

# Epistemic Game of Thrones

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# **Epistemic Game of Thrones**

### **Abstract**

*The aim of this paper is rather modest: I want to provide an account of some of the most recent developments in epistemology, characterized by a certain shift that has been going on for some time now. This shift is best explained as the abandonment of traditional, monistic picture (according to which knowledge is the only important achievement in our attempt to cognitively grasp the world), and the acceptance of pluralism (according to which there are other important cognitive achievements we should strive for, most notably understanding and wisdom). One of the crucial aspects of this shift is the question about which cognitive state inherits knowledge as the prime epistemic value, and this is the aspect I will be mostly interested in. I will claim that the pluralistic picture fits much better into our cognitive engagement with the world, with other people, and with ourselves. In that sense, rather than rooting for one value as the holder of the epistemic throne, we should acknowledge the irreplaceable contribution that each has for our attempts to come to terms with who we are and with our experience of the world.*

### **Keywords**

knowledge, epistemic monism, epistemic pluralism, understanding, wisdom

## **1. Epistemic aims and values: monism vs. pluralism**

Writing about the task epistemology has traditionally been committed to, Marian David says:

“Epistemologists of all persuasions tend to invoke the goal of obtaining truth and avoiding error. This goal seems to be of specific interest to epistemology. No other goal is invoked as frequently as this one. No other goal is given as much weight or is treated with as much respect as this one.” (David 2001, p. 151)

David here expresses the traditional, monist view on what is our epistemic goal: reaching truth. Whether it is the question of what is morally right or wrong, of whether there are doors in front of me or whether there is a cat on the mat, once we pose these questions, we want to get to the right answer. In case you wonder why, explanations are many. Philosophers of the ancient times would tell you that we simply cannot live a life of happiness and tranquillity, or good life, without having the knowledge of reality, and all of its portions. Descartes would tell you that our inquiring minds demand of us to examine our knowledge and see what we can know. Aristotle would have us convinced that we are simply drawn to asking questions and we want to know the right answers. Truth is in this sense intrinsically good and desired for its own sake, whether it has to do with listening to the latest

gossip about celebrities, counting the blades of grass in one's background, inquiring about the nature of beauty or trying to decide on the right course of action.

Of course, trying to get to the truth always brings in the possibility of failing in one's attempts, for various reasons. Sceptics warn us about the impossibility of ever disproving sceptical scenarios, but even with lesser demands on us, it still seems we are constantly falling behind our desire to reach truth. We might be tired or in a hurry and therefore fail to see or consider a relevant piece of evidence, we might be deceived by dishonest informer who nevertheless seems reliable, we may err due to bad luck regardless of all of our best efforts to be the best cognizers we can be. This means we are constantly open to errors. In fact, the fact that the goal of reaching truth implies that of avoiding error, the two come hand in hand. Wayne Riggs calls this Twin Goods View:

"There are exactly two goods that are distinctly and purely cognitive or epistemic. They are (1) having true beliefs and (2) avoiding false beliefs." (Riggs 2002)

Given the way our epistemic goal is defined, all the epistemological assessments (whether of individual belief, sets of belief, believers or processes) will only take into consideration how what is being evaluated fares with respect to this goal. Ultimately, even the value of knowledge has to be derived from the value of having true and not having false beliefs. Admirable as this might be, serious reasons have been offered for resisting the monist view.

First of all, Riggs argues that The Twin Goods View is wrong. His reasons for that claim have to do with a discussion on the value of knowledge, as opposed to the value of its components; for my purpose here, we don't need to take up on this.<sup>1</sup> But a valuable lesson is that, if we focus too much on the (value of) truth and knowledge and praise these achievements on their own, we lose sight of the active role of a cognizer. Such reasoning is motivated by drawing the analogies with what we praise in the domain of moral behaviour:

"We value morally right acts because we are responsible for the good outcome that results. We are correctly granted credit for the good outcome." (Riggs 2002)

This same reasoning applies to what we value in epistemology. One can get to the truth by lucky coincidence, or just by chance. In this case, cognizer reached the truth (and avoided error), but somehow the intuition is, this is not enough to make this achievement epistemically valuable. Thus, Riggs concludes, in addition to valuing the goals of getting to the truth and avoiding error, we

"... value the properties of having reliable processes, epistemic virtues, truth-directed motivations, and so forth. But, in addition, we value being responsible for the satisfaction of our cognitive goals. Such responsibility requires at least that the goals are reached by way of our very own epistemically valuable properties." (Riggs 2002)

First lesson from this objection to monist epistemology is to acknowledge the importance and significance of the responsible cognizer.

Another reason for abandoning the epistemic monism (and the epistemic primacy of truth) is the fact that such a view doesn't differentiate between good, bad, and pointless truths. In discussing the problem of pointless truth Jonathan Kvanvig is more concerned with showing that truth (and knowledge and understanding, whose value derives from their connection to truth) has unqualified and universal value, but such a view has to explain for the fact that we find some truths (the number of the sand grains on the beach or the number

of grass blades in one's backyard) trivial.<sup>2</sup> But if our main epistemic goal is believing truths, then even pointless truths seem to be of importance, and we should aim at knowing them. If not, one has to find a criterion for differentiating between those that do and those that don't. One way for doing so is to invoke the notion of those truths which are pragmatically important: if having a certain truth can help us further some practical goal, then being in possession of that truth is important, and the truth in turn is valuable. Notice, however, plausible as this might be, that it does not solve our problem: the monist has to stay deeply committed to the view that all truth matters, always. Thus he cannot accept any kind of division between trivial and important truths. Yet, our epistemic practice strongly favours the view according to which some truths matter more strongly than others. We are very discriminatory when it comes to investing our research efforts and we don't want our time and energy be spent on things which will ultimately have no value or importance for us.

Regardless of that, I want to suggest another reason why some truths, though not practical in the strict sense, may still be important. It is at least plausible to suggest that truths about how to cure Alzheimer have more practical importance than truths about the logical implications of double negation or that truths about how to justly distribute goods such as housing and education are more important than truths about Venetian Renaissance art. Yet, for some reason, we value (strongly and passionately) truths about double negation, and truths about Venetian Renaissance art. We would be very happy if Alzheimer were cured, the hungry fed, and the homeless sheltered, but nevertheless, we invest our time and resources into studying double negation and Venetian Renaissance art.<sup>3</sup> This might be because we are naturally curious and inquisitive, but it might also be because we find something valuable in these things.

