, each individual concept may have greater or lesser fidelity insofar as they more accurately match the world than rival concepts. I will also assume that there is some threshold above which the fidelity of a belief is "close enough". Every belief above this threshold is a *fidelic*, or *joint-carving*, belief. At the limit, a fidelic belief may just be a belief that has the maximum degree of fidelity. Similarly, I will assume that there is some threshold below which the fidelity of a belief is "too far off". Every belief below it is a *non-fidelic*, or *gruesome*, belief. Finally, I will assume that these two thresholds are one and the same. As a consequence of this "bivalence" about fidelity, every belief is either fidelic or non-fidelic. These assumptions might very well be wrong. But they will help to streamline my discussion of fidelity's epistemic value.

In the example above, the belief that the bracelet is green has greater fidelity than the belief that the bracelet is grue. But fidelity need not be restricted to the natural world. The belief that murder is wrong has greater fidelity than the belief that murder is wrong on Wednesdays because morality does not (ordinarily) depend on the day of the week. Furthermore, some beliefs about social categorizes like gender, race, and sexual orientation may have greater fidelity than others, even if these categories are social constructions. Fidelity is applicable to any belief about any topic insofar as that belief reflects a way that the world is organized. Nevertheless, in what follows I will not rely on any specific assumptions about which of our concepts reflect how the world is organized and which do not.

Of course, plenty of philosophers deny that the world is organized.[4] While such a denial does not

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[4]See, for instance, Goodman (1955); Rorty (2000). It is important to contrast these "full blown" deniers of organization from more moderate deniers like Thomasson (2014). Moderate deniers do not deny that the world is in some ways organized. Rather, they deny that this organization can do all the work that some philosophers attempt to make it do. In fact, most philosophers – insofar as they have an opinion on the matter – tend to be moderate deniers. Many deny, for example, that fidelity is a notion that applies to logical concepts like that of quantification. Moderate deniers still face the epistemological issues raised in this paper.

automatically constitute a denial of fidelity, it does trivialize it. Consider the analogous situation for truth. Many philosophers hold that truth is a kind of correspondence, a belief being true just in case it "gets it right" with respect to what's going on in the mind-independent world. Those who deny that there is a mind-independent world do not thereby deny this kind of correspondence. But they do trivialize it and are consequently likely to replace the correspondence with some other relation, perhaps even calling that relation "truth".

As the analogy to truth shows, I need not fully respond to such deniers before exploring the potential value of fidelity, no more than I would need to fully respond to anti-realists before exploring the potential value of truth. Thus, in this paper I will assume without further argument that belief has this second sense of "getting it right" and that in a good number of cases its success or failure is a non-trivial matter.

That being said, it is worth saying one more thing about the fidelity of belief. The details here will be important in the subsequent exploration of its value.

Often, fidelity is given a linguistic gloss. As Sider sometimes puts it, "a fact is fundamental when it is stated in joint-carving terms," (Sider (2011): i). But this linguistic gloss is inappropriate when it comes to the question at hand. Belief is a mental phenomenon. We may at times express our beliefs with words, and those words may (or may not) carve the world at its joints. But so far as the fidelity of a belief goes, it is fidelity with respect to our concepts – more specifically, our primitive concepts.

What makes a concept *primitive*? Here, I want to be as accommodating as I can be and avoid needlessly presupposing any specific theory of concepts.[5] So, in lieu of a full account of conceptual primitiveness, I offer a partial characterization that should suffice for the purposes of this paper.

First, a rough definition: a concept is primitive relative to an agent just in case (i) the agent regularly employs the concept, and (ii) the agent predominantly employs the concept to the exclusion of rival concepts. According to this definition, neither the source of the concept nor the time of its acquisition determines whether or not it is primitive (though, to be sure, these factors often shape which concepts agents have primitively and which they do not). The definition also does not explicitly acknowledge what the agent could do with a concept, what they would ideally do, and

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[5]Similarly, I don't want to insist at all costs that the phenomenon I am targeting is properly called a concept. What is important is the role that this phenomenon plays in belief, whether or not the thing that plays that role is a concept.

so on. The definition is about what the agent in fact does with their concepts. Furthermore, by acknowledging the regularity of the concept's employment, the rough definition allows for change in which concepts are primitive relative to the agent.

