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A Holistic Defense of Veritic Epistemic Consequentialism

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ABSTRACT

This paper offers a defense of veritic epistemic consequentialism, addressing its principal critiques. I argue that the core of epistemological value lies in its conduciveness to truth, rendering true beliefs intrinsically valuable. In response to the criticism that this approach may sacrifice individual truths for a greater aggregate and undervalues autonomous inquiry, I emphasize the well-connectedness of beliefs. Each belief's content is a proposition. Propositions are classified as first-order, second-order, third-order, etc., depending on what they are about. Higher-order propositions are about lower-order ones. I assume that if an epistemic agent believes in p , then she tends to believe in higher-order propositions that are about p . These higher-order propositions are more structural beliefs of the agent. If p is false, then falsity may spread over the whole network through higher-order propositions about p . Thus, sacrificing a single belief may bring more damage to the network, which is not acceptable for veritic epistemic consequentialism. Regarding the issue of autonomy, epistemic acts like reflection, inference, etc. can be represented as higher-order propositions. Therefore, veritic epistemic consequentialism values them.

KEYWORDS: *Veritism, Epistemic Consequentialism, Web of Belief, Higher-order Propositions, Epistemic Autonomy*

RESUMEN

Este artículo ofrece una defensa del consecuencialismo epistémico verítico, abordando sus principales críticas. Argumento que el núcleo del valor epistémico radica en su conductividad hacia la verdad, lo que hace que las creencias verdaderas sean intrínsecamente valiosas. En respuesta a la crítica de que este enfoque puede sacrificar algunas verdades individuales en favor de una acumulación mayor y devaluar la investigación autónoma, subrayo la buena conexión entre las creencias. El contenido de cada creencia es una proposición. Las proposiciones se clasifican como de primer orden, segundo orden, tercer orden, etc., dependiendo de aquello de lo que tratan. Las proposiciones de orden superior versan sobre las proposiciones de orden inferior. Supongo que, si un agente epistémico cree que p , entonces tiende a creer en proposiciones de orden superior que versan sobre p . Estas proposiciones de orden superior son creencias más estructurales del agente. Si p es falsa, entonces la falsedad puede extenderse por toda la red de creencias a través de proposiciones de orden superior sobre p . Por lo tanto, sacrificar una sola creencia puede causar más daño a la red, algo que no es aceptable para el consecuencialismo epistémico verítico. En cuanto al tema de la autonomía, los actos epistémicos tales como

la reflexión, la inferencia, etc., pueden representarse como proposiciones de orden superior. Por lo tanto, el consecuencialismo epistémico verítico las valora.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *veritismo, consecuencialismo epistémico, red de creencias, proposiciones de orden superior, autonomía epistémica*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the present study, I defend veritic epistemic consequentialism. Epistemic consequentialism posits that epistemic rightness hinges on the generation of true beliefs. Mirroring act-utilitarianism in ethics, veritic epistemic consequentialism emphasizes outcomes that are non-derivatively good.

Notwithstanding, this stance encounters considerable opposition, grounded in two core criticisms. Firstly, it faces the susceptibility of sacrificing certain truths in the pursuit of accruing a larger sum of true beliefs. Secondly, it may potentially erode autonomy due to the neglect of reflective and inferential processes, a factor perceived to undermine the epistemic integrity of this approach.

In response to these critiques, I seek to defend veritic epistemic consequentialism by adhering to its core principles while offering a novel interpretation. This novel interpretation focuses on the contents of beliefs, or propositions. In my interpretation, the contents of beliefs are hierarchically clustered: first-order propositions, second-order propositions, third-order propositions, and so on. In my terminology, an n -th order proposition is a proposition about $(n-1)$ th-order propositions. Let's consider belief contents as nodes in a graph. Since nodes correspond to propositions, they can be ranked as higher or lower orders. At each level, there are propositions of the same order. The connection between nodes at the same level is made through a node at a higher level. The graph as a whole represents an epistemic agent's model of the world. Any damage to a node in this graph damages the higher-order nodes connected to it. Damage to a higher-order node may spread to nodes at both upper and lower levels, ultimately putting the entire network at risk. Thus, sacrificing a true belief for the sake of a number of truths may risk the whole belief system. For this reason, it would not be rational for a veritic epistemic consequentialist to sacrifice certain truths for the sake of others.

