Realism, Naturalism, and Hazlett's Challenge concerning Epistemic Value[1]

Abstract: According to *Realism about Epistemic Value*, there is such a thing as epistemic value and it is appropriate to evaluate things—e.g., beliefs—for epistemic value because there is such a thing as epistemic value. Allan Hazlett's *A Luxury of the Understanding* is a sustained critique of *Realism*. Hazlett challenges proponent of *Realism* to answer explanatory questions while not justifiably violating certain constraints, including two proposed naturalistic constraints. Hazlett argues they cannot. Here I defend *Realism*. I argue that it is easy for proponents of *Realism* to answer Hazlett's explanatory questions. The interesting issue is whether those answers violate Hazlett's naturalistic constraints. My own view is that epistemic value is irreducible to natural properties; it thus violates Hazlett's proposed constraints. I argue that this is justifiable because Hazlett fails to convincingly motivate his naturalistic constraints and there is reason for thinking epistemic value is irreducible to natural properties anyway.

Many contemporary epistemologists, myself included, have been focusing on questions of epistemic value. A focal question in whether and why knowledge is of more epistemic value than true belief, but there are others as well. Indeed, discussion of epistemic value has increased so much in recent years that Wayne Riggs once went so far as to speak of the "Value Turn" in epistemology (2008).

Such epistemologists are inclined towards the following position (hereafter '*Non-Nihilism*'):

> *Non-Nihilism about Epistemic Value*: There is such a thing as epistemic value, and some things have this property.[2]

Such philosophers are also inclined to evaluate things as being of epistemic value, to state principles of epistemic value, to defend views about what is of epistemic value, etc. To introduce a phrase, such philosophers are inclined to engage in "epistemic evaluation." Further, though I cannot speak for everyone, I at least assume that the appropriateness of epistemic evaluation is explained by the existence of epistemic value. That is, I hold the following position (hereafter '*Realism*'):

> *Realism about Epistemic Value*: The appropriateness of epistemic evaluation is explained by the existence of epistemic value.

Realism implies *Non-Nihilism*, but not conversely. One might embrace *Non-Nihilism* while going on to embrace (hereafter '*Anti-Realism*'):

> *Anti-Realism about Epistemic Value*: While epistemic evaluation is appropriate, its appropriateness is not explained by the existence of epistemic value.[3],[4]

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[1] [Acknowledgments and references to author's work removed.]

[2] Throughout, I'll be assuming that nominalism is false—there are such things as properties. I'll also be assuming that expressivism about epistemic value discourse is false—that is, that discourse about epistemic value is truth-apt and that the truth of such discourse requires the existence of the property of epistemic value. Though some philosophers question these assumptions, I find the usual criticisms of those views promising and will add nothing to such criticisms here.

[3] Cf. Hazlett (2013: 243). I've modified Hazlett's formulation to make clear that *Anti-Realism* is committed to the appropriateness of epistemic evaluation.

[4] The contrasting position to *Non-Nihilism* is not *Anti-Realism* but *Nihilism*, the view that there is no such thing as epistemic value and nothing has the property of being epistemically valuable. Stich (1990) defends a version of this view. I criticize Stich's argument in [author-a].

A proponent of *Anti-Realism* might then go on to explain what makes epistemic evaluation appropriate if not the existence of epistemic value.

Hazlett's *A Luxury of the Understanding* is a wide ranging and sustained critique of *Realism*. At its center is a challenge to proponents of *Realism* to answer certain explanatory questions without justifiably violating several constraints, including two naturalistic constraints. Hazlett argues that since several ways of developing *Realism* flounder on his challenge, we have reason to adopt a version of *Anti-Realism*, which he briefly develops and defends.

The aim of this paper is to defend a version of *Realism* from Hazlett's challenge. After laying out Hazlett's argument in section I, I defend *Realism* in section II by arguing that any proponent of *Non-Nihilism* can answer the *particular* explanatory questions Hazlett identifies by simply appealing to the existence of epistemic value. Since *Realism* assumes *Non-Nihilism*, proponents of *Realism* can easily answer the particular questions Hazlett identifies. This suggests that the explanatory questions Hazlett has in mind are slightly different from the ones he identifies. In section III, I consider some alternative "successor" explanatory questions. However, by drawing on an analogy with the literature on the regress of justification, I argue that any proponent of *Non-Nihilism* can answer the successor explanatory questions as well. Since *Realism* assumes *Non-Nihilism*, proponents of *Realism* can once again answer the relevant explanatory questions.

My defense of *Realism* never actually turns on any substantive views about what is of epistemic value; it abstracts from such "in house" disputes. This reveals the shallowness of Hazlett's questions: any proponent of *Non-Nihilism*—including realists—can answer his questions. The upshot is that the interesting question is not whether proponents of *Realism* can answer his questions but whether they can answer them in a way that does not justifiably violate Hazlett's proposed constraints. My preferred view is that epistemic value is a non-reductive, non-natural property. Thus, my preferred version of *Realism* answers Hazlett's explanatory questions in a way that violates his proposed constraints. In section IV, I defend my violation of those constraints. Specifically, I first argue that Hazlett's defense of them is too underdeveloped so as to make the constraints plausible. I then sketch a reason for thinking that epistemic value is not reducible to natural properties. The upshot is that a non-reductive, non-naturalistic version of *Realism* can weather Hazlett's criticisms.

I. Hazlett's Challenge

Hazlett's challenge to *Realism* is that there are certain explanatory questions it must answer but cannot without justifiably violating three constraints. Therefore, we have reason to abandon *Realism* for *Anti-Realism*. Before explaining either the explanatory questions or the three constraints, two comments are necessary.