Some examples may help to further illuminate what I mean by conceptual primitiveness. Zilin is a mathematician who accepts the successor-based reduction of the natural numbers and the arithmetic functions. This morning, when she calculated the number of eggs to buy for breakfast, she multiplied the number of people eating by the number of eggs each wanted. The cognitive story never involved succession. Assuming that this is what regularly occurs in Zilin's head, multiplication is a primitive concept for her, even though she could and sometimes does "reduce" it to succession. Adam is an American who now lives in New Zealand. At first, whenever he read the weather forecast, he needed to mentally convert from Celsius into Fahrenheit before he could determine whether he should wear a jacket. Now, decades after his relocation, he can determine what to wear without converting. At first, only Fahrenheit was conceptually primitive for Adam. But over time it has been replaced by Celsius. Zilin and Adam meet at an academic conference. While describing her background, Zilin shares a story about the time she and her sister visited their uncle in Chengdu. Adam shares a similar story about the time he and his younger sister visited their father's older brother in San Francisco. Of course, both can speak English and (Mandarin) Chinese. Because they are practicing their non-native languages, Zilin shares her story in English, using the English words 'sister' and 'uncle', while Adam shares his story in Chinese, using the Chinese words '妹妹' and '伯伯'. Despite what Zilin says in English, she conceives of her sister as her 妹妹 and her uncle as her 伯伯. Despite what Adam says in Chinese, he conceives of his 妹妹 as his sister and his 伯伯 as his uncle. Their primitive conceptions of family are different, Zilin's being more fine-grained than Adam's.

One belief has a higher degree of fidelity than another to the extent that the primitive concepts employed in that belief better represent the way the world is actually organized. What someone believes can come apart from what they say. So, too, can the fidelity of someone's belief come apart from the fidelity of how they express that belief. Similarly, the fidelity of someone's belief can come apart from the fidelity of the proposition they believe. Some theories of propositions do not distinguish between propositions about younger sisters and propositions about 妹妹. On such theories, the content of Zilin's beliefs may be the same as the content of Adam's beliefs. But clearly

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something different is going on in their minds. Zilin employs fine-grained Chinese familial concepts even though she utters English familial words and even if she expresses a relatively course-grained proposition. This conceptual employment, whatever it is, is what is important in the evaluation of a belief's fidelity.[6]

2   The Epistemic Value of Fidelity

Once we acknowledge fidelity as a second sense of "getting it right", we face a wide range of questions regarding the precise nature of its epistemic value. In this section, I'll offer some potential answers to these questions.

Truth and fidelity are only two among many epistemic features that are sometimes regarded as epistemically valuable. Some others include: accuracy, adequacy, aptness, coherence, creditability, explanatoriness, generality, intellectual virtue (and all of the more specific intellectual virtues like caution, courage, humility, and perseverance), justification, knowledge, proper functioning, reliability, systematicity, and understanding, as well as social features like trust, epistemic justice, and epistemic autonomy. (I'm sure there are others that I've missed, and for that I apologize.)

Which of these features are actually valuable and why they are valuable is a matter of dispute.[7] But almost everyone agrees that there are *some* connections between them. Let me briefly introduce some terminology to help articulate these connections, and then apply that terminology to the case of fidelity.

Some beliefs we value for their own sake. Philosophers disagree as to what feature makes these beliefs valuable for their own sake. But many think that, for at least some of these beliefs, we value them at least in part because they are true. In this sense, truth has *final epistemic value.*[8] Similarly, some beliefs are epistemically disvaluable because they are false; falsity has final epistemic *disvalue.* But consider an epistemic feature like reliability. If some belief of mine comes from a

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[6]Cf. Dasgupta (2018); McDaniel (2017)

[7]Amongst other disputes is the dispute about the foundations of epistemic normativity. Roughly, the dispute is about whether epistemic normativity is ultimately based on the acquisition of epistemic goods, or, instead, ultimately based on the observation of epistemic duty. While I talk in a way that implicitly endorses the first position, much of what I say may be salvageable on the second. For more on this dispute, see Berker (2013); Andow (2017); Singer (2018); Sylvan (forthcoming).