In his 2003, Wayne Riggs offered another argument for abandoning the Twin Good View of what matters in epistemology. According to him, one worry that such a view raises is that trying to fulfil the goal of reaching truth and avoiding error might in the end be counterproductive. Given how easy it is to get things wrong (that is, how hard it is to know with certainty that truth, rather than error has been reached), cognizer might end up restraining from epistemic pursuit and suspending their judgements even in cases when no such suspension is necessary. That might seriously undermine our epistemic pursuit as well as lower the amount of things we know. One practical consequence of this is the acceptance of sceptical position. Another one is insisted upon by Miranda Fricker (2007), though in a slightly different context. Fricker claims that our ability to have knowledge and pass it on to others is a distinctive sign of our rationality, and in the longer run, of our humanity. Thus the valuable monist insistence on truth might in the end make us destroy what we mostly aim at. The more we strive towards the truth, the further away from it we are. Elusive knowledge would soon become unreachable knowledge.

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This in itself is a book-long debate, thus for the reasons of limited space we will not engage in it. Valuable and insightful contributions to the problem are found in Kvanvig 2003, and Pritchard, Millar, Haddock 2010.

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See: Kvanvig 2008.

3

It might be argued that these truths also have practical implication given that they make

those who study them happy. But then it seems that all truths are important in that they help promote some other goods. I don't think this is a problem for me. I simply want to show (though not much rests on this) that, in certain sense at least, it is a thin line between the number of blades of grass, the number of houses available for homeless, and the number of Tizian's works. This is precisely what the monist has to explain.

Riggs' own solution to balancing these goals is to recognize the epistemic importance of a goal that supersedes the two, and that is pursuit of understanding. We'll turn to this shortly.

Abandoning monist picture of epistemic aims and values brings about a change in how we understand epistemology. Riggs characterizes such an approach to epistemology as the value turn in epistemology, given that the defining aspect of it is the recognition of other cognitive values beside truth and consequently, an expansion of our epistemic goals so as to include these values. Riggs calls this 'new' kind of epistemology a value-driven epistemology, and sees it as expanding the domain of epistemological enquiry beyond that determined by the traditional monistic view according to which epistemology was defined as theory of knowledge. According to Riggs,

"... perhaps the greatest potential effect of value-driven epistemology is its openness to new epistemological investigations that are not tied to accounts of either knowledge or epistemic justification. As important as those concepts are to epistemology, they do not exhaust the range of epistemic evaluations that are worthy of study." (Riggs 2008)

There are various developments within epistemology itself that brought on such a change in the epistemological enquiry. Certainly one of the most influential was the increasing interest in the question of the value of knowledge as opposed to the value of true belief, a question that was, at least according to the traditional reading, developed in Plato's *Meno* but remained neglected throughout epistemological discussions influenced by Descartes. Of particular importance to the development of value-driven epistemology are theories developed by virtue epistemologists, particularly those that answered to the value problem by invoking the epistemic agency and intellectual virtues or skills of cognizers.<sup>4</sup> Generally speaking, such theories see knowledge as a kind of cognitive achievement that springs from cognizer's ability and therefore deserves credit.

There is a lot that is valuable in the virtue epistemology primarily because it recognizes the important place that individual cognizer and his cognitive apparatus and intellectual character hold in the human pursuit of knowledge (and other epistemic aims). That doesn't mean however that these theories are not entwined with their own problems and inconsistencies, but it is not my aim here to discuss them. The lesson I want to take from them is the importance of the active role of the cognizer, who is asked to reflect not only on what he thinks he knows, but also on his cognitive skills and belief forming processes, on his epistemic character, cognitive aims he finds worthy of pursuing, and on how his knowledge and other cognitive benefits of his pursuit help him in leading a good life. Before we elaborate on this connection in more details, let's turn briefly to see how epistemology has modified itself in order to accommodate these new considerations.

## 2. Epistemology: A wider conception

If the focus of epistemology is no longer on knowledge, then what is it on? Here is how Kvanvig sees it; the extent of the quote only testifies to the expansion of epistemological concerns:

"At the most general level of characterization, epistemology is the study of certain aspects of our cognitive endeavours. In particular, it aims to investigate *successful* cognition. Within its purview, then, are various kinds of cognizing, including processes such as thinking, inquiring, and reasoning; events such as changes in one's world view or the adoption of a different perspective on things; and states such as belief assumptions, presuppositions, tenets, working

hypothesis and the like. Also within its purview is the variety of cognitive successes, including true beliefs and opinions, viewpoints that make sense of the course of experience, tenets that are epistemically adequate, knowledge, understanding, theoretical wisdom, rational presuppositions, justified assumptions, working hypothesis likely to be true, responsible inquiry and the like.” (Kvanvig 2005, p. 286)

What we see here is an expansion of the domain epistemology was traditionally occupying.<sup>5</sup> The challenge for us now is to see why this wider conception of epistemology fits better into our cognitive engagement with the world. In order to give some kind of a framework to how I see this engagement takes place, I will consider two ways in which we might reach knowledge and other cognitive gains. One such way, traditionally accepted by monist epistemology, is through the words of others, i.e. testimony.<sup>6</sup> Another way is through engagement with art. Philosophers who claim that art is a source of cognitive gains often claim that it is not necessarily knowledge but understanding that art gives us. Given that artistic creation is not guided by desire to reach truth, monist epistemology cannot see art as a valuable source of knowledge, and given that it doesn't recognize the importance of understanding, it cannot explain (or, more importantly validate) the rather intuitive view (traditionally defended by aesthetic cognitivists since Aristotle) that there are many things we learn from art.<sup>7</sup>

Let us start with the first aspect from Kvanvig's list: epistemological research includes various kinds of cognizing, including processes such as thinking, inquiring, and reasoning. Obviously, thinking, inquiring, and reasoning are all involved in the very process of responding to someone's testimony. If one is to make sense of a content that the informer is delivering, one has to pay attention to what is being said, meaning one has to try to construct a story of what happened and what kinds of information are being transmitted. Ideally, the listener also makes an attempt to incorporate new pieces of knowledge into his existing web of knowledge. Similarly, thinking, inquiring, and reasoning are involved in reading a literary work. The process of understanding a work involves filling in the gaps not explicitly given and asking about fictional truth: these processes of negotiating between fictional world and real world would be impossible unless the reader engages in thinking about what he is reading, inquiring into the connections between characters and reasoning about how the episodes within the novel are structurally connected and depend upon each other. But more importantly for how we learn from literature is to see that reading a literary work invites thinking, inquiring and reasoning about the real world. At least one aspect of the reading process is trying to determine how what is described fares with respect to how things are in the

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See for example: Fairweather, Zagzebski (eds.), 2001.

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It is worth pointing out that this is not the only way in which contemporary epistemologists think of epistemology. Another new approach to epistemology is the one pursued by Roberts and Woods who have recently developed an account of what they call *regulative epistemology* (see their 2007). See also: Prijic-Samaržija, Bojanić 2012.