First, *Realism* does not specify what is *of* epistemic value; it is consistent with different accounts. For his discussion, Hazlett utilizes the following principle:

> *Truth Principle*: For any subject S and proposition that p, S's belief that p is (in one respect) good iff it is true that p, and (in one respect) bad otherwise. (2013: 133)

Hazlett accepts this principle.[5] Glossing '(in one respect) good' as 'epistemically valuable,' and given some qualifications and elaborations, that occur in [author-a], this is a principle I would accept. Second, the explanatory challenge that Hazlett adduces concerns not just evaluations

[5] Though, on his final view, he thinks it is a trivial consequence of the conventions of epistemic evaluation; cf. (2013: 268).

about epistemic value but also epistemic reasons. However, I'm only here concerned with epistemic value. Consequently, I'll just focus on the issue he raises concerning epistemic value.[6]

The explanatory challenge for *Realism* is what Hazlett calls "the problem of the source of epistemic value" (2013: 135). This problem encompasses three questions:

> *Basic Question about Epistemic Evaluation*: What (if anything) explains the fact that epistemic evaluation (e.g. evaluation of beliefs vis-à-vis the truth principle) is appropriate? What (if anything) justifies, or grounds, or warrants, or legitimates, this species of evaluation?
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> *Uniqueness Question about Epistemic Evaluation*: Does epistemic evaluation of belief (e.g. evaluation vis-à-vis the truth principle) have a "special sort of status"? In what sense (if any)? Is epistemic evaluation of beliefs uniquely appropriate, in some sense? In what sense (if any)?
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> *Scope Question about Epistemic Evaluation*: What principles, other than the truth principle, are *epistemic*? What defines or characterizes the standards of evaluation that are employed in *epistemic* evaluation? What *is* the domain of the epistemic? (2013: 134-5)

Though Hazlett identifies three questions, it is clear he regards *Basic Question* as the most important. He thinks that if *Realism* cannot answer it, it will likely be unable to answer the next two. Consequently, he spends most of his time arguing *Realism* cannot answer *Basic Question*. I'll follow suit, focusing almost exclusively on it as well.

Hazlett proposes three constraints on possible answers to these questions:

> *Universalism about Epistemic Normativity*: Epistemic evaluation is appropriate for all possible beliefs; epistemic reasons attribution is appropriate for all possible beliefs. (2013: 142)
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> *First Naturalist Constraint*: We have *pro tanto* reason to avoid positing irreducible normative properties. (2013: 150)
>
> *Second Naturalist Constraint*: We have *pro tanto* reason to avoid positing (causally efficacious) irreducible normative properties. (2013: 152)

The second two constraints refer to "irreducible normative properties." Hazlett defines a reducible property as: "Property P_1 is reducible to property P_2 when the instantiation of P_2 completely explains the instantiation of P_1" (2013: 150). Irreducible properties are non-reducible properties.

Hazlett's challenge is for proponents of *Realism* to answer these explanatory questions without violating his constraints or, at least, justifying a violating of them. He argues they cannot. He considers three different realist positions: a Humean position, a Darwinian position, and a Kantian position. (The differences between them are unimportant for my discussion; simply note that they offer different theories about what is of epistemic value.) He then argues that these positions fail to satisfactorily answer *Basic Question*. The Humean position, he contends, fails to secure the *Universalism* constraint (2013: 164ff.). The Darwinian position rests on implausible assumptions about value (2013: 188ff.). The Kantian position fails to meet the

[6] What I say here about epistemic value could also be said about epistemic reasons, but I will not argue that here.

pro tanto burden laid at its feet by the two naturalistic constraints (2013: 215ff.). Thus, he claims, we have reason for rejecting *Realism* and embracing *Anti-Realism*.

My response to Hazlett will not turn on a defense of any of those three positions. Hazlett's challenge is pitched at an abstract level to *any* proponent of *Realism*; I'll argue that there is a response pitched at the same level of abstraction.

II. Answering *Basic Question*

Basic Question asks: what if anything explains the fact that epistemic evaluation is appropriate? Why is it fitting or otherwise correct to engage in evaluation of things for epistemic value? *Realism* tells us that the existence of epistemic value explains the appropriateness of epistemic evaluation, that is, the appropriateness of attributing and describing the property of being epistemically valuable. This explanation is intuitive and obvious. After all, if there were no such thing as epistemic value, then epistemic evaluation concerning epistemic value would not be appropriate.[7] Further, if there is such a thing as epistemic value, then it is presumably appropriate to engage in discourse concerning epistemic value. The answer to *Basic Question*, then, is this: what explains the fact that epistemic evaluation is appropriate is the existence of epistemic value.

We can provide further explanations given specific views about epistemic value. Suppose—as we have been—that the *Truth Principle* is true. Hazlett points out that many epistemologists would think it inappropriate to use the following principle (2013 135):

> *Tuesday Principle*: For any subject S and proposition that p, S's belief that p is (in one respect) good iff S formed her belief that p on a Tuesday.

Given the *Truth Principle*, there is a straightforward explanation for why it is inappropriate to use this principle for epistemic evaluation: its false! Forming a belief on a Tuesday is neither necessary nor sufficient for having an epistemically valuable belief. Thus, the existence of epistemic value (and the fact that certain things have it, e.g., true beliefs) can explain the appropriateness of engaging in epistemic discourse both in general and in particular.

These points are not unique to epistemic value. I engage in "species" discourse: I talk about species, refer to some by name ("Japanese beetle") or description ("the species popularized by Thomas Hunt Morgan"), I attribute properties to species, claim that some things are species while others are not, etc. What, if anything, explains the appropriateness of engaging in this discourse? Clearly the existence of species. By contrast, I do not engage in "life-force" discourse. I do not attribute life-forces to things; I do not write works describing the properties of life-forces; I do not distinguish things on the basis of whether they have a life-force or not. Not participating in that discourse is appropriate. What explains its appropriateness is that there is no such thing as life-forces.[8]

Hazlett anticipates this response. He writes,

> We should not just say that the epistemic value of true belief explains the appropriateness of evaluation of beliefs vis-à-vis the Truth Principle…We should seek an explanation of the appropriateness of epistemic evaluation that will

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[7] If there were no such thing as epistemic value, it might still be useful to utter sentences containing locutions like 'epistemic value' because such sentences might express certain non-cognitive attitudes, and it may be useful to express those attitudes. But the kind of "epistemic evaluation" under discussion includes more than merely expressing certain non-cognitive attitudes, but also attributing and describing the property of being epistemically valuable.

[8] This paragraph answers the *Uniqueness Question*: the reason why epistemic value evaluation is appropriate is not unique; the same reason applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to the appropriateness of species evaluation (and, by extension, the inappropriateness of life-force evaluation).