Concerning the autonomy issue, my approach values epistemic acts like inference and reflection by representing them as higher-order propositions. It is important to note that, in responding to the autonomy ob-

jection, I do not presuppose that the objection is well-grounded. In other words, I do not take a position on whether a theory of knowledge should account for epistemic autonomy. Instead, I show that if the objection is well-grounded, my version of epistemic consequentialism can account for it. Conversely, if epistemology does not have such a requirement, my addition would be nothing other than a harmless redundancy.

II. VERITIC EPISTEMIC CONSEQUENTIALISM

Veritic epistemic consequentialism asserts that the merit of doxastic attitudes is evaluated based on their conduciveness to true beliefs. Drawing parallels with ethical consequentialism, which aspires to realize non-derivatively good outcomes, utilitarianism serves as an apt illustration. For instance, if pleasure is identified as the sole intrinsic good, then this form of ethical consequentialism dictates that any action culminating in an abundance of pleasure is inherently moral. It is crucial to underscore the exhaustive nature of this stance: no other action is deemed morally commendable outside this criterion.

Similarly, in epistemic realms, consequentialism is framed as the “idea that epistemic rightness -- denoted by terms such as ‘justification’ or ‘rationality’ -- is to be understood in terms of conduciveness to epistemic goods” [Ahlstrom-Vij and Dunn (2018), p. 2]. This perspective necessitates a closure principle, asserting that only those outcomes facilitating epistemic goods are considered valuable from an epistemological standpoint. In veritic epistemic consequentialism, specifically, the true measure of value lies in the acquisition of true beliefs. The following sections explore two main criticisms of this approach, mirroring the types of challenges also seen in ethical discourse.

II.1. *Berker’s Critique of Epistemic Consequentialism*

Selim Berker critically examines the parallels between ethical and epistemological consequentialist theories. Drawing upon criticisms traditionally leveled at ethical consequentialism, particularly utilitarianism, Berker challenges the foundations of epistemic consequentialism. He contends that, akin to the skepticism ethicists hold toward utilitarianism, epistemologists should be wary of epistemic consequentialism. Highlighting the overarching issues with epistemic consequentialism, he specifically underscores process reliabilism, describing it as a prominent yet flawed exemplar within the epistemological landscape. This version pos-

its that a belief, if borne out of a reliable process, attains epistemic value [Goldman (1979)]. Berker, however, seeks to debunk what he calls “the conceptual specter” [Berker (2013b), Berker (2013a)].

The core criticism Berker levels against epistemic consequentialism mirrors a renowned ethical contention against utilitarianism. The ethical critique against utilitarianism rests on its potential willingness to sacrifice individuals for the greater good. A classical illustration of this ethical predicament involves a hypothetical scenario where a doctor transplants the organs of one individual to save multiple patients, thereby maximizing overall happiness despite the evident ethical compromise [Thomson (1976)].

Berker transposes this ethical quandary to an epistemological setting, suggesting that epistemic consequentialism might entail sacrificing specific truths in a quest for a broader truth acquisition. One illustrative scenario, borrowed from Roderick Firth, concerns a logician on the brink of mortality, with just six months left to live. If this logician adopts a baseless optimism, believing he won't die within that period, this belief could positively impact his health, extending his life and allowing him to prove additional theorems [Firth (1981)]. Yet, this “wishful belief” would be epistemologically groundless. Here, one truth is ostensibly sacrificed for the acquisition of numerous others.

Another example centers on prime numbers. Imagine adopting a strategy where, for any posed natural number, it is automatically deemed non-prime. Since non-prime numbers exceed prime ones, this approach would yield more true beliefs than false ones over time. Yet, as the query volume increases, the truth ratio converges to unity. This strategy's flaw is evident when we erroneously claim that “7” isn't prime. The strategy, in essence, trades off particular truths for a general prevalence of truth — a transaction Berker deems unacceptable [Berker (2013a), pp. 374-375; Berker (2013b), p. 375].

Alvin Goldman, a stalwart proponent of epistemic consequentialism, counters this criticism. He posits that his theory doesn't merely appraise the value of a belief based on its capacity to yield more true beliefs. Instead, the underlying process producing the belief is paramount. It's retrospective evaluation: if the belief-generation process predominantly yields truths over falsehoods, the belief in question is deemed epistemologically valuable [Goldman (201), pp. 135-137; Ahlstrom-Vij & Dunn (2014), pp. 2-3]. To this end, Goldman argues that the prime number strategy, when confined to smaller numbers, would not be epistemically commendable due to the relative abundance of small prime numbers [Goldman (2015), p. 141]. However, Berker re-

finer his argument, contending that even if the strategy is applied only to numbers exceeding 100, it remains epistemologically unsound per process reliabilism, emphasizing its inherent shortcoming [Berker (2015), p. 149].