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Due to the lack of space, I cannot go into details regarding the nature of testimony and

conditions that have to be fulfilled for it to successfully transmit knowledge. Suffice to say that testimony has to do with people telling us things they know, or think they know, or are reliable about, without knowingly and intentionally deceiving us. In that sense, I advocate what is known as “The Broad View of Testimony” (see: Fricker 2007).

7

See: Vidmar 2013 for the connection between art and cognitive gains pertaining to pluralism.

world. This is captured by way of creating new patterns of thinking about the real world situations, which are inspired by the specificities of the work and by what is made salient in the work. Thus in many ways, the cognitive processes we engage in when we listen to the testimony and in the process of reading, can be evaluated positively by epistemic processes Kvanvig sees as pertaining to epistemological research.

The next important aspect of epistemology is evaluation of “events such as changes in one’s world view or the adoption of a different perspective on things”. Both, testimony and literary works can contribute to these kinds of cognitive processes, particularly if we see them as sources of experiences. My friend’s testimony on her adulterous relationship can help me understand why people engage in such behaviour in the same (or at least similar) way as reading about *Ema Bovary* or *Ana Karenina*. Valerie Tiberius (2005) has argued that this kind of change in perspective can result in acquisition of wisdom. If my friend tells me about her experience of living with cancer, yet remains positive and optimistic about the possibility of still having a valuable, fulfilled life, then what she is telling me can influence how I see the world and the prospects of fulfilled life and can bring about a change in my perspective on how to deal with hardships of life. Many philosophers emphasize the ability of literature to cause a change in perspective, most often in terms of how one sees the world morally.<sup>8</sup> As a result of reading, readers can develop new evaluative and descriptive patterns through which they think about their experience, they can realize that their previously held view was lacking in depth or was too superficial, not sensitive towards complexities that make our experience.

Next, epistemology concerns itself with “states such as belief assumptions, presuppositions, tenets, working hypothesis”. At this point of course it is not yet clear how such states lead to any recognizably valuable cognitive goods, but at least it is recognized that they do have a role to play in our attempt to reach cognitive grasp of our world. Knowing that *p* is always better than assuming (even if correctly) that *p*. However, it is wrong to claim that hypothesis and assumption have no epistemic value. They are of great importance for the scientific research. Why then shouldn’t we claim they can also be used by individuals, in their daily attempts to reach knowledge and gain a wider cognitive grasp on various aspects of reality? Belief assumptions, presuppositions, tenets and working hypothesis are not important only from the perspective of how a cognizer organizes her own research, but also for how the transmission of knowledge and other epistemic benefits take place in a society. One devastating way in which assumptions and presuppositions affect the cognitive transfer of knowledge in the case of testimony was demonstrated by Miranda Fricker (2007) in her analyses of the ways in which prejudice against women lower their status as reliable informers.

Finally, Kvanvig inserts variety of cognitive successes on his list, including true beliefs and opinions, viewpoints that make sense of the course of experience, tenets that are epistemically adequate, knowledge, understanding, theoretical wisdom, rational presuppositions, justified assumptions, working hypothesis likely to be true, responsible inquiry and the like. Putting knowledge aside, given its traditional importance for epistemology, let us focus on these other cognitive successes. If all of these count as cognitive successes, then all of these are states we should strive towards. This is precisely what pluralist epistemology claims. In addition to knowledge, two more cognitive successes are said to be important: understanding and wisdom. Let’s turn to these now.<sup>9</sup>

### 3. Knowledge, wisdom and understanding: Friends or foes?

We saw that the abandonment of monistic picture of epistemology means recognizing that there are more epistemic goals we should be striving towards. According to Kvanvig, this plurality of epistemic goals includes “knowledge, understanding, rationality, justification, sense-making” (Kvanvig 2005, p. 287). More or less, this list exhausts the key notions of contemporary epistemological debates, with the addition of wisdom. Once the epistemologists turned their attention toward understanding, it did not take it long for it to win the epistemic throne and replace knowledge as the chief cognitive success. Duncan Pritchard, Jonathan Kvanvig, Wayne Riggs, Catherine Elgin, Linda Zagzebski, and George Gardiner all provide arguments that show that understanding is more valuable than knowledge.<sup>10</sup> The most recent developments in epistemology suggest that the next epistemic battle between values and goals will be the one between understanding and wisdom. Several philosophers now seem to be giving precedence to wisdom and provide accounts of it that are based on the fact that reaching wisdom, that is, becoming wise, is what all epistemic agents should strive towards. In discussing the value turn and the changes it brought about, Jason Baehr claims that “whatever its other qualities may be, wisdom is widely regarded as a major – perhaps the supreme – epistemic good” (Baehr 2010, p. 82). In order to decide whether this battle is necessary, that is, which epistemic good should be seen as supreme, let us see in more details the nature of each of them. I will not have much to say about knowledge, given that monism has been giving it its due attention. Here I want to elaborate a bit on understanding and wisdom.

#### 3.1. Understanding

Despite the constantly growing interest in the notion of understanding, there are still many grey areas left to explore. Is understanding to be understood as a process, whereby the cognizer comes to understand something, or is it to be understood as a state, quite like knowledge, where a cognizer can say ‘I understand that’ or ‘I understand how’. A question that precedes such considerations is what it is that can be understood in the first place, i.e. what is the object of understanding. This is particularly problematic for two reasons. First, if analogies between ‘knowing that’ and ‘understanding that’ are brought too close, then one has to explain what is it that is ultimately distinctive of understanding that makes it different from and superior to knowledge. Couldn’t we just claim that understanding is a kind of knowledge, perhaps in the sense that the one who understands simply knows more, namely knows the reasons why something (rather than some other thing) happened?<sup>11</sup> This is the heritage

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Matthew Kieran has insisted on this, see: Kieran 1996.

Riggs 2003, 2008; Elgin 1996; Zagzebski 2001; Gardiner 2012.

9

Short terminological clarification: to claim that something is epistemic or cognitive (here the two are synonymous in the sense that epistemology, in part, has to do with our cognitive economy) success implies that it is also a goal we should aim to reach.

11

Kvanvig calls this (and argues against) the common assumption about the nature of understanding: “Though the nature of understanding is not often addressed, it is nonetheless commonly assumed that knowledge and understanding bear a direct and intimate connection, for the assumption is that understanding of the theoretical sort is a species of knowledge. The assumption is that the kind of understanding at issue when regarding our

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See: Pritchard 2010 (in Pritchard, Millar, Haddock 2010); Kvanvig 2003, 2005, 2008;





left to epistemologists by the philosophers of science, who saw understanding as a special kind of knowledge, namely knowledge of the causes. Within philosophy of science, understanding was seen as the result of the successful process of explaining: if we want to know why certain state of affairs, A, took place, we need an explanation of why A, rather than B or C, and the crucial part of such explanation was knowing the reasons (causes) which made A (rather B or C) develop.