> *explain* the epistemic value of true belief. Otherwise we will have given no explanation at all: we will just have said that its appropriate to call true beliefs good, because they are good. But to explain the value of true belief would be to explain the appropriateness of evaluating beliefs vis-à-vis the Truth Principle. (2013: 134-5)

I find this response perplexing, even mystifying. In general, if P exists and there are truths about P, it is entirely appropriate, correct, or right—all else being equal—to engage in discourse where we talk about P and assert truths about P.[9] Thus, if *Non-Nihilism* is true, and there is such a thing as epistemic value, it is entirely appropriate—all else equal—to engage in discourse where we attribute epistemic value to things. And if the *Truth Principle* is true, it is entirely appropriate—all else equal—to use it to evaluate beliefs for epistemic value. So a perfectly good answer, if not the only answer, to the question "why is it appropriate to call true beliefs epistemically valuable?" is "because true belief *are* epistemically valuable."

The obviousness and naturalness of the realist's response suggests that perhaps the issue most bothering Hazlett is not merely the appropriateness of some bit of discourse. In fact, at one point, Hazlett concedes something like this point. He says that this kind of explanation is "prima facie plausible" and provides a "straightforward way" of explaining the relevant appropriateness (2013: 139). Consequently, I suggest that the issue he is truly concerned with is the *Truth Principle* itself and explanation of *it*. What Hazlett writes confirms this reading. Recall, in particular, these two passages from earlier:

> We should seek an explanation of the appropriateness of epistemic evaluation that will *explain the epistemic value of true belief.*
>
> But *to explain the value of true belief* would be to explain the appropriateness of evaluating beliefs vis-à-vis the truth principle.

The italicized passages suggest that Hazlett is not primarily interested in the appropriateness of discourse about epistemic value but rather an explanation of the epistemic value of true belief; or, what amounts to the same thing, an explanation of the *Truth Principle*. (Indeed, other passage suggest something similar; e.g., (2013: 138) "we will inquire after the appropriateness of evaluating beliefs vis-à-vis the truth principle….by inquiring after the epistemic value of true belief.") This suggests the following question:

> *Basic Question, Revised*: What explains the epistemic value of true belief? That is, what explains why the *Truth Principle* is true?

In what follows, I will focus my attention on this question, and not *Basic Question*, as it more perspicuously represents Hazlett's concern.

III. Answering *Basic Question, Revised*

Let's use the phrase 'principle of epistemic value' to be any true principle that tells us what is of epistemic value or disvalue. (I assume that there are such principles and that such principles can be formulated in terms of necessary and/or sufficient conditions.) On this usage, *Truth Principle* is a principle of epistemic value. Hazlett's *Basic Question, Revised* asks us to explain principles of epistemic value like the *Truth Principle*. In this section, I sketch my way of

[9] Of course, on some occasion, such discourse might be irrelevant or rude. Clearly, that kind of "inappropriateness" is irrelevant to Hazlett's argument.

thinking about the structure of explaining principles of epistemic value. I then use that way of thinking to defend a realist answer to Hazlett's *Basic Question, Revised*.[10]

A. Non-Fundamental Principles

One way to explain a principle about some property P is to appeal, at least in part, to another principle also about P. This applies to normative or evaluative properties as well. Thus, consider the following explanation:

> Why ought one not murder? Because one ought not harm others, and to murder someone is to harm them.

The principled to-be-explained is about what one ought to do. It is explained by appealing to a set of further principles, one of which is also about what one ought to do. This is a simple explanation, appealing to only two claims. Clearly there could also be more complex explanations of this kind.

In that example, one principle "subsumes" another. Because there are ways of harming others that are distinct from murder, the actions prohibited by 'one ought not murder' is a proper subset of the actions prohibited by 'one ought not harm others.' In this way, the latter is subsumed by the former. But I leave open whether all explanations of a principle about normative or evaluative properties work that way. For instance, Mark Schroeder draws our attention to what he calls "constitutive explanations" (2007: 61ff.). To use my own example, a constitutive explanation might be:

> Why is a state of affairs ethically valuable if and only if it contains more pleasure than pain? Because for a state of affairs to be ethically valuable *just is* for it to contain more pleasure than pain.

Constitutive explanations are not plausible cases of subsumption, since the properties in the explaining principle do not have a larger extension then those in the explained principle. Nonetheless, in a constitutive explanation, a principle concerning one property—here, being of ethical value—is explained by appealing to another principle that also refers to that very same property.

Let us use the term 'non-fundamental principle of epistemic value,' to denote (i) a principle about epistemic value that is (ii) explained by other principles about epistemic value. A fundamental principle of epistemic value would be a principle of epistemic value that is *not* explained by other principles about epistemic value. Any proponent of *Non-Nihilism* is committed to there being at least one non-fundamental principle of epistemic value. I'll argue in the next section she is also committed to there being at least one fundamental principle of epistemic value.[11]

B. Non-Fundamental Principles

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[10] There's a complex issue of how exactly the views I sketch in this section relate to "particularism," or at least various forms of particularism (for more on kinds of particularism, see Sinnott-Armstrong (1999), McKeever and Ridge (2005), and Lance and Little (2006)). I assume that principles of value can state what is of value in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. That assumption is in tension with the idea that whether something is of value can change its "valence" from context to context (cf. Dancy (2000)). It is also in tension with the idea that principles of value must have exceptions, only state prima facie conditions, or only hold in privileged conditions (cf. Lance and Little (2004)). Despite such surface disagreement, most particularists could agree with much of what I say. For most would agree that there are principles of value and that some could be used to explain others. Those are the main premises I need for my argument and my argument could, in principle, be run with more qualifications to take on some of claims particularists are inclined towards.

[11] There's an interesting question as how this usage of "fundamental" relates to the ever growing literature on fundamentality. I will not explore this issue here except to say that what I claim about the structure of explanation is consistent with many approaches in that literature.

Any proponent of *Non-Nihilism* is committed to there being at least one fundamental principle of epistemic value. Here is an argument for that conclusion:

(1) There is a principle about epistemic value (per *Non-Nihilism*).
(2) Either (i) that principle is a fundamental principle or (ii) it is not.
(3) If (i), there are fundamental principles of epistemic value.
(4) If (ii), there are fundamental principles of epistemic value.
(5) Therefore, there are fundamental principles of epistemic value.