[8]Sometimes, this sort of value is called *intrinsic* value. There's no need to fight about the terminology here. I choose the word 'final' instead of 'intrinsic' to leave open the theoretical possibility that epistemic value is extrinsic or relational. See Korsgaard (1983).

reliable belief-forming process, then that belief is probably true. Because reliability directs me toward that which has final epistemic value – in this case, toward the truth – reliability itself has a sort of indirect epistemic value. Call this indirect value *instrumental* epistemic value. Many philosophers, though, think that the instrumental value of reliability exhausts its epistemic value; they deny that reliability has final epistemic value. If they're right, we can say that reliability *only* has instrumental epistemic value, or has *mere* instrumental epistemic value.

Many of the above-mentioned epistemic features are indirectly connected in the way that reliability is indirectly connected to truth. But some of them have an even more intimate connection. For instance, part of what it is to know something is to have a belief that is true. Plausibly, we value knowledge for its own sake; it has final epistemic value. But some philosophers (e.g. David (2005)) think that its final value is entirely comprised of the final value of the truth that it includes. For them, knowledge has only *non-basic* final epistemic value, whereas truth has *basic* final epistemic value. Other philosophers (e.g. Greco (2003)) think that some other component of knowledge contributes final epistemic value. And, in theory, a philosopher could argue that knowledge has final value that goes beyond the final value of its elements – that is to say, that knowledge has "emergent" basic final epistemic value.[9]

The instrumental-final distinction and the basic-non-basic distinction are importantly different. I won't attempt to give a full account of the difference here, because I do not think that the details matter for what I want to say in this paper. Suffice to say that the connection between the instrumental and the final seems to be something like a causal, correlative, or probabilistic connection and the connection between the basic and the non-basic seems to be something like a constituitive, mereological, or grounding connection. That gloss leaves a lot to be developed, but it should be informative enough to put the distinctions to fruitful use.

To understand how fidelity "gets it right", we need to identify the source of its epistemic value. Does fidelity have instrumental value? If so, is that all it has? Or does it also have some sort of final value? If so, is its final value basic or non-basic?

Fidelity may have instrumental value. For instance, because fidelity tracks objective similarities, fidelity may promote more successful inductive inferences. Or maybe fidelic beliefs lead to better

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[9] Jonathan Kvanvig discusses this position (as well as its possible connections to Timothy Williamson and Richard Feldman) in Kvanvig (2003): 140–156

theories, which lead to better experimental designs, which lead to more and better discoveries. Maybe not. Maybe, because of our psychological limitations, thinking in fidelic terms actually increases the number of errors we make. (Quantum mechanics is hard!) Questions about the instrumental value of fidelity are empirical to a degree that renders me unable to do anything more than speculate. Since such speculation has little value, I will set these questions aside. I will simply note that the claim that fidelity has instrumental epistemic value is not *obviously* wrong.

Thankfully, I can do a bit more than speculate about fidelity's final value. Many philosophers seem to think that it does have final value. One of the most prominent proponents of this position is Sider. As he forcefully puts it:

> [I]magine a universe that is entirely full of fluid. A plane divides the universe into two halves, one in which the fluid is uniformly red, the other in which the fluid is uniformly blue...Now imagine a group of people who encounter this universe, but accord no special status to the dividing blue-red plane. Instead of thinking of the universe as divided into the red and blue halves, they think of it as being divided in half by a different plane...And they do not use predicates for red and blue. Instead, they have a pair of predicates that they apply uniformly within the two regions separated by their dividing plane. These predicates...cut across the predicates 'red' and 'blue'. The regions to the left of the [dividing] line they call "bred"; the regions to the right they call "rue". It is almost irresistible to describe these people as making a mistake. But they're not making a mistake about where the red and blue regions are, since they make no claims about red or blue. And they make no mistakes when they apply their own concepts. The regions that they call "bred" are indeed bred, and the regions they call "rue" are indeed rue. The problem is that they've got the wrong concepts. They're carving the world up incorrectly. By failing to think in terms of the red/blue dividing plane, they are missing something. Although their beliefs are true, those beliefs do not match the world's structure (Sider (2011): 2–3).

According to Sider, the mistake these people make is not a merely instrumental one. When they divide the world into bred regions and rue regions, they make a mistake with respect to what they believe now, regardless of their mistaken beliefs' consequences. It would have been better if they had used concepts that divided the world into blue regions and red regions. If they had done so, their beliefs would have had greater fidelity. In virtue of that greater fidelity, their beliefs would have had greater final epistemic value.