Second worry is that one might end up explaining what understanding is by providing an example of it: understanding is what it is involved in understanding a sentence, or a mathematic proof. Though this is a good pointer towards how to think of understanding, it is radically too narrow and does not allow for a full impact that understanding as cognitive success bears. One of the reasons why some philosophers are so sceptical over the epistemic significance of understanding is their inability to recognize various ways in which understanding is important for our cognitive economy. Swirski (2007) claimed that one problem with it is that it is unclear whether it is a process or a state. But the fact that understanding can be a gradual process as well as a state should not be interpreted as a negative aspect of understanding. There is a valuable insight contained in “we are coming to understand better and better the impacts that social networks such as Facebook have on social connections children make with their peers”. The reason why such an understanding is a process is the fact that new aspects of these impacts are revealed with time, aspects which couldn’t have been taken into consideration before. On the other hand, “A child understands Pythagorean Theorem” implies a state she reached. It can be manifested in her ability to solve various mathematical tasks in which Pythagorean Theorem is used. But notice that as she starts to engage with more and more complex calculations, her understanding of Pythagorean Theorem develops and can again be seen as a process. In order for the child to be able to successfully perform these calculations it is not enough to know the correct formula. She needs to understand the way it functions and the implications it has.

These kinds of considerations lead Richard Mason, whose *Understanding Understanding* (2003) is one of the most insightful, elaborated, and systematic contribution to this problem, to claim that critical theory of understanding cannot be based on the critical theory of knowledge. Analysing various ways in which we might think of the relation between knowledge and understanding and the priority of one over the other, he claims that “there is no reason to suppose that understanding needs ‘conditions’ of a kind that would mirror those in a theory of knowledge” (Mason 2003, p. 48).

A valuable analysis of understanding is found in Riggs, Zagzebski, Pritchard, and Kvanvig, all of whom explain understanding in terms of grasping certain aspects of the object of understanding. According to Riggs,

“What is involved in having understanding may well be even more obscure than what is involved in having knowledge. But it seems clear enough that it includes having a true grasp of some significant part of reality without being deeply deceived about it. Thus achieving it requires achieving our two traditional goals ... Understanding some part of the world requires an appreciation for order, fit, and pattern. It requires that one ‘see’ how things fit together and why they are the way they are.” (Riggs 2003, p. 350)<sup>12</sup>

Linda Zagzebski (2001) retains this basic idea. According to Zagzebski, it was already in Plato that understanding was given epistemic precedence over knowledge, but somehow epistemologists lost this from sight because of their constant unyielding focus on justification. But understanding can better fur-

ther our epistemic goals of obtaining ‘cognitive contact’ with structures of reality. According to her, there are three elements that figure in the understanding. First,

“... understanding is a state gained by learning an art or skill, a *techne*. One gains understanding by *knowing how* to do something well, and this makes one a reliable person to consult in matters pertaining to the skill in question.” (Zagzebski 2001, p. 241)

Person who understands (why the car isn’t working in circumstances C1) is able to solve the problem not only in C1, but in all the relevant circumstances in which the car might break down. On the other hand, a person who knows how to fix the car in C1 but lacks understanding of why the car broke down in the first place, will not be able to repair it in any other circumstances.

Second feature Zagzebski identifies as relevant to understanding is that

“... understanding is not directed toward a discrete object, but involves seeing the relation of parts to other parts and perhaps even the relation of part to a whole. It follows that the object of understanding is not a discrete proposition” (Ibid., p. 241).

We have seen this idea already in Riggs, and as it stands it is one of the most emphasized aspects of understanding.

Third feature that figures in Zagzebski’s account of understanding is that it

“... represents some portion of the world nonpropositionally.” (Ibid., p. 242)

Zagzebski sees the world as composed of various structures and finds it

“... unlikely that propositional structure exhausts the structure of reality.” (Ibid., p. 242)

Therefore, the manner in which we come to grasp these structures is through understanding:

“I propose that *understanding is the state of comprehension of nonpropositional structures of reality.*” (Ibid., p. 242)

The most influential account of understanding is provided by Jonathan Kvanvig. His interest is in two senses of understanding: when understanding is claimed for some object, that is, subject matter, and when it involves understanding that something is the case, which covers understanding why, when, where and what. On a first approximation, knowledge and understanding are both factive. One important difference however is that in some contexts, knowing (Bill Clinton) does not imply understanding (him). Note however that from understanding (a body of information) follows that one has the knowledge (of the information). This suggests that understanding is not identical with knowledge, which implies that understanding adds something that knowledge itself lacks. Here is how Kvanvig accounts for it:

cognitive success and achievements is some type of deep and comprehensive knowledge concerning a particular subject, topic, or issue.” (Kvanvig 2003, p. 188)

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Riggs believes that accounting for understanding in this way allows us to surpass the practical and theoretical limitations that traditional epistemic goals of believing truth and avoiding error impose on us. Namely, from the theoretical point of view, our epistemic desire to acquire as much truth as possible

might be restrained by our fear of getting things wrong. But if we aim at understanding, and understanding can be reached even if there are some erroneous components in the wider system, then one can still gain cognitive benefits that might be unreachable if we were careful not to make a mistake. The claim that understanding can be attained even if there are some errors in the wider cognitive construction is not unique to Riggs, as we’ll see.

“The central feature of understanding, it seems to me, is in the neighbourhood of what internalist coherence theories say about justification. Understanding requires the grasping of explanatory and other coherence-making relationships in a large and comprehensive body of information. One can know many unrelated pieces of information but understanding is achieved only when informational items are pieced together by the subject in question (...) Whereas knowledge can have as its object individual propositions, understanding may not.” (Kvanvig 2003, p. 192)

Thus, what is of crucial importance are various elements within one’s cognitive grasp and the way they are related to each other. This relation may be explanatory, logical, probabilistic or of some other kind that brings about a coherence and unity among them. What is crucial for understanding is that the cognizer sees how these relations among elements are held together and how they interact to one another, producing a state of affair that is the object of understanding. Kvanvig calls this ‘theoretical understanding’ and what is important is that it is not directed at particular propositions, but at the whole they create.