In this context, I'm assuming with Hazlett that (1) is true. The only remaining controversial premise is (4).

In defending (4), it will be useful to draw on an analogy from the literature on the regress of epistemic justification. Non-fundamental principles about epistemic value are analogous to inferentially justified beliefs; fundamental principles of epistemic value are analogous to non-inferentially justified beliefs (i.e. basic beliefs); and the "justifies" relation is analogous to the "explains" relation. Assuming there is a non-fundamental principle about epistemic value, it must have an explanation that appeals to other principles about epistemic value. Drawing on this analogy, there are four ways that might go.

The first possibility is:

> There is a infinite "hierarchy" of non-fundamental principles about epistemic value but no fundamental epistemic principles. (That is, there is an infinite number of non-fundamental epistemic principles that can be ordered by the "explains" relation that is transitive and asymmetric.)

On this possibility, each non-fundamental principle gets explained by some other one, which is explained by another one, *ad infinitum*. This possibility is analogous to "Infinitism" about justification (cf. Klein (1999, 2007)). The second possibility:

> There is a finite number of non-fundamental principles about epistemic value, where each non-fundamental principle is explained by appealing to some other non-fundamental principles, but there are no fundamental epistemic principles. (That is, the finite number of epistemic principles can be ordered by the "explains" relation which is transitive, but not asymmetric.)

On this possibility, the non-fundamental principles can be placed in an explanatory circle. This possibility is analogous to what is sometimes called "linear" or "circular" coherentism.[12] The third possibility:

> There is a group of fundamental epistemic principles. These principles are not explained by appealing to other principles of epistemic value. Rather, each fundamental epistemic principle is explained by the fact that it is a member of a group or set of epistemic principles and that group or set has certain properties, $P_1 \ldots P_n$.

On this possibility, fundamental epistemic principles do have an explanation; but that explanation is not in terms of other principles of epistemic value. Rather, it is because they belong to a set with certain properties (the particularities of which won't matter for us here).[13] The analogous version of this position is labeled differently by different authors. It is probably what most coherentists have in mind: a belief is justified because it belongs to a set of beliefs and

[12] It's unclear whether anyone has ever endorsed this position, even if coherentists are sometimes accused of it.

[13] But since the set is a set of *epistemic principles* should this mean these principles are non-fundamental ones? No, because the epistemic principles themselves are not used in the explanans. (Though, given my rejection of this possibility, perhaps the exact way to specify it is unimportant.)

that set of beliefs has certain properties e.g. being consistent, coherent, etc. (cf. BonJour (1985), Elgin (1996), Lehrer (1990)). But the analogous version of this position might also be thought of as a kind of foundationalism: "group foundationalism" we might call it, since it holds that there are basic beliefs but they only come in groups. The important thing to see is that on this possibility fundamental principles must come in groups. This contrasts with:

> There is at least one fundamental epistemic principle. It is not explained by appealing to other epistemic principles nor is it explained by appealing to its inclusion with a group of other epistemic principles. Insofar as non-fundamental epistemic principles can be explained it is ultimately by reference to some fundamental epistemic principle(s).

The idea behind this position is that some fundamental epistemic principles simply lack an explanation in terms of other principles of epistemic value. Nevertheless, other principles can be explained by appealing to those fundamental epistemic principles. The analogous version of this possibility is foundationalism, as standardly understood (cf. Alston (1989), Audi (1993), Plantinga (1993)).

It is clear that we can set aside the first two possibilities. The first possibility is unpromising for two reasons. First, it is not clear that even if principle *p* is backed by an infinite chain of explanations that this would explain *p*. If explanations never end, it is hard to see that they get started. But without fully defending that point, there's a second more damning problem. It is very doubtful that there are an infinite number of principles concerning what is of epistemic value that can be forced into linear order of explanation. The second possibility is also a non-starter. Quite clearly there could not be an "explanatory circle" as so imagined. Explanations are, if anything, asymmetric.

Whatever plausibility coherentism or "group foundationalism" has as a theory of justified belief, its analogous position under consideration here is not plausible. The problem is that it implausibly implies that different propositions have more or less the same explanation for why they are true. Suppose we have a set S with principles about epistemic value where S has properties $P_1 \ldots P_n$. Let *p* and *q* be distinct but otherwise arbitrary elements of S. On this proposal, we have the following two explanations:

> Why is *p* true? Because *p* is an element of S and S has properties $P_1 \ldots P_n$.
> Why is *q* true? Because *q* is an element of S and S has properties $P_1 \ldots P_n$.

These *explanans* are more or less the same; the only difference between them is what they claim is an element in S. But *p* and *q* are just random elements of S. It would be surprising that distinct propositions have almost exactly the same explanation for why they are true!

We can make this objection more precise as follows. Either (i) *p* and *q* mutually entail each other, (ii) one of them, say, *p*, entails the other, *q*, but not *vice versa*, or (iii) neither entails the other. If (iii), it is hard to see how the truth of each has virtually the same *explanans*. A similar point holds for (ii). If *p* entails *q*, then that's relevant to the truth of *q*. But we wouldn't expect that we'd get virtually the same explanation of *p* and *q*. (The proposition that George is a chinchilla entails the proposition that George is a rodent; but we would not expect an explanation of the truth of the former to be more or less identical as an explanation of the truth of the latter.) Finally, even if *p* and *q* mutually entail each other, it is surprising that they would have more or less the same *explanans*. A closed two-dimensional figure has three sides if and only if it has three angles, but an explanation of why it has three sides would not be the same as an explanation as to why it has three angles.

This leaves us with the final possibility: if there are any principles of epistemic value, then there will be at least one fundamental principle of epistemic value.[14]

It is important to notice the minimal assumptions used for this argument. It does not turn on any particular view on what is of epistemic value such as the particularities of the *Truth Principle*. Nor did this argument turn on any assumptions about *Realism*. In effect, all the argument turns on are plausible assumptions about explanation and that that there is some principle stating what is of epistemic value. And this second claim is in effect just a corollary of *Non-Nihilism*.