Personally, I think Sider's example suggests that fidelity has basic final epistemic value. But others may demur. More specifically, some may claim that the final value of fidelity is non-basic and fully comprised of the basic value of truth. I find that claim *prima facie* implausible, at least in

part because the comparative fidelity of a belief is almost always contrasted with its "mere" truth. But it's worth exploring the claim a bit further. As far as I can see, there are two strategies for reducing the final value of fidelity to the final value of truth.

The first strategy employs the notion of a fidelity belief. A *fidelity belief* is a belief that explicitly maintains that some concept is joint-carving. The strategy says that every individual believes the fidelity beliefs that support their primitive concepts. Perhaps, even, they must believe them. Plausibly, every individual must be immodest in that they believe their beliefs to be more accurate than anyone else's.[10] (If they were not immodest, then they would just adopt the beliefs of those they judged to be more accurate, in which case they would still believe their beliefs to be the most accurate, albeit indirectly.) This need for immodesty extends to fidelity: every individual must believe that their concepts are more joint-carving than the alternatives – otherwise, they would come to employ those alternative concepts. So, this first strategy concludes, an individual's belief has final epistemic value only insofar as it entails that they have a true fidelity belief.

The second strategy identifies a value discrepancy in true beliefs. Many philosophers (though certainly not all) maintain that some beliefs are more valuable than others. Often, this difference in value is explained by the comparative *significance* of the beliefs.[11] The second strategy, then, claims that fidelity tracks significance.[12] For example, the belief that all emeralds are green is more valuable than the belief that all emeralds are grue because the former is more significant than the latter. Likewise, the truths of physics are said to be more valuable than the truths of astronomy because the concepts inherent to physics have greater fidelity than the concepts inherent to astronomy and that greater fidelity indicates greater significance. And by thinking in terms of bred and rue, Sider's imaginary group of people missed an opportunity to attain a "deeper", more significant, truth about their world.

Neither strategy works, I think. First, neither strategy shows what it purports to show. At best, each provides a reason to think that *some* of fidelity's final value derives from truth. But neither provides a reason to think that *all* of it is. Furthermore, the strategies themselves seem – to me, anyway – irredeemably flawed. The first strategy is psychologically unrealistic. It seems

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[10]Cf. Horowitz (2014); Lewis (1971); Joyce (2009)

[11]Cf. Alston (2005); Hazlett (2017); Treanor (2014)

[12]The second strategy could weaken this assumption and grant that there are multiple (and equally valuable) species of significance. My subsequent reply would be no less applicable.

to me that plenty of people have some beliefs such that they have no opinion about the fidelity of the concepts employed in those beliefs. The second strategy supplies incorrect value judgments. Significance amplifies value: a true significant belief has greater epistemic value than its insignificant counterpart, while a false significant belief has greater epistemic disvalue than its counterpart. But fidelity does not amplify value. It adds value. The belief that the bracelet is green has greater epistemic value than the belief that the bracelet is grue. But the belief that the bracelet is not green does not have greater disvalue than the belief that the bracelet is not grue.

Much more can be said about the potential reduction of fidelity's value to truth's.[13] But there are other epistemic features that seem much more clearly connected to fidelity. When an individual comes to understand something, they come to acquire something that goes beyond mere truth. Arguably, in some cases this acquisition involves fidelity.[14] To understand something is, in part, to possess a genuine explanation of that thing. These explanations may be causal – as when a chemist explains the reactive dispositions of the elements – or they may be non-causal – as when a philosopher explains that goodness is what the gods love. These explanations only reflect a genuine understanding when they are stated in joint-carving terminology. So, if understanding has final value that is not derivative of truth's, then fidelity has a corresponding, non-basic, final value. Perhaps similar arguments can be given for other "heavyweight" epistemic features, like knowledge.