One of the crucial differences between knowledge and understanding is the fact that understanding, unlike knowledge, comes in degrees. This makes understanding different from knowledge, and it also makes it possible for us to talk in terms of understanding something better or with a greater degree. This is one of the reasons why Kvanvig eventually rejects the view according to which understanding is a species of knowledge. The fundamental difference between the two is revealed in the fact that knowledge is primarily directed at the world and the relevant connection is that between the mind and the world. On the other hand, understanding is directed at the connections of beliefs within the mind. The final requirement that Kvanvig puts forward for understanding is that the grasping of these relations be psychological:

“The way in which all the information fits together must be part of what the person is aware of.” (Kvanvig 2003, p. 202)

The idea here is that one cannot understand something without being aware of it. Someone might object to this by claiming that if understanding is only a matter of internal connection, then it can completely fail to grasp things in the external world. It can be false, in other words, or it can miss out on how things are in the world. Yet this would be wrong. According to Kvanvig, both knowledge and understanding are factive and in that sense truth (of what is understood) matters to understanding, but the difference between the way truth is connected to knowledge and understanding is in the role that truth plays in Gettier-like cases. While instances of gettierized true belief are not considered knowledge, Kvanvig suggests that understanding is not vulnerable to Gettier-like cases. Given the cognitive effort on the part of the cognizer to reach understanding, one cannot come to it by luck or by accident.<sup>13</sup>

Roberts and Wood point toward another way in which understanding can be evaluated with respect to truth:

“Something like truth is typically a condition for understanding.” (Roberts, Wood 2007, p. 43)

This can be further explained in terms of adequacy:

“Understanding anything typically has to be more or less adequate to what it is about.” (Ibid., p. 43–4)

There is one further aspect of Roberts and Wood’s theory that is appealing and that is the way they connect understanding to the active engagement of the cognizer:

“Understanding often emerges only with concerted intellectual activities like exploring, testing, dialectical interchange, probing, comparing, writing, and reflecting.” (Ibid., p. 50)

Notice that none of these intellectual activities is necessary for gaining simple truths (and thus knowing) that there is a glass in front of me. So at least in some sense, knowing involves less activities and mental work than understanding.<sup>14</sup>

The most developed account of understanding is the one by Catherine Elgin, in her book *Considered Judgment*. The book itself is deeply concerned with how we get from individual propositions and beliefs to more coherent and encompassing, full developed theories. In developing such a view, Elgin relies on the Rawlsian model of deliberations in domain of politics and her central notion is that of reflective equilibrium and coherentist account of how we get to know something and justify it. Such a coherent system includes not only beliefs of which it is composed but also values, rules, categories and methods of justification, all of which are subject to constant revision and reconfiguration as the new beliefs, new values, new aims, etc. come along. This is radically oversimplified retelling of Elgin’s account, but it gives us enough to go by. Here I am interested in her account of understanding, and the role it plays in our cognitive economy.

Elgin begins her account of understanding by noting that:

“Cognitive progress is no piecemeal accretion of separately established facts but a dynamic interplay of novel proposals and entrenched commitments. Integration of new material often requires reconfiguration of commitments already in place, revision or repudiation of earlier adoptions.” (Elgin 1996, p. 122)

What is crucial is that she does not take the result of such a process to be knowledge but understanding. In accounting for such a view, her account of understanding and the crucial ways in which it differs from knowledge is revealed: knowledge and understanding do not share the same conditions. Knowledge is “a permanent achievement, its justification unconditional and [it is] insensitive to the changes in epistemic clime” (Ibid.). However, understanding, as an epistemic achievement that is accomplished only within a wider structure of reflective equilibrium, is a result of various elements falling into place (elements such as values, rules, categories, methods) which guide the research and these cannot be evaluated with respect to some permanent truth. This allows for the possibility that a falsehood is inserted into the sys-

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Of course, intuitions vary here. Someone akin to anti-luck epistemology might claim that the source of information has to be immune to all kinds of Gettier like scenarios, even if S still managed to (or was lucky enough to) ‘choose’ right, in which case he would side against Kvanvig on this. Had it been too easy for S to go wrong, then, even if he in fact hadn’t, this still isn’t good enough to grant him understanding. My intuition is more on the Kvanvig side.

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This is particularly so for those who defend externalist accounts of knowledge and justification, according to which all that is necessary for knowledge is reliable belief-formation process. In fact, Goldman, the main defender of such a view, rejects the need for

a cognizer to wonder about the reliability or justifiability of such process, which means that on this reading, reflective or intellectual activities of the kind that Roberts and Wood describe are not necessary. Though I do not think reliabilism is enough for justification (in the sense that justification has to include internalist component), it has to be admitted that in many instances when cognizers believe they know, they do not subject their beliefs to any kind of internalist test, yet there is a sense that they have knowledge (for example, upon entering a room with one table, a cognizer automatically forms the justified belief ‘there is one table in this room’ and we are ready to ascribe her that knowledge, even if she never considered the sceptical scenario as a real treat to her statement.

tem, which cannot be the case with knowledge. However, Elgin urges, falsehoods can have a valuable role in advancing understanding. Her example is the law of gravity, which

“... is not strictly true since it neglects the gravitational attraction of everything except the Earth. Still, it provides genuine insight into the behaviour of falling bodies, contributes to a general theory of terrestrial motion, connects observations and measurements with physical laws, and closely approximates the vastly more complicated truth. It is plainly epistemically valuable, even if its falsity disqualifies it as knowledge.” (Elgin 1996, p. 123)

It is important here to emphasize that on this account, understanding is not restricted to facts and it does not have to be “couched in sentences” but “located in apt terminology, insightful questions, effective nonverbal symbols, intelligent behaviour” (Ibid.). Nevertheless, it represents a valuable cognitive achievement, one which is “more comprehensive than knowledge ever hoped to be” (Ibid.), given that it extends to domains and objects that cannot be captured by knowledge. These include understanding rules, reasons, actions, passions, objectives, obstacles, techniques, tools, forms, functions, fictions, facts, pictures, worlds, equations, patterns. What is important is that these are “not isolated accomplishments; they coalesce into an understanding of a subject, discipline, or field of study” (Ibid.). Finally, Elgin, as well as Kvanvig, Zagzebski and Roberts and Wodd, sees understanding as something that comes in degrees.

Rather than wondering about the differences between these accounts of understanding, let us briefly consider what the lack of understanding consists in. At the first approximation, lack of understanding over a subject matter is evident when a person lacks appropriate recourses in her cognitive economy to see the subject matter as a well-supported, coherent system that leaves no room for uncertainties and unresolved issues. A person who understands something will not be in need of any additional information or judgment to be able to see the connections, and to grasp the situation in all of its complexities. She will also have no need to rely on others to solve her problems. In that sense, understanding something implies the position of epistemic authority over a situation, rather than the position of epistemic dependence. A lack of understanding may also be visible when one’s perspective on the subject matter is incomplete, and the cognizer’s beliefs are indifferent and disconnected. This might be manifested in one’s inability to come up with an account he himself is ready to offer to others or to accept himself. Restraining from judgment when judgement is demanded might be a sign of considerable holes in one’s grasp of situation or circumstances.