Thus, even a non-nihilist proponent of *Anti-Realism*—like Hazlett—is committed to there being fundamental principles of epistemic value. And so they are. For instance, consider the following principle that Hazlett seems inclined towards (cf. (2013: 256-60)):

> *A Conventionality Principle*: For any p, S's belief that p is of epistemic value if and only if S's belief that p does well with the conventions of epistemic evaluation.

On his view, this seems to be a fundamental principle about epistemic value. For instance, he does not try to derive it from any other principles of epistemic value, as one might expect if he did not regard it as a fundamental principle. Further, one could use it to derive other principles. (E.g. one might derive the *Truth Principle* by arguing that x does well with the conventions of epistemic evaluation if and only if x is true.) But if *A Conventionality Principle* is a fundamental principle of epistemic value, then it cannot be explained by appealing to other epistemic principles.

Likewise, consider naturalists who accept *Non-Nihilism*. They too are committed to fundamental principles of epistemic value. That might seem surprising but on second thought it shouldn't be. Naturalists will propose some principle like (where 'N' is a relevant natural property, properties, or disjunction of natural properties):

> For any p, S's belief that p is of epistemic value if and only if S's belief that p has N.

Different naturalists might fight over the details of a principle like this. For instance, they might see the concept of 'epistemic value' and 'N' as picking out the same property but dispute over whether 'epistemic value' and 'N' are synonymous or non-synonymous—thus fighting over whether this principle is analytic or synthetic. Or perhaps they see 'epistemic value' and 'N' as picking out distinct properties but that the property picked out by 'epistemic value' is always grounded in or explained by the properties picked out by 'N'. And, of course, they'll fight over what N is exactly. But in general they will agree that there is such a principle and that it is a fundamental principle (even if they claim it is empirically discoverable).[15]

So, I conclude, proponents of *Non-Nihilism*—whether anti-realists or realists, naturalists or non-naturalists—are committed to fundamental principles of epistemic value. To be clear, none of this means that we can say nothing about fundamental epistemic principles. Even if their truth cannot be explained by appealing to some additional epistemic principles, that does not mean we cannot defend them. And there are various ways one might defend such principles: giving arguments for them, showing how they unify a phenomenon or meet certain pre-theoretical

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[14] This sort of conclusion is not without historical precedent. For instance, the British Moralists—including Bentham, Mill, and Sidgwick—were explicit that some moral principle are susceptible to "proof" from other principles whereas some were not.

[15] For various participants of these disputes in the case of ethics, see Jackson (1998), Sturgeon (1985), Brink (1989), Railton (2003), Schroeder (2007).

constraints, criticizing opposing views, etc. Thus, to endorse the existence of a fundamental epistemic principle need not license an unduly crude primitivism or problematic "intuitionism" about it.

C. Answering Basic Question, Revised

Building on the work of the previous two sections, we can articulate a schematic response to Hazlett's challenge on behalf of the realist. On some given view that accepts the *Truth Principle*, either (i) the *Truth Principle* is a fundamental epistemic principle, or (ii) it is a non-fundamental one. If (i), then *Basic Question, Revised* is ill-posed. If (ii), then by definition there are some other epistemic principles that explain it. One can answer *Basic Question, Revised* by appealing to them. Either way, any view that accepts the *Truth Principle* has an answer for Hazlett's *Basic Question, Revised*.

A critic might object to the first horn of this reasoning. All that follows from a principle of epistemic value being fundamental, as defined, is that it is not explained by appealing to other principles of epistemic value. But that is consistent with it still having an explanation, simply an explanation in terms of principles that make no reference to epistemic value. Thus, even if the *Truth Principle* were a fundamental epistemic principle (on some view) *Basic Question, Revised* would not be ill-posed.

In response, if the fundamental principles of epistemic value could be explained by appealing to principles that do not refer to epistemic value, then the property of being epistemically valuable is a reducible property. For its instantiations could be explained by the instantiations of whatever properties were used to explain the fundamental principles of epistemic value. In the next section, I'll argue that the property of being epistemically valuable is irreducible. Thus, if the argument of the next section is correct, then this critic is mistaken. If the *Truth Principle* were a fundamental epistemic principle *and* the property of being epistemically valuable were irreducible, then Hazlett's *Basic Question, Revised* would be ill-posed.

Finally, Hazlett's challenge assumes the *Truth Principle*, and so have I. But neither Hazlett's challenge nor my response turns on it. Suppose some other principle were true, say, the principle that reasonable belief is of epistemic value. One could then mount an analogous challenge as Hazlett's that turned on that principle. The response I've provided here would, *mutatis mutandi*, successfully respond to that challenge as well.

The flexibility of my response is important for the following reason: it shows the shallowness of Hazlett's challenge, understood as either *Basic Question* or *Basic Question, Revised*. For the only substantive position about epistemic value we need assume to answer those questions is *Non-Nihilism*. But *Realism* presupposes *Non-Nihilism*. Thus, any proponent of *Realism* has the resources to find an answer to Hazlett's challenge. Just as clearly, any proponent of *Non-Nihilism* has the resources to find an answer to Hazlett's challenge. Thus, Hazlett's challenge fails to force any proponent of either *Realism* or *Non-Nihilism* into endorsing *Anti-Realism* to find an answer to his explanatory questions.

The interesting question, then, is not whether a realist can find an answer to Hazlett's *Basic Question* or *Basic Question, Revised*. The interesting question is whether her answer violates Hazlett's proposed constraints.

IV. Defending Non-Reductive, Non Naturalism

If the arguments up to this point are correct, then proponents of *Realism* should not be overly bothered about answering Hazlett's *Basic Question*. The interesting question is to what degree we have reason for advancing a form of *Realism* that affirms the property of epistemic value as an irreducible non-natural property or, alternatively, a property that is a natural property

or reducible to one. Of course, we need additional clarity about what exactly constitutes a natural property.