Finally, for all I have said, I haven't said anything about the ultimate source of epistemic value. What is epistemically valuable may ultimately be a matter of what we are naturally curious about, or of the constitutive aims of belief, or of something else. Based on how this question about ultimate source is answered, epistemic value may generate more or less restricted normative force – and so these issues regarding the epistemic value of fidelity may be more or less relevant to people's lives. Similarly, arguments for or against the basic final value of fidelity may turn on the source of epistemic value. These issues ought to be explored. But they introduce such a level of dialectical complexity that I can't hope to do them justice here. For that reason I now set them aside.[15]

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[13]For more, see [blinded for review]

[14]Cf. Hazlett (2017): Section 4.3. Hazlett argues for the claim that *apt theorizing* is a species of understanding. Theorizing, as he understanding it, is a propositional attitude similar to but importantly different from belief. Whereas belief aims at the truth, theorizing aims at both the truth and the fidelic. Since these differences in propositional attitudes are largely tangential to the balancing questions I address later in the paper, I'll try to remain neutral on the attitude at play. (For what it's worth, I think Hazlett is mistaken to think that belief does not aim at fidelity.) Those who are sympathetic to Hazlett's line of reasoning will find that the issues of balance still arise for those who theorize – presumably something that many philosophers do!

[15]For some relevant literature, see Côté-Bouchard (2016); Dasgupta (2018); Grimm (2008); Hazlett (2017).

3 The Balance of Epistemic Value

My hope is that I've said enough to motivate the claim that fidelity has some sort of final value. If so, then it's worth asking how fidelity is best pursued as well as how its pursuit should be balanced with the pursuit of other epistemic values.

This issue is especially pressing in connection to the pursuit of truth. We want to "get it right". But, if "getting it right" means pursuing both truth and fidelity, then what do we do when the two come into conflict? Should we prioritize truth over fidelity? If so, how much truth is worth an off-setting lack of fidelity?

These questions may look familiar. They are the same sorts of questions we ask when considering the pursuit of the truth. As William James famously declared, no one simply "pursues the truth". Such a description obscures an important complexity. In reality, there are two separable pursuits: the acquisition of true beliefs and the avoidance of false beliefs. How someone balances these pursuits will shape their overall strategy for belief formation. If they privilege the acquisition of true beliefs, then they should just believe everything. Much of what they will come to believe will be false, but they are guaranteed to believe everything that is true. Similarly, if they privilege the avoidance of false beliefs, then they should maintain total agnosticism. They would entirely lack true beliefs, but they would also succeed in their goal to never form a false belief.[16]

To give this dual-natured pursuit a more accurate label, call it the pursuit of *alethic value*. The "optimal" strategies suggested above are psychologically unrealistic for human beings to adopt. Beliefs are, to some degree, outside of our control. So we can neither believe anything we want to believe nor refrain from believing anything we don't want to believe. There is, nevertheless, a wide range of psychologically realistic strategies for pursuing alethic value. These strategies may influence how skeptical or dogmatic someone is, how often they seeks further evidence, and so on. Philosophers disagree as to which of these strategies are rational – some even argue that there is only one rational strategy for the pursuit of alethic value.

In fact, there is an analogous complexity in the pursuit of fidelity. A fidelic belief has positive epistemic value and a non-fidelic belief has negative epistemic value. The pursuit of *fidelic value* includes the acquisition of fidelic beliefs and the avoidance of non-fidelic beliefs. Their "optimal"

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[16]See James (1979): 17–18.

strategies may be just as psychologically unrealistic. We are unable to employ every possible concept, and so we are unable to guarantee that some of our beliefs are fidelic. We are also unable to refrain from employing any concepts whatsoever, and so we are also unable to guarantee that none of our beliefs are non-fidelic. More generally, it does seem to me that which concepts human beings take as primitive is to a large degree beyond our direct control. (Remember: Adam's use of Chinese familial vocabulary doesn't guarantee his use of Chinese familial concepts!) But which among the range of psychologically realistic strategies someone chooses may influence how readily they adopt new concepts, how hesitant they are to abandon their old ones, and so on.

(Because philosophers do not always explicitly acknowledge the independence of these two pursuits, they have little to say about the balance between them.[17] Nevertheless, it's my impression that many of the recent disputes in metaphysics over ideology – that is, disputes over metaphysical terminology – can be sourced to unarticulated differences about the proper balance between seeking the joints and avoiding the gruesome. Here's one example. In a discussion of the comparative fidelity of logical ideology, Sider advocates for an "egalitarianism" according to which "both $\exists$ and $\forall$ carve at the joints" (Sider (2011): 258). He does not seem overly bothered by the possibility that he is carving too aggressively. Others, however, seem more cautious. To avoid arbitrariness in his choice of ideology, Cowling (2013) offers a kind-based principle of ideological parsimony; to avoid both arbitrariness and redundancy, McSweeney (2019) motivates a sort of agnosticism about our logical concepts. Their reasoning can be seen as motivated by an underlying aversion to bad butchery. It's a move they judge to be worth making, even if they thereby risk missing one of reality's joints. If there is no uniquely rational balance between the acquisition of fidelic beliefs and the avoidance of non-fidelic beliefs, then there may be no fact of the matter about which of these strategies is best.)