### 3.2. *Wisdom*

We saw that an epistemic theory of understanding is still a work in progress, and things are similar when it comes to a theory of wisdom. Some of the questions regarding wisdom are the same as regarding understanding: what exactly is the connection between knowledge and wisdom, and are there conditions of wisdom, such that, if one satisfies them then one is wise. However, it seems that most of the attempts to come to a theory of wisdom struggle to incorporate several factors. First of all, the heritage of Socrates, and his idea that wisdom has to do with knowing that one doesn’t know anything. Second, and more influentially, Aristotle’s distinction between *sophia* and *phronesis*, which is mostly visible in the fact that most often, wisdom is said to have two kinds, theoretical and practical. Thirdly, the fact that wisdom can be practical suggests that being wise has to do with how one lives, not only with what is

going on in his cognitive economy. In that sense, wisdom is brought in connection with ‘knowing how’, not only ‘knowing that’. And finally, a lot of things said about wisdom seem to rely on and set out to incorporate what has become one of the most famous (even if not particularly unified) notion of wisdom expressed by Nozick:

“Wisdom is not just one type of knowledge, but diverse. What a wise person needs to know and understand constitutes a varied list: the most important goals and values of life – the ultimate goal, if there is one; what means will reach these goals without too great a cost; what kinds of dangers threaten the achieving of these goals; how to recognize and avoid or minimize these dangers; what different types of beings are like in their actions and motives (as this presents dangers or opportunities); what is not possible or feasible to achieve (or avoid); how to tell what is appropriate when; knowing when certain goals are sufficiently achieved; what limitations are unavoidable and how to accept them; how to improve oneself and one’s relationships with others or society; knowing what true and apparent value of various things is; when to take a long-term view; knowing the variety and obduracy of facts, institutions, and human nature; understanding what one’s real motives are; how to cope and deal with major tragedies and dilemmas of life, and with the major good things too.” (taken from Mišćević 2012, p. 130)

Let us briefly go through some of these theories.<sup>15</sup>

The first one is inspired by Socrates’ insistence on taking an attitude of humility towards one’s own knowledge. This view is known as *epistemic humility view* and according to it, wisdom consists in acknowledging one’s ignorance. Someone who accepts some account of humility view might claim that a wise person knows that knowledge is fallible and that therefore one should always have the attitude of humility rather than of arrogance. It can also be claimed that a wise person knows which things she knows for certain (i.e. which of her beliefs are justified and true) and restrains from claiming to know anything that falls out of the domain she knows well.

Insisting on epistemic humility is praise worthy, particularly if contrasted with epistemic arrogance. Epistemic humility is important as a character trait, in that it makes one cautious in how one exercises one’s epistemic agency. Being open minded about other people’s viewpoints, arguments and evidence rather than arrogantly assuming that one is always right certainly invites not only epistemic but ethical praise as well. It is also important in the epistemology, in that it makes one more careful in forming judgments. Peter Unger has warned us against taking dogmatic attitude toward things and the attitude of epistemic humility is nice *modus operandi* on how to achieve it. But, it is hard to see how epistemic humility (whether as a character trait or as an attitude) is in itself sufficient to make someone wise. If A and B are epistemically humble, but A has all sorts of knowledge about various areas of life and knows how to live well, and B is ignorant on most things and has no clear conception of how life should be lived well, intuition says that A’s cognitive economy and his ways of exercising his epistemic agency are somehow better than B’s. Though both are humble, B lacks something and it is probable that what B lacks is wisdom.

On the other hand, it is at least possible that one can be wise even if one is not humble. Let’s say that one was always lucky in a sense that his viewpoints, arguments, and evidence really were good and correct, perhaps because they were formed reliably or because one simply is extremely smart and competent in reaching knowledge. Then, had he been humble and perhaps restrained

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A nice overview was provided by Sharon Ryan (2012); I will rely on her classification here.

from sticking to his knowledge, he would end up not knowing. We can think here of the character of doctor House from the famous television show. Leaving aside the question of whether he was wise, the fact remains that he was competent and reliable in his knowledge (which was the result of what Pritchard would call one's ability) and he was acting upon it to save lives. Had he been humbler, and listened to those who objected him, certainly some of his patients would die. So the attitude of arrogance can sometimes be a better way to go. The problem then is, how to know which situations ask for humility and which for arrogance. Knowing when to be humble and when to stick to one's gun might just be one important aspect of wisdom, rather than being humble all the time.

Being wise can also mean knowing a lot, according to the *wisdom as knowledge* view. This knowledge may consist in having theoretical knowledge (as explained by Aristotle's account of *sophia*) or in having practical knowledge (as captured by Aristotle's *phronesis*). Theoretical knowledge in this sense includes self-knowledge, knowledge of the world and other people, as well as knowledge of what is truly important. Some philosophers would also include here understanding, specified as knowledge of the casual connections that exist in the world, as well as understanding of some fundamental philosophical concerns. On this view, our House character is wise: he has extensive knowledge about people, medicine, religion, psychological reactions of people, he understands how things hang together as well as why people do what they do and how they react to things, given their character, motivations, beliefs, preferences, etc. What is most often objected to this view is the lack of any additional condition, beside knowledge, for being wise. In the previous chapter we saw that some are willing to negate the distinctive value of understanding because it wasn't clear how it differs from having more knowledge; in the case of wisdom as lots of knowledge, it is even more problematic. Therefore, the idea is, something needs to be done with this knowledge, in the sense that it is put to good use for the person who has it. Again inspired by Aristotle, some philosophers claim that being wise is closely connected to living well, to making one's life good. Therefore, any theory of wisdom, on the third view, should necessary take into consideration the intuitive idea that wisdom is somehow connected to the practical side of us: deciding how to live and what to do. Ryan terms this as wisdom as *knowledge and living well view*:

"Many practical theories of wisdom focus on not only knowing how to live well, but on how we apply what we now and how we actually live out our lives. When we do it well, by taking the long view on things, knowing what is worth worrying about and what we should just shrug off and move on from, knowing how best to spend our time and effort, etc., we achieve wisdom." (Ryan 2012, p. 103)

It seems that any theory of wisdom is somehow divided between taking into consideration theoretical aspect of wisdom, and the idea of being practically wise. Ryan suggests that the problem with philosophical construction of a theory of wisdom is in not being able to balance the two, in that one either ends up putting too much emphasis on theoretical or on practical aspect. On her latest view

"A wide and deep variety of well-grounded, rational beliefs in basic academic subjects such as philosophy, science, literature, history, etc. are essential for wisdom. Someone who has not had the privilege of a well-rounded education [by which she means being exposed to and understand the big ideas and questions] may be quite intelligent, might be living well, and may well be a person to admire and consult on wide variety of issues, but he or she is not informed enough to count as wise." (Ryan 2012, p. 103)

Practical wisdom is not enough, Ryan argues, because it neglects the effort one has to put into achieving wisdom:

“Wisdom is difficult to achieve, in part, because of all the investigation, reading, thinking, studying, analyzing, and learning it requires.” (Ibid., p. 104)

Because of the active involvement on the part of the cognizer to achieve wisdom, it is claimed that wisdom is the prime epistemic good, the most valuable state one can reach. Baehr characterizes theoretical wisdom partly as “a kind of personal intellectual *ability* or *competence* that is *aimed at*” (Baehr 2012, p. 89). This suggests that an active engagement on the part of the cognizer is necessary for wisdom to be achieved. It also suggests that wisdom (i.e. the desire, and the effort put into becoming wise) is a lifelong process, and like understanding, wisdom is a sort of achievement that comes in degrees and is susceptible to constant growth and improvement.