Presumably, the adjective 'natural' is meant to link natural properties with the naturalistic world view (cf. Hazlett (2013: 150)). The issue is how to understand this "linking." One straightforward and concrete proposal is simply to articulate some properties that are supposed to belong to the naturalistic world view and identify *those* properties as the natural ones. This proposal is straightforward since natural properties would be those properties that are already part of the naturalistic world view. And it is concrete since it would actually tell us what the natural properties are. Armstrong (1978) essentially does this and identifies natural properties with spatiotemporal properties. Hazlett favorable cites Armstrong and uses this identification when motivating his naturalistic constraint. While there are other accounts of natural properties, given that this one is straightforward and concrete as well as held by Hazlett, I'll assume it in what follows. Hereafter, I will use the terms 'natural property' and 'spatiotemporal property' interchangeably.[16]

[16] Lewis (1986: 59) has a well-known account of natural properties. But Lewis' account isn't essentially motivated by a prior commitment to the naturalistic world view (even if Lewis has such a commitment). Rather, Lewis' account is motivated by metaphysical need for a class of properties that is elite (as Lewis himself describes them (1983: 13)). But normative properties have many features that elite properties possess—they aren't gerrymandered or vague and they make for genuine similarity, may function in normative laws, and carve the world at its joint. Indeed, it is quite plausible that normative properties are elite properties. But if so, on this understanding, normative properties would be "natural" properties but being a "natural" property would not be essentially tied to belonging to the naturalistic world view.

For those motivated by the naturalistic world view, there are other accounts of natural properties. But normally these accounts are less straightforward. For they normally do not actually identify specific properties as being the natural ones. Rather, they identify certain higher-order properties and claim that natural properties are those that have these higher-order properties. But it is harder to know what properties do indeed have those higher-order properties. Thus, it is harder to use these alternative accounts to motivate methodological constraints, such as the ones Hazlett proposes.

To illustrate, an alternative account of natural properties does not identify specific properties that are presumed part of some already existing naturalistic theory. Rather, they propose they are those properties had by some future, complete scientific theory. Of course, it is hard to know exactly what properties would be part of such a future complete scientific theory. Indeed, there might not be such a thing if a nuclear holocaust occurs because of the whims of an incompetent leader, in which case there would be no natural properties at all on such an account! An alternative account might try to avoid this problem by proposing that natural properties are those properties, whatever they are, that belong to an ideal naturalistic theory. Since ideal naturalistic theories need not be in the future—or obtain at all—it might avoid worries for the previous account. But this proposal makes it even more obscure what properties would exactly belong to such an ideal naturalistic theory. It is also challenging to motivate Hazlett's constraints—suitably reinterpreted—since it is hard to know what features an ideal theory would have that would motivate such constraints.

As I'll note below, some philosophers are non-reductive naturalists. Their account of natural properties is, at its core, a recursive account. A property is a natural property just in case it is a natural property or it bears a sufficiently "close" metaphysical relation to natural properties (where some account of a "close" metaphysical relation is given, e.g., supervenience, realization, grounding, etc.). However, these recursive accounts still need an account of what a natural property is to begin with and so they are not as straightforward or concrete as the one I'm working with here.

Thus, I prefer to work with the account of natural properties as spatio-temporal properties because it is straightforward, concrete, and Hazlet's own. For further discussion of the difficulties of identifying natural (or slightly differently "physical") properties if not by simply identifying properties, see Stroud (1996), Ravenscroft (1997), Ney (2008), Stoljar (2010: chapter 3-5).

Clearly, Hazlett holds that insofar as we opt for *Realism* we ought to opt for a version that avoids irreducible, non-spatiotemporal properties. Recall that Hazlett maintains that in answering *Basic Question* we should avoid violating his two proposed naturalistic constraints:[17]

> *First Naturalist Constraint*: We have *pro tanto* reason to avoid positing irreducible normative properties.
>
> *Second Naturalist Constraint*: We have *pro tanto* reason to avoid positing (causally efficacious) irreducible normative properties.

Accepting these constraints is tantamount to maintaining that insofar as we endorse *Realism* we should endorse a version on which the property of epistemic value is identical to, or reducible to, spatiotemporal properties.

In this section, I will defend a version of *Realism* that maintains that the property of being epistemically valuable is irreducible to spatiotemporal properties. First, I will argue that Hazlett's defense of his constraints is unpersuasive. Second, I will argue that insofar as we have reason for endorsing *Realism* we have reason for endorsing a version on which epistemic value is irreducible to natural, spatiotemporal properties.

A. Hazlett's Parsimony and Agreement Arguments

Hazlett articulates two constraints. By his own admission, the second constraint will only appeal to those who think only the spatiotemporal world exists. As I am not sympathetic to that view, and he does not defend it, I'll simply ignore it. Instead, I will focus on his first constraint.

Hazlett's *First Naturalist Constraint* is derived from a more fundamental constraint, which I'll call:

> *Parsimony Constraint*: We have a pro tanto reason to avoid positing properties that are irreducible to spatiotemporal properties.

This constraint is, in turn, defended by what I'll call the "Agreement Argument." Given that the naturalist and non-naturalist *agree* that the spatio-temporal world exist, any proposed non-natural property—be it normative or not—is an addition that, for reasons of parsimony, we have *pro tanto* reasons against positing.

These two sub arguments for the *First Naturalist Constraint* appear quickly in the following passage:

> One reason naturalists have, to avoid positing irreducible normative properties, is a reason that everyone has, based on the appeal of **parsimony**. For naturalists, the "spatio-temporal" system is all there is; but everyone agrees to the existence of the naturalist's "spatio-temporal system." And normative properties are not straightforwardly part of that system… [N]ormative properties (being good, being valuable, being a reason) are nether spatiotemporal relations nor local properties of space-time points. And while properties reducible to natural properties are no ontological addition to the "spatio-temporal system," irreducible properties are an ontological addition. They are therefore unappealing from the perspective of parsimony. Thus everyone should endorse the first naturalist constraint. (2013: 151)

B. Parsimony Constraint *Underdeveloped*

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[17] I will ignore his third constraint—the *Universal Constraint*—for two reasons. First, it is a constraint that non-reductive, non-naturalists have, historically, had the least difficulty meeting. Second, since any belief can be true or false, any position which accepts the *Truth Principle* will imply that any belief can be evaluated for epistemic value. So any position which accepts the *Truth Principle* trivially satisfies *Universal Constraint*.

Hazlett's "Agreement Argument" for the *Parsimony Constraint*, and by extension *First Naturalist Constraint*, is too underdeveloped to be plausible.