So "getting it right" is a multi-faced affair. The pursuit of alethic value requires a balance between the acquisition of true beliefs and the avoidance of false beliefs. The pursuit of fidelic value requires a balance between the acquisition of fidelic beliefs and the avoidance of non-fidelic beliefs. And the pursuit of overall epistemic value requires a balance between the pursuit of alethic

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[17]In the *Phaedrus*, Plato distinguishes between "the principle of division" and "the principle of generalization". While Plato does allude to an avoidance of the non-fidelic with his criticism of bad butchery, I think these two principles are better understood as tracking different levels of acquiring the fidelic. To push the carving metaphor to its gruesome (in the original sense) limits: the principle of division is followed by carving at each joint of the arm – at the shoulder, the elbow, the wrist, and all of the knuckles; whereas the principle of generalization is follows by recognizing that the (fragmented) finger bones of the right arm go together with the (fragmented) finger bones of the left.

value and the pursuit of fidelic value. I don't mean to suggest that the analogies are as perfect as I've drawn them here. I am sure that there are subtle differences worth exploring. But the point stands: the Jamesian framework neatly characterizes the complexity inherent to "getting it right".

How should we balance the pursuits of truth and fidelity? I don't see why anyone should want to pursue fidelity with little concern for the truth. In contrast, some may be inclined to privilege the pursuit of truth over the pursuit of fidelity. I'd like to end this section by offering a reason against that strategy.

Consider Putnam's model-theoretic argument.[18] Any theory, before we can say whether the theory is true or false, needs to be interpreted. But, on one way of construing Putnam's argument, almost any theory can be interpreted in a way that makes the theory come out true. So far as the truth of our theories is concerned, it doesn't matter what the world is really like. The same can be said for interpretations of what we believe. This result threatens the supposed significance of "getting it right".

One standard response to the argument is to claim that not all interpretations are created equal. Some interpretations are better than others in virtue of the fact that the former pick up on objective samenesses and differences. Here's how David Lewis put it:

> Among all the countless things and classes that there are, most are miscellaneous, gerrymandered, ill-demarcated. Only an elite minority are carved at the joints, so that their boundaries are established by objective sameness and difference in nature. Only these elite things and classes are eligible to serve as referents. The world – any world – has the makings of many interpretations that satisfy many theories; but most of these interpretations are disqualified because they employ ineligible referents. When we limit ourselves to the eligible interpretations, the ones that respect the objective joints in nature, there is no longer any guarantee that (almost) any world can satisfy (almost) any theory. It becomes once again a worthy goal to discover a theory that will come true on an eligible interpretation, and it becomes a daring and risky hope that we are well on the way toward accomplishing this (Lewis (1984): 227).

Lewis's use of the phrase "a worthy goal" is suggestive. To put his point into the terminology that I have been using in this paper: the pursuit of alethic value above all else is an impoverished strategy because alethic value by itself is too easily acquired. In contrast, the pursuit of both alethic and fidelic value leads to much greater overall epistemic value. Insofar as we ultimately care about

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[18]Cf. Putnam (1977, 1980). I am suppressing most of the technical details, but I hope I have remained faithful to the overall thrust of the original presentation.

maximizing overall epistemic value, we ought not privilege the pursuit of truth.

This argument does not justify any one particular strategy. But it does restrict the range of permissible strategies to those that seek beliefs that are "true enough" and "fidelic enough" – likely enough to be true, likely enough to be fidelic.

4   In Support of Permissivism

I'll end the paper by using the above discussion of fidelity and epistemic value to sketch some cases that seem to support the claim that there is more than one rational way to try to "get it right". These cases are structurally similar to a case given in Kelly (2013). There, Kelly notes that the need to strike a balance between the pursuit of truth and avoidance of falsehood seems to allow for multiple strategies: two people can rationally differ in how they weight these two pursuits, with one person acting relatively more cautious than the other. This difference in strategy can, in turn, lead to a difference in belief. The cases I will discuss are similar insofar as they suggest how a difference in value can lead to a difference in belief. But in my cases the values are with respect to truth and fidelity.