Being wise is an epistemic good; but it is also a virtue. In fact, out of many different proposals on how exactly to classify wisdom, it seems that the most promising line is to see wisdom as a kind of intellectual virtue, a chief intellectual virtue that governs our intellectual conduct. Roberts and Wood (2007), Ryan (2012), and Mišćević (2012) are among philosophers who offered such accounts. Ryan classifies her view as “Deep Rationality” theory of wisdom and claims that it incorporates the following three conditions:

- (1) S has a wide variety of epistemically justified beliefs on a wide variety of valuable academic subjects and on how to live rationally (epistemically, morally, and practically).
- (2) S has very few unjustified beliefs and is sensitive to his or her limitations.
- (3) S is deeply committed to both:
  - (a) acquiring a wider, deeper, and more rational beliefs about reality (subjects listed in condition 1)
  - (b) living rationally (practically, emotionally, and morally)<sup>16</sup>

Inspired mostly by Ernest Sosa’s theory of knowledge, Nenad Mišćević (2012) offers the most elaborate theory of wisdom, a “Virtue-Theoretic Proposal”, according to which understanding (defined as a type of knowledge, namely knowledge of casual dependencies) is an important element of wisdom. Unfortunately, I cannot go into details regarding Mišćević’s account, but I strongly recommend it, given that I think it is the most promising way in which to think of the connection between knowledge, understanding, and wisdom, and in that it offers a coherent view on the value of knowledge and the way it connects to epistemic virtues. Another aspect of Mišćević’s theory is the way in which he incorporates Nozick’s account into a more elaborate and refined account of what it means to be wise. Here, however, it is important to note a two level account of wisdom he offers. The first level of wisdom – basic wisdom –

“... encompasses primarily phronesis generated motivation and, on the factual theoretical side, casual-dispositional knowledge of oneself and of other people, in particular, group-focused and general, and as much information about the world as is needed for the good life.” (Mišćević 2012, p. 135)

The second level – reflective wisdom– is thought of as a kind of meta-ethical level where one is asked to reflect on the first level commitments and to try to

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Ryan 2012, p. 108. Ryan’s account is specific in that she doesn’t see knowledge as a requirement for wisdom, only that person has

justified beliefs. Condition (2) captures the key elements of epistemic virtue of humility.



balance them out, and to adjust them to novel situations. It is here that more practical aspect of wisdom is revealed, the one connected to how one lives and comports in his life, rather than to what one knows.

One final theory of wisdom that I find particularly revealing is the one proposed by Jason Baehr (2012), who provides elaborate accounts of theoretical, as well as practical wisdom. Both he and Mišćević are close in claiming that wisdom incorporates a special kind of understanding of relevant subject matters, and they both claim that wisdom is involved in making the right choices in the courses of one's life, where these are enabled by one's understanding of the relevant aspects of situations, choices, dilemmas, character traits, etc. According to Baehr's classification, theoretical wisdom incorporates two further distinctions. It can be thought of as an ideal epistemic state characterized by deep explanatory understanding of epistemically significant subject matters, and as a competence, that is, a personal intellectual ability to reliably identify choice-worthy ends. Similarly, practical wisdom also includes two aspects. Trait conception classifies practical wisdom as knowing how to live well, where this involves willingness to conduct in that manner, as well as the know-how conception, according to which a cognizer is good at balancing competing values and applying moral principles to new situations.

Plenty of issues are left for epistemologists to answer regarding wisdom. At the moment, a rather interesting debate is going on concerning with the claim that being wise implies being ethically good – some philosophers have raised interesting points regarding with wise yet morally corrupted people who act only for their own interests. Another relevant discussion is finding the proper balance between intellectual and ethical aspects of wisdom and its motivational force. Does knowing what is good, what should be done, what is wise to do automatically make demand on one to do so? Is there room for weakness of will, or for intentionally making a mistake? And finally, given how strongly epistemologists insist on the connection between being wise and living a good life, more needs to be said about what good life is. Always doing the right thing (as Ryan's account seems to suggest) might leave one wise, perfectly moral and completely unhappy; epistemologists need to (in co-operation with psychologist and moral philosophers) provide an explanation of the connection between wisdom and happiness.

But what is important for our discussion here is that wisdom makes a special use of self-knowledge and I'd like to insist on this aspect. Being wise means knowing how to learn from one's experiences and how to protect oneself from life's hardships. It also means learning from the experiences of others, so as to avoid making mistakes that others have done. In addition to knowing when to let go and when not, wisdom, I suggest, incorporates a great deal of self-knowledge and self-understanding not only in terms of one's desires, interests and motives, but also in terms of coping with the consequences of one's actions. Macbeth might be a useful example here; one thing that he lacked was knowledge of what he can't live with. Going mad is at least partly a result of his not being able to predict how killing of a king will affect him.

#### 4. Conclusion

I have presented several accounts of understanding and several accounts of wisdom, deliberately not choosing 'my favourite' among them, and deliberately not going into deep analysis or comparison of them. My reason for providing only an overview is the fact that I was primarily focused on present-

ing recent trends in value driven epistemology, with the aim of showing the importance of the shift from monism to pluralism. Monism in epistemology should not be accepted because it takes away the value of epistemic agency that we exhibit. Who we are as people is to a great extent determined by our cognitive endeavours to come to terms with ourselves, our world and other people, and epistemology has to recognize that. In addition, I claimed, monism cannot explain cognitive gain that is evident in cases of testimonial exchange (where more than knowledge is being transmitted and a listener can deepen one's understanding or change his perspective on things thus becoming practically and theoretically wiser) or in cases where one feels one has learned from art (in the sense that one has come to understand something about the psychological relations between people or some other aspect of the world that art brings forward). Thus pluralism simply fits better and explains better different cognitive connections we have with the world and different ways in which we feel we have obtained some kind of cognitive gain. By insisting on the practical aspect of wisdom it can also explain better than monism why knowledge matters. Though all of these claims need to be further analysed and supported by more elaborate research, I hope that here I have offered reasons to accept pluralism.