At first blush, the structure of the Agreement Argument is that if two parties agree to the existence of something, then there is *pro tanto* reason against claiming something exists that is *not* identical to that thing (or kind of thing). But clearly that's not right. To use an analogy, you and I agree that hydrogen exists and things have the property of being hydrogen. But clearly this agreement does not generate a *pro tanto* reason against claiming that helium exists, even though helium is neither identical to nor reducible to hydrogen. Perhaps the structure of the Agreement Argument is instead this: if one party's ontological commitments are a *proper subset* of another's, then this generates a *pro tanto* consideration against anything that is not an agreed commitment between them. Again, that can't be quite right. Suppose a friend and I agree that there are natural numbers but he believes there is only a million of them, while I maintain there is an infinite number. Clearly I do not have a *pro tanto* reason against believing in an infinite number of natural numbers because of our disagreement.

One might try to fuss with the structure of the Agreement Argument some more. But there's a more fundamental problem. The fundamental problem is that facts about agreement do not settle facts about parsimony. Insofar as a view runs afoul of a parsimony constraint, it is because it posits entities which are "unnecessary" or "do no explanatory work" or otherwise "go beyond the data." To use a phrase, a view runs afoul of a parsimony constraint when it implies that certain entities exist but those entities would be in some sense "superfluous." But facts merely about agreement and disagreement between two parties undermines which, if either, recognizes superfluous entities. Thus, the mere fact that non-naturalist accept the existence of properties irreducible to spatiotemporal properties, and some naturalists do not, is insufficient *by itself* to show that the non-naturalist is positing superfluous entities or properties. In this way, Hazlett's argument for *Parsimony Constraint* is too underdeveloped.

Hazlett, or someone sympathetic to Hazlett's argument, could further develop his defense of *Parsimony Constraint*. That is, they could argue that properties that are neither identical to nor reducible to spatiotemporal properties are superfluous. I will not consider such a response here. Rather, I will be pro-active and argue that we have some reason for thinking that the property of being epistemically valuable is not reducible to spatiotemporal properties.

C. Epistemic Value as Irreducible, Non-Spatiotemporal

Recall that for Hazlett, "Property P_1 is reducible to property P_2 when the instantiation of P_2 completely explains the instantiation of P_1." I assume that the primary *relata* of explanations are propositions. Filtering Hazlett's claim through that assumption, we get the following result. A property P_1 is reducible to a property P_2 when any statement about an instance of P_1 is completely explained by a statement just about an instance of P_2. To say that a property is irreducible to spatiotemporal properties, then, is to say that there is some statement about an instance of that property that is not completely explained by statements about instances of spatiotemporal properties.

Hazlett does not offer an analysis of "completely explains." A natural proposal is this. A proposition *p* offers a complete explanation of *q* just when there is no other proposition *p** such that *p** offers a superior explanation of *q* than *p*. This proposal is plausible on the face of it; after all, if there's a better explanation than what you've already got, then what you've got surely cannot be a *complete* explanation. To put the point differently, the dual of a complete explanation would be a *partial* explanation. A partial explanation would be an explanation that lacks relevant information. A complete explanation would then be one that have the relevant

information partial explanations lacks. And clearly having that relevant information would make the complete explanation better than any partial one.[18]

This proposal also gets support from examples. Compare:

> Why is this piece of glass transparent? Because the electron orbits of the atoms that compose it are spaced so as to be unable to absorb the energy of photons currently passing through them.
>
> Why is this piece of glass transparent? Because the electron orbits of the atoms that compose it are spaced so as to be unable to absorb the energy of photons currently passing through them, and whenever light photons pass through a collection of atoms instead of being absorbed, those atoms allow light through to the other side of the atoms, which is what it means for something to be transparent.

The second explanation is clearly superior. It is superior because it identifies a connection between the property mentioned in the first explanation and the property of being transparent. Thus, the former cannot be a *complete* explanation.

Given the *Truth Principle*, the properties of epistemically valuable belief and true belief are are co-extensive. Anytime something is a true belief it is of epistemic value and conversely. This strongly suggests that if the property of being epistemically valuable is reducible to another property, it is the property of being a true belief.

However, on the face of it, it is pretty implausible that the property of being a true belief is a spatiotemporal property or is reducible to one. However, there are also arguments for this conclusion. First, suppose we are *pluralists* about the bearers of truth. That is, there are a number of things that are true beyond beliefs including utterances, sentence tokens, sentence types, propositions, etc. (Cf., e.g., Soames (1999: 13-19), Horwich (1998: 16), Alston (1996: 13)). It is unlikely that *all* of these entities are just regions of spacetime and thus that the property of being true is a spatiotemporal property. (For instance, on some views, propositions are intrinsically representing *abstracta* (c.f., Plantinga (1993: 117-120), Merricks (2015)). Even among those who think that propositions are extrinsically representational, propositions are not identified with regions of space time but (e.g.) abstractions (Soames (2010: 120) or structured facts (e.g. King (2007)). Similarly, sentence types are *abstracta*, being abstractions from sentence tokens (cf. Alston (1996: 13)).) Thus, it is implausible that the property of being true is a spatiotemporal property, if it can be had by various kinds of *abstracta*.

Second, even focusing on the case of belief, it is implausible that having a true belief is identical to, or reducible to, spatiotemporal properties. There are a number of distinct views about the nature of mentality. On either substance or property dualism (see Swinburne (1997)

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[18] See Hempel (1965: 415-418) for an initial discussion of the distinction between partial and full explanations. My account abstracts away from his preferred models of explanation. An alternative proposal is that a proposition p completely explains a proposition q only if p logically implies q. However, this alternative proposal would be problematic, given Hazlett's desire for naturalistic reductions. For on Hazlett's preferred naturalistic reductions, a proposition about spatiotemporal properties "completely explains" the proposition that my true belief is of epistemic value. Thus, on this alternative proposal, that proposition logically implies that my true belief is of epistemic value. But that proposition presumably does not refer to my belief but only distributions of spatiotemporal properties. But given a theorem of logical implication—sometimes referred to as the "Generalization on Constants"—that proposition will also imply that everything, not just my true belief, is of epistemic value—a clear absurdity. (See [author] for discussion and proof.) Thus, given Hazlett's desire for naturalistic reductions, it is better for him to avoid this alternative proposal.