II.2 *The Autonomy Problem*

Paulson (2023) introduces another critique of veritic epistemic consequentialism. Drawing parallels to concerns raised against ethical consequentialism, Paulson leverages Robert Nozick's thought experiment against hedonistic consequentialism. Nozick envisions a hypothetical pleasure machine that can provide pleasure directly without intermediary actions. This scenario demonstrates that experiencing pleasure directly from a machine does not equate to living an ethically superior life. Nozick's conclusion emphasizes that not just outcomes but also the actions leading to those outcomes matter ethically [Nozick (1974), pp. 42-44].

Building on this perspective, Paulson (2023) introduces the notion of a "true-belief machine," a hypothetical apparatus that bestows its users with accurate beliefs, bypassing the need for inquiry or research. This concept closely resembles Lehrer's depiction of Mr. Truetemp, who, after undergoing an experimental surgical procedure, is implanted with a device that functions both as a precise thermometer and a computational unit capable of generating thoughts [Lehrer (1990), pp. 163-164]. The idea of a true-belief machine is not entirely fictional. As J. Adam Carter notes, ventures like Elon Musk's Neuralink already strive toward realizing similar ambitions [Carter A. (2022) pp. 1-3; Musk and Neuralink 2019]. Yet Paulson argues that simply extracting truths from such a device lacks genuine epistemological worth. He asserts that this highlights the inherent shortcomings of veritic epistemic consequentialism, connecting the debate to the broader theme of autonomy through two distinct accounts.

The first account, by J. Adam Carter, critiques cognitive enhancement tools such as wearable devices or pills, asserting that individuals become overly reliant on these enhancements. Carter believes that this dependency opposes the Enlightenment ideals of intellectual autonomy endorsed by thinkers like Kant, Hume, and Emerson, which emphasize independent reasoning and inquiry [Carter J. (2020)].

Jonathan Matheson offers a different perspective on autonomy. He positions autonomy as a characteristic that finds a balance between two extremes: the Maverick and the Codependent. The Maverick is fiercely independent in knowledge acquisition, while the Codependent leans

heavily on others. Matheson clarifies that possessing an extreme trait of autonomy (like the Maverick) doesn't equate to having the virtue of autonomy. Instead, he posits that true epistemic autonomy sits between these polarized states [Matheson (2022)].

But how does veritic epistemic consequentialism grapple with autonomy? While autonomous inquiries tend to yield more true beliefs, making autonomy advantageous, the proposed true-belief machine complicates matters. If one can acquire truths without autonomy, does autonomy retain its epistemic values? Paulson (2023) states, "the value of that ability is wholly derivative according to the veritic consequentialist. The value of the ability to inquire at your own discretion is wholly parasitic on the value of the true beliefs you secure by exercising this ability, on that view" [Paulson (2023), pp. 2429-2430].

III. A REVISED MODEL OF VERITIC EPISTEMIC CONSEQUENTIALISM

The critiques discussed earlier seem to stem from a neglect of the complex relationships among various beliefs. In its basic form, veritic epistemic consequentialism appears to depict agents seeking to acquire a collection of true beliefs. If we posit that our beliefs lack a structure, then aiming solely to aggregate true beliefs may result in the problem of sacrificing some beliefs for the sake of others.

Sacrificing certain beliefs for the sake of others is not desirable. In ethics, it corresponds to sacrificing certain individuals for the sake of others, which violates the separateness of persons. A great number of people's pleasure is not a substitute for a single person's pain. Berker argues that the separateness issue is even more important in epistemology. "Whereas in the ethical case there is some room for arguing that it is not a normative mistake to ignore the separateness of persons, since all of us think that at least some trade-offs that cross the barrier between persons are morally acceptable, in the epistemic case there is no wiggle room: the epistemic separateness of propositions is nonnegotiable" [Berker (2013b), p. 365].