The first kind of case centers on the level of specificity at which we decide to form beliefs. In general, more specific beliefs are more likely to be false. At first pass, this reality counter-intuitively suggests that the rational strategy is to privilege the pursuit of general truths over specific truths. But more specific truths seem to be, in general, more epistemically valuable than their less specific counterparts. For example, my true belief that Tim's office is on the fourth floor of the philosophy building on campus is more valuable than the less specific belief that Tim's office is either on the fourth floor or the fifth floor would be. I suggest that this difference in value is not merely a matter of alethic value. My belief is more valuable in part because it employs less disjunctive, and therefore more fidelic, concepts. If people may rationally differ with respect to how they balance truth and fidelity, then they may rationally differ with respect to the specificity of the beliefs they form. Those who prioritize fidelity may be more inclined to form beliefs that are more specific but also more likely to be false, whereas those who prioritize truth may be satisfied forming "safer" beliefs of a more general form.

The second kind of case involves strategies employed most prominently in the sciences. Scientists

often reach conclusions that differ in a way that suggest differences in values. For example, two scientists may disagree as to the best way to fit a curve to a given data set. One scientist may construct a curve that strictly adheres to the data acquired, whereas another scientist may construct a smoothed curve that merely approximates the data. Both scientists are attempting to "get it right". But what they are attempting to get right differs. I suggest that the first scientist seems to prioritize the alethic value attached to a strict adherence to the data, whereas the second scientist seems to prioritize the fidelic value attached to a curve that minimizes noise. Similar points may be made so far as scientists disagree about the value of idealized models as well as *ceteris paribus* laws with unspecified provisos.

The final case that I'll discuss is deeply immersed in metaphysical methodology. Many philosophers, when they are choosing between competing theories, want to choose the theory that exhibits the greater overall theoretical virtue, where overall theoretical virtue is determined as a function of comparisons regarding more specific virtues, like explanatory power, fertility, parsimony, unity, and fit with pre-theoretic intuitions. Typically, philosophers see theoretical virtue as truth-conducive. But, if some features may be truth-conducive, and for that reason justify our beliefs, then some features may be fidelity-conducive, and for *that* reason justify our beliefs. Call the truth-conducive virtues *alethic* virtues; call the fidelity-conducive virtues *fidelic* virtues. In principle, alethic virtues and fidelic virtues may come into conflict. There may be two competing theories, one of which exhibits greater alethic virtue and the other of which exhibits greater fidelic virtue. Unless there is a uniquely rational way to balance the pursuits of truth and fidelity, then it seems as if either theory may be rationally believed. I think that this in fact happens with theories that maximize distinct species of parsimony. Many philosophers acknowledge trade-offs where an improvement in ontological parsimony can be acquired at the expense of ideological parsimony, and *vice versa*. Arguably, ontological parsimony is an alethic virtue and ideological parsimony is a fidelic virtue.[19] If that's right, then a philosopher who prioritizes alethic value may endorse the ontologically parsimonious theory and the philosopher who prioritizes fidelic value may endorse the ideologically parsimonious theory.

In some cases, value permissivism about alethic value and fidelic value seems to lead to *extreme*

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[19]For a fuller defense of these claims, see [blinded for review].

synchronic interpersonal belief permissivism.[20] That is to say, there are cases where, given the range of evidence available to them, one philosopher may rationally believe a proposition and another may rationally disbelieve it. Such a case is most evident when it comes to belief in competing metaphysical theories. But value permissivism may lead to weaker versions of permissivism, where the content of the beliefs are related but not identical. Either way, the fact that fidelic value holds final epistemic value seriously complicates how we ought to understand the rationality of belief-forming strategies.

Conclusion

In this paper, I've attempted to shed light on some neglected issues inherent to "getting it right". Once we complicate our understanding of epistemic value, we face a multitude of pressing questions. I've offered some tentative answers to those questions, but I think much more deserves to be said.

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[20]Cf. Jackson and Turnbull (forthcoming): 1–2; Jackson (forthcoming): 2.

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