However, and this is what I now want to claim, pluralism should not be seen as a battlefield of various cognitive goods. It is not 'the winner takes it all' story. Even if wisdom is chief epistemic good, and the most praise-worthy character trait and intellectual virtue, there's still plenty of work for knowledge and understanding. From the accounts presented by Mišćević and Baehr, it seems obvious that the three goods work together. What I want to suggest at this point is that we should not be considering these candidates as mutually exclusive, in the sense that one is either a distinctive instance of the other (understanding as a special instance of knowledge), or that having plenty of one somehow enables a cognizer to have the other (having plenty of knowledge enables one to be wise). My proposal is to recognize the importance of each of these, relevant to the different areas of research and different motives and needs we might have for conducting our own researches. In some circumstances, being too reflective might cause one not to react at all, while in some other circumstances one needs to invest a proper amount of reflection before one can make one's 'cognitive decision' on how things are. Balancing these two extremes is not always pleasant, but it is what we are demanded to do. If I have doubts regarding my husband's fidelity, then I need to know (where this implies knowing for certain, having all the relevant evidence and appropriate level of justification) whether or not he really committed adultery. I need to *know* how things are. If we are in the middle of a marital crisis, I need to *understand* the reasons that brought us to this point. And if we are contemplating a divorce, I need to be *wise* about whether or not the marriage is worth fighting for or letting go is the solution I ought to embrace, so as to ensure more prosperous life later on, after the heartache is gone. In the first case (knowing about his potential affair) I need to be absolutely certain about his behaviour and whereabouts (perhaps even his disposition to act in that way) in order to be certain whether or not he was unfaithful. Notice that in some other circumstances the demands to be certain need not be so high – if I want to know what time it is, all I need is a reliable informer or a properly running watch. In the second case, knowing that we are in trouble is not enough to find the solution; ideally, we need to know why and how we got to this point, i.e. we need to understand what brought this on us, how the interplay of our characters and motives (needs, desires and other things that might be relevant

for sustaining a compatible relation) and external circumstances (demanding and time-consuming work schedules, financial issues) worked together, and influenced each other to bring us to where we are. The more I know about these things the better, but without understanding this particular kind of interplay, I will not have a fully cognitively satisfying grasp of why our marriage came to this point. And in the third case, understanding what brought this on is not enough to make a decision regarding my future action, being wise in the sense outlined above is needed to go on. So the point is, the relation between knowledge, understanding and wisdom is not that of dominance of one over the others but of cooperation and integration.<sup>17</sup>

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**Iris Vidmar**

### **Epistemička igra prijestolja**

#### **Sažetak**

*Cilj je ovoga rada skroman: želim ponuditi osvrt na neke od najnovijih razvoja u epistemologiji, okarakteriziranih posebnim pomakom koji se nazire već neko vrijeme. Pomak je najlakše objasniti kao napuštanje tradicionalne, monističke slike (prema kojoj je znanje jedino važno postignuće u pokušaju da spoznajno zahvatimo svijet) i prihvaćanje pluralizma (prema kojemu postoje i drugi važni spoznajni dosezi prema kojima bismo trebali ustrajati, ponajviše razumijevanje i mudrost). Jedan od najvažnijih aspekata toga pomaka pitanje je koje spoznajno stanje nasljeđuje znanje kao vrhovnu epistemičku vrijednost i taj će me aspekt najviše zanimati. Tvrdit ću da pluralistička slika bolje odgovara našem spoznajnom susretanju sa svijetom, s drugim ljudima i sa samima sobom. U tome smislu, umjesto da navijamo za to da postoji neka jedna vrijednost koja će se nalaziti na epistemičkom tronu, trebali bismo uvažiti nezamjenjiv doprinos svake od tih vrijednosti našim nastojanjima da shvatimo tko smo i s našim iskustvom svijeta.*

#### **Ključne riječi**

znanje, epistemički monizam, epistemički pluralizam, razumijevanje, mudrost

Iris Vidmar

## Epistemisches Spiel der Throne

### **Zusammenfassung**

*Das Ziel dieser Arbeit ist bescheiden: Ich möchte einen Rückblick auf einige der letzten Entwicklungen innerhalb der Epistemologie halten, die durch eine besondere Verschiebung gekennzeichnet sind, welche bereits seit einiger Zeit durchschimmert. Diese Verschiebung wird am eingängigsten erklärt als eine Abkehr von der traditionellen, monistischen Vorstellung (wonach das Wissen die einzige bedeutende Errungenschaft ist, in unserem Versuch, die Welt erkenntnis-mäßig zu erfassen) und die Anerkennung des Pluralismus (nach dem auch andere belangreiche erkenntnis-mäßige Leistungen bestehen, die wir anvisieren sollten – zumeist sind dies Verständnis und Weisheit. Einer der wichtigsten Aspekte dieser Verschiebung ist die Frage, welche Erkenntnislage das Wissen als den obersten epistemischen Wert erbt, und dieser Aspekt wird mein Interesse am stärksten erregen. Ich werde behaupten, dass das pluralistische Bild besser geeignet ist für unsere erkenntnisbezogene Begegnung mit der Welt, mit anderen Menschen sowie mit sich selbst. In diesem Sinne, anstatt die Option zu favorisieren, dass es den einen Wert gibt, welcher den epistemischen Thron besteigen wird, sollten wir den unersetzlichen Beitrag jedes Einzelnen von uns akzeptieren, in seiner Anstrengung, sich damit zu versöhnen, wer wir sind und was für Welterfahrungen wir gemacht haben.*

### **Schlüsselwörter**

Wissen, epistemischer Monismus, epistemischer Pluralismus, Verständnis, Weisheit

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## Le jeu épistémique des trônes

### **Résumé**

*Le but de ce travail est modeste : je souhaite exposer un compte rendu de certains progrès récents en épistémologie, caractérisés par un déplacement particulier qui se profile depuis déjà un certain temps. La manière la plus évidente d'expliquer ce déplacement est de le voir comme abandon de l'image traditionnelle, monistique (selon laquelle le savoir est la seule acquisition importante dans la tentative de saisir le monde d'un point de vue de la connaissance) et d'accepter le pluralisme (selon lequel il existe d'autres significations pour la connaissance sur la base desquelles nous devrions persévérer, spécialement dans la compréhension et la sagesse). L'un des aspects les plus importants de ce déplacement est la question de savoir quel est l'état de la connaissance dont hérite le savoir en tant que valeur épistémique suprême, et c'est bien cet aspect qui va le plus m'intéresser. J'affirmerai que l'image de pluralité convient mieux à notre rencontre avec le monde, avec les autres et avec nous-même d'un point de vue de la connaissance. En ce sens, au lieu d'encourager l'idée qu'il n'existe qu'une seule et unique valeur qui va se trouver sur le trône épistémique, nous devrions accepter l'irremplaçable contribution de chacun de nous dans le but de nous réconcilier avec qui nous sommes et avec comment est constitué notre expérience du monde constituée.*

### **Mots-clés**

savoir, monisme épistémique, pluralisme épistémique, compréhension, sagesse