One way to account for the separateness of propositions is to reject the idea of reducing epistemic value to having more true beliefs, effectively rejecting veritic epistemic consequentialism. This option presupposes that sacrificing one true belief does not harm the overall truth. However, if we assume a strong connection between the contents of beliefs, then veritic epistemic consequentialism would not result in sacrificing certain true beliefs for the sake of more. The reason is that sacrificing

a single truth could harm the entire belief system due to the interconnectedness of beliefs. To demonstrate this connection, I will adopt a holistic approach to beliefs by their content. Each belief has a proposition as its content. Lower-order propositions are connected through higher-order propositions. While first-order propositions have objects as their constituents, higher-order propositions have lower-order ones as their constituents. I call the overall propositions one believes a world model. I reasonably assume that an epistemic agent believes many higher-order propositions that connect all of her beliefs. If one does not share this assumption, then my argument in this paper would not make any sense. On the other hand, if an epistemic agent is disposed to believe in higher-order propositions that relate lower-order ones, then veritic epistemic consequentialists can overcome the problem of sacrificing true beliefs and the autonomy issue.

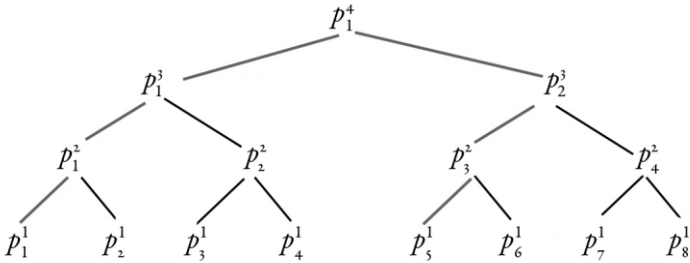
III.1 *A Holistic Interpretation and Veritic Epistemic Consequentialism*

III.1.1. Well-connectedness of Beliefs Through Their Contents

Higher-order propositions are about lower-order propositions. An n th-order proposition is about $(n-1)$ th-order propositions. Suppose the following is the case. p_1^n is an n th-order proposition that is about $(n-1)$ th-order propositions, p_1^{n-1} and p_2^{n-1} . p_2^n is an n th-order proposition that is about $(n-1)$ th-order propositions, p_3^{n-1} and p_4^{n-1} . p_1^{n+1} is an $(n+1)$ th-order proposition that is about p_1^n and p_2^n . The whole picture means that the $(n+1)$ th order proposition, p_1^{n+1} , connects apparently unrelated propositions at the $(n-1)$ th level, p_1^{n-1} to p_3^{n-1} . Graph theoretically, propositions can be represented as a well-connected network. In a well-connected network, between any two nodes, there are few intermediary nodes [de Sola Pool and Kochen (1978); Milgram (1967)].

To exemplify, suppose we have a set of propositions about physics and sociology. First-order propositions, p_1^1 , p_2^1 , p_3^1 and p_4^1 are about certain particles' physical properties such as position, momentum, etc. Propositions p_5^1 , p_6^1 , p_7^1 , p_8^1 are about various social groups' properties, such as mean age, income distribution, and total wealth. At the second level, there are propositions that connect the first-order propositions. For example, a proposition about the position of one particle can be related to the proposition about the mass of another particle. At this level, we are not only talking about objects but also about predicates and

propositions. For instance, p_1^1 supports p_2^1 or p_3^1 presupposes p_4^1 . These higher-order propositions can also be related to each other through more abstract entities like rules and laws. For example, p_1^1 supports p_2^1 implies that p_3^1 presupposes p_4^1 . Or consider a higher-order proposition expressing that these two higher-order propositions share the same structure. At an even higher level, we may have more abstract structural propositions concerning both the propositions about physics and sociology. Some simple examples might be uniformity in nature, causality, or certain epistemological beliefs. In such a case, all the propositions in this toy model would be connected. Below is a simple graph of this toy model. Apparently distant propositions p_1^1 and p_5^1 are connected through the higher-order proposition p_1^4 .



I believe that the propositions we hold are mostly related to each other. However, there may be some exceptions. I think most of the false beliefs we have are of this kind. We believe in these false propositions because we do not realize they are false, simply because we do not really think about them. We believe in them, but we do not form higher-order propositions about them. Once we form higher-order propositions about them, we revise our beliefs.

III.1.2. Epistemic Status of False and True Beliefs

There is a possibility that having a false belief damages the whole network. Let's consider the example above. If the agent acquires a false belief p_1^1 , then this damage moves to her belief p_1^2 , which is a higher-order proposition. Consequently, it affects an even higher-order proposition, p_1^3 . If we consider that those beliefs about higher-order propositions affect the agent's beliefs in lower-order propositions, the damage

may spread throughout the network. In sum, acquiring a single false belief may risk the whole network.

It does not mean any false belief is going to destroy the whole belief network. We, as epistemic agents, always make mistakes. These mistakes are usually not in conflict with our other beliefs. For this reason, we do not even realize them. Once we see their conflict with our other beliefs, we may reject them. On the other hand, the false beliefs that opponents of veritic epistemic consequentialism highlight are blatant ones. Unlike the minor mistakes we make, blatant falsities interact with other beliefs and, like a virus, may destroy the whole belief network. In other words, they bring about more false beliefs than true beliefs.

To note, one may object that the agent may not form beliefs about those connections between the newly acquired false beliefs and the rest of the network. In other words, why shouldn't we believe that epistemic agents would form no beliefs about a higher-order proposition, preventing the falsity from spreading over the whole network? Why can't we believe that epistemic agents' belief networks are not that globally connected? Of course, one may assume so. It is possible that ordinary epistemic agents' belief networks are not that well-connected. In that case, my whole argument fails. However, I think my assumption that beliefs are well-connected with each other is a reasonable one. If it is true, then a single obvious false belief may risk the whole model. To the consequentialist, this would mean that such a single falsity may spread throughout the belief network and bring about significantly more false beliefs.

III.2 *Sacrificing Truths*

Let's now respond to the criticism about sacrificing truths. Let's go on with each of the counterexamples. First, consider the sick mathematician with groundless optimism. The mathematician believes that she will heal. Since she eventually heals, the belief itself is true. However, her belief in wishful thinking as a valid method is false. This falsity may spread throughout her belief network. For instance, the proposition that wishful thinking is groundless may be entirely eliminated from her network. Instead, she may form a belief that wishful thinking works. At even higher levels, she may form a false belief about epistemology. Such beliefs could potentially put all her beliefs at risk.

The second example is the atheist scientist who needs to appear religious to get a grant from a religious society. Since he is not good at pretending, the only way is to genuinely believe that God exists. Would this

really bring more truth than falsity? If our beliefs are tightly connected, from an atheist's perspective, this act has the potential to destroy the whole truth. The only way to reject my point here is to assume that his belief about God's existence is isolated from most of his other beliefs, posing no risk of affecting other beliefs. However, I assume the opposite.

The last counterexample is the case involving prime numbers. Mathematics provides the most obvious support for my point. In mathematics, every proposition is interconnected through the overall structure, with higher-order proposition representing these structural elements. There is a hierarchy of mathematical propositions, ranging from lower to higher and even higher levels. For example, the fact that 15 is factorized into 3 and 5 is not on the same level as the fundamental theorem of arithmetic. The fundamental theorem of arithmetic stands at a higher level. As Gottlob Frege states, there is an increasing level of abstraction in the history of mathematics, evolving from "calculations with individual numbers" to use second-level functions [Frege (1997), p. 148]. A single falsity at a lower-level spreads to higher-order propositions. Falsity in the higher-order propositions may destroy the entire structure of mathematics. Therefore, the belief that no number is prime does not bring more truth. Instead, it potentially destroys all mathematical truths. From the perspective of increasing the total number of truths, this act would not be acceptable. Thus, such a belief is not valuable from the veritic epistemic consequentialist's perspective.

III.3 *Autonomy*

Turning our attention to the autonomy conundrum, we recognize that an autonomous individual engages in reflection, inference, and other epistemic actions to procure beliefs. A device like the true-belief machine, which furnishes direct truths, circumvents these processes and thus diminishes autonomy, rendering us epistemologically reliant on it. We content, however, that veritic epistemic consequentialism effectively addresses this once we interpret the human belief system the way we described above.

To note, I do not claim that autonomy is a must for an epistemic theory. Being neutral on this issue, if autonomy is a requirement, I show that veritic epistemic consequentialism overcomes this issue. If autonomy is not a requirement, then veritic epistemic consequentialism is already in a good position, and my integration of autonomy into the system would only be a harmless redundancy. In the following para-

graphs, I will show how veritic epistemic consequentialism integrates autonomy into the system.

In our theoretical framework, we conceptualize inferences as functions that are defined from one set of propositions to another, thereby characterizing each inference as a higher-order proposition. Viewed through this lens, the so-called “true-belief machine,” which provides insights into higher-order propositions, gains new significance due to the importance of these propositions.

A potential critique might arise from distinguishing between actively making inferences and passively receiving truths from a machine, focusing on the volitional nature of inference-making. My response to this objection is that in both deliberate reasoning and arriving at truths through the true-belief machine, there are deliberate and unconscious elements. Firstly, just as deciding to make an inference is a conscious, deliberate act, deciding to engage with the true-belief machine is also a conscious, deliberate act. On the other hand, we find that both processes are fundamentally influenced by unconscious, physiological mechanisms beyond conscious control.

This is evident in the true-belief machine, but it is also true in deliberate thinking. Consider the process of working on a paper. We first decide to work on certain elements of the paper. After deciding to analyze them, we do not explicitly continue to consider our beliefs; whatever we are doing when solving a math problem, for instance, is beyond our conscious control. We achieve each step in solving a problem through immense processing in our neural systems. This doesn't mean that no step is consciously accessible. Of course, there are steps accessible to the epistemic agent, and those steps can be represented as higher-order propositions. A true-belief machine should provide those propositions to the epistemic agent.

Matheson (2022) addresses a similar misconception regarding epistemic autonomy, clarifying that it does not necessarily entail doxastic voluntarism. Beliefs, he argues, are often passively acquired rather than actively chosen. Matheson states, “Beliefs are best seen as the outputs of inquiry. Like a successful job application, individuals exercise a much greater degree of control over the actions leading up to the output (inquiry, filling out application), then they do over the output itself (belief, getting hired)” [Matheson (2022), p. 178].

In our framework, autonomy is not an end but a byproduct. As Paulson notes, the value of autonomy is “parasitic on the value of the true beliefs you secure by exercising this ability” [Paulson (2023), p.

2430]. We value autonomy for its correlative epistemic actions, like inference or reflection. Our emphasis on higher-order propositions, therefore, offers a different perspective on the contents of beliefs and their interconnections.

This perspective resonates with the Enlightenment's philosophical underpinnings on autonomy. According to Carter's amalgamation of views from luminaries like Kant, Hume, and Emerson, the virtuously autonomous agent is characterized by critical thinking, independent reason, and resistance to external opinion molding [Carter J. (2020), p. 2939]. Our proposition dovetails with these tenets. A person in possession of true beliefs in higher-order propositions, whether acquired from external sources or self-derived, operates from a standpoint of independence. Once these truths are integrated, how they are integrated becomes an irrelevant question, much like the ownership of a purchased car is independent of the seller.

In our approach, individuals who allow their beliefs to be exclusively shaped by others possess primarily first-order propositions as beliefs, lacking the enriched structure brought about by higher-order propositions. Our model envisions an enlightened society where individuals harbor a well-connected belief web, with higher-order propositions weaving the complex tapestry. True enlightenment is elusive without possessing higher-order propositions as beliefs.

Importantly, even in our contemporary society, true enlightenment remains an aspirational goal. An individual may comprehend the proposition that the universe is 13.7 billion years old yet lack the capacity to intricately connect this proposition with others, perhaps more esoteric ones. Only with technologies like the "true-belief machine" that Paulson criticizes could we approach an ideal state of enlightenment.

IV. INTERPLAY BETWEEN EPISTEMOLOGY AND ETHICS

When critiquing epistemic consequentialism, the foibles of ethical consequentialism often serve as a blueprint. The pitfalls associated with hedonistic consequentialism or act utilitarianism find parallels in the domain of epistemology. In both realms, critics assert that an overemphasis on the end value of an activity neglects other intrinsic values.

Consider act utilitarianism, which posits that an action's morality hinges on its ability to maximize utility for the collective. This perspective inevitably stumbles over the ethical dilemma of sacrificing individuals' welfare for the broader community's benefit. A classic dilemma

arises when contemplating if a healthy individual's organs should be harvested for numerous unwell recipients to boost societal utility. To address such quandaries, rule utilitarianism pivots the focus from individual actions to overarching rules. Here, an action gains moral merit when aligned with rules that, when widely adopted, elevate communal utility. Using the organ distribution quandary as an example, a rule sanctioning involuntary organ harvesting might plunge society into widespread anxiety, thereby diminishing overall utility.

Paulson ponders, "what is the epistemic analogue of this?" [Paulson (2023), p. 2426]. Berker views process reliabilism as "the epistemic analogue of satisficing hedonistic rule-utilitarianism (where instead of evaluating whether an action is based on a *rule* that does sufficiently well at promoting pleasure, we evaluate whether a belief is formed via a process that does sufficiently well at promoting true belief" [Berker (2015), p. 145]. I agree with Berker that reliabilism is the epistemic analogue of rule utilitarianism, as rules can be considered as processes.

What is the analogue of our stance in ethics? Even though there is no direct analog of our view in ethics, there is some relation with both rule utilitarianism and negative utilitarianism. Let me begin with its relation to rule utilitarianism. If we entertain the analogy that first-order propositions equate to moral actions while higher-order propositions resemble moral rules, our vision of consequentialism emerges more holistically. Just as an ethical framework focusing solely on actions appears insufficient, an epistemic framework that omits beliefs in higher-order propositions seems incomplete.

There are also some elements from negative utilitarianism, which is formulated by Karl Popper as follows:

Instead of the greatest happiness for the greatest number, one should demand, more modestly, the least amount of avoidable suffering for all; and further, that unavoidable suffering -- such as hunger in times of an unavoidable shortage of food -- should be distributed as equally as possible [Popper (2013), pp. 602-603].

Interestingly, Popper relates this ethical position to epistemology. He posits a view similar to the one I propose in this paper:

Similarly, it is helpful to formulate the task of scientific method as the elimination of false theories (from the various theories tentatively proffered) rather than the attainment of established truths [Popper, 2013, p. 603].

Roderick Ninian Smart criticizes negative utilitarianism by arguing that it implies the destruction of all humanity in a painless way, since such an act would absolutely minimize all suffering in the world [Smart (1958), p. 542]. The epistemological analogue of this criticism is given by Berker.

If we include in our theory of final value a negative goal of avoiding false beliefs without a corresponding positive goal of acquiring true beliefs, that would encourage undue epistemic caution. In the limit, one could trivially satisfy the negative goal by not believing anything, or -- if that is not possible -- by believing as little as one can [Berker (2013b), p. 361].

This means that mere avoidance of falsity may seem appealing at first but comes with the enormous damage mentioned above. Our view takes only the appealing part of this negative approach. The reason is this: I do not merely value the avoidance of false beliefs. I arrive at this conclusion as a part of our holistic, hierarchical formulation of beliefs. My primary aim is not to minimize false beliefs but to maximize overall true beliefs. However, as a product of my formulation of a belief system as a well-connected network, I conclude that a single blatant falsity risks reducing the overall truth enormously. So, as rational beings, we cannot accept such a risk. Again, the aim of veritic epistemic consequentialism is to increase the total amount of truth, not to risk it enormously.

V. CONCLUSION

Central to veritic epistemic consequentialism is the notion that the sole non-derivative value resides in possessing true belief. All other epistemic concepts hold value only in a derivative sense, their worthiness gauged by their conduciveness to attaining true beliefs.

Various critiques have emerged against veritic epistemic consequentialism in existing literature. A prominent strand of criticism posits that this framework inadvertently endorses the sacrifice of specific truths in the pursuit of an overarching abundance of truth — a proposition that many find intuitively problematic. Another line of argument contends that veritic epistemic consequentialism fails to sufficiently revere autonomous epistemic activities like inquiry, inference, or reflection. Within this paradigm, these activities are relegated to mere instruments, valuable only as they facilitate the accumulation of true beliefs.

In this paper, I defended veritic epistemic consequentialism on the basis of a holistic account of belief contents. Each belief's content is an n th order proposition where n is a natural number. First-order propositions are about objects but not about propositions. Higher-order propositions are about lower-order propositions. I assume that through higher-order propositions that an epistemic agent believes, all of her beliefs are connected to each other. This assumption can be investigated on empirical and conceptual bases. Anyone who rejects it may reject my position here. However, anyone who finds my assumption plausible should agree with my defense of veritic epistemic consequentialism.

Once all beliefs are connected to each other, sacrificing certain truths for the sake of a great number of truths would not increase the total number of truths. Rather, it risks destroying the whole truth because of the strong connection between apparently unrelated beliefs. Secondly, autonomy -- being neutral whether it is epistemically valuable or not -- can be accounted for by higher-order propositions that are believed. A reflection or an inference can be formulated as a set consisting of the pairs of the contents of beliefs.

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