and Chalmers (1996) respectively), beliefs will not be spatiotemporal states. Thus, believing truly on such views would not be spatiotemporal states. Of course, the most popular view in philosophy of mind is not some form of dualism, but non-reductive physicalism (see, e.g., Fodor (1974), Pereboom and Kornblith (1991), Baker (1995), Anthony (2007)). But on such views, beliefs are *not* reducible to underlying brain states. But let us assume that beliefs *just are* brain states—perhaps, relativized to species (e.g. Kim (1993)). Even still, it is unlikely that facts about brains—like most biological and physiological facts—are identical to, or reducible to, facts about spatiotemporal relations those objects happen to occupy. (For relevant discussion, see e.g. Bolton and Hill (2003), Mitchell (2009).) So even focusing on the case of true belief, it is doubtful that believing truly is, or is reducible to, a spatiotemporal property.

However, let us *wave* these objections and assume that having a true belief is a spatiotemporal property. Even still, we must ask whether the property of being epistemically valuable is reducible to *it*. And, again, there are reasons for thinking it is not. Consider the following two explanations:

> Why is his belief that *p* epistemically valuable? Because it is true.
>
> Why is his belief that *p* epistemically valuable? Because it is true and a belief is epistemically valuable if and only if it is true (the *Truth Principle*).

The second explanation is clearly superior. The first explanation fails to connect the property of being true and the property of being epistemically valuable. Thus, the first explanation fails to connect the property referred to in the *explanandum* with the property referred to in the *explanans*. By contrast, the second explanation improves on this point. By including the *Truth Principle*, it connects the property referred to in the *explanandum*—being epistemically valuable—with one of the properties referred to in the *explanans*—being true.

Some might offer an alternative account. They might suggest that in order for the first explanation to be a *good* explanation, it needs to be the case that there is a connection between the property referred to in the *explanans* and the property referred in the *explanandum*. However, this connection does not have to be *part* of the *explanans*. Rather, it should be treated as a sort of "side constraint" or "adequacy constraint" on that explanation.

However, it is unclear why the *Truth Principle* should be treated as a side constraint or adequacy constraint on an explanation. It is not true of explanations *in general* that they are good only if there is a true bi-conditional linking a generalization of both the *explanans* and the *explanandum*. Further, the *Truth Principle* is too specific to be a general sort of adequacy constraint. Finally, the issue before us is not whether the first explanation is a *good* explanation but whether the second is a *better* explanation. It is entirely possible that the first explanation is a good one, but it can be improved upon.

A subtler objection is that in claiming that the second explanation is superior, we've implicitly committed ourselves to an infinite regress *ala* Carroll's "What the Tortoise Said to Achilles." If the second explanation is superior, the objection goes, surely this third one would be better yet:

> Why is his belief that *p* epistemically valuable? Because it is true and any true belief is of epistemic value, and if that belief is true and any true belief is of epistemic value, then his belief that *p* is of epistemic value.

An infinite regress is lurking here, whereby we have an infinite chain of *explanans* each of which is "superior" to the previous one, which is absurd. So, the objection goes, the best way to avoid this regress is from the start and reject my claim that the second explanation is no better than the first.

However, this objection fails. It assumes that what makes the second *explanans* superior to the first *explanans* is that one part of the *explanans* implies that the other part of the *explanans* entails the *explanandum*. If that was right, we might very well launch into an infinite regress. But that is not why the second *explanans* is superior to the first *explanans*. It is superior because it identifies a connection between a property mentioned in the *explanans* (being true) and a distinct property being mentioned in the *explanandum* (being of epistemic value).[19] The third *explanans* does not do that. Therefore, no infinite regress is launched.

One might object that the second explanation is circular as the property of being epistemically valuable appears in both the *explanans* and the *explanandum*. But if this is a kind of circularity, it is entirely unproblematic. For any subsuming explanation—like, for instance, those that appeal to laws of nature or well-established generalities—will likewise have some property that appears on both sides of the explanation.

If the instantiation of being true completely explained the instantiation of being epistemically valuable, then the second explanation would not be superior to the first. But it is. Therefore, the instantiation of being true does not completely explain the instantiation of being epistemically valuable.

Could there be some other property that completely explained the instantiation of being epistemically valuable? It is hard to see what that might be. This is for two reasons. First, assuming the *Truth Principle*, all and only true beliefs are epistemically valuable. So for some other property to completely explain the instantiation of epistemic value it would have to be extensionally adequate—holding whenever the property of truth was instantiated—but yet distinct from the property of being true and the property of being epistemically valuable. It is hard to see what property that would be. Second, even if we could locate such a property—call it 'P'—then the same argument we ran against truth could be run against P. That is, we could just swap in the first explanation 'P' for 'truth' (and cognates) and the same points would apply. So, I conclude, given the *Truth Principle*, there is no spatiotemporal property that completely explains the instantiation of being epistemically valuable.

One might wonder if these results are generated by our assumption of the *Truth Principle*. I do not think they are. Suppose one rejected the *Truth Principle*, embracing a kind of epistemic value pluralism on which justified beliefs are also of epistemic value. Similar points would apply then as well. For instance, consider the following pairs of explanations:

> Why is her belief that *q* of epistemic value? Because it is justified.
> Why is her belief that *q* of epistemic value? Because justified beliefs are of epistemic value and her belief that *q* is justified.

Again, clearly the second explanation is superior to the first and thus the first could not be a complete explanation.

Thus, we have reason for thinking if there is a property of being epistemically valuable, it is not reducible to spatiotemporal properties. Given Armstrong's understanding of natural properties, this means we have reason for thinking the property of being epistemically valuable is not reducible to natural properties.

V. Conclusion

Hazlett's *A Luxury of the Understanding* is a rich and rewarding book. But, I've argued here, its central argument against *Realism* fails. I've shown how any proponent of *Non-Nihilism* is able to find an answer to Hazlett's explanatory questions. Further, I've sketched some

[19] Or, more weakly, it identifies an informative connection between two concepts—truth, epistemic value—that are not analytically related.

arguments for thinking that the property of being epistemically valuable is a non-reductive, non-natural property. The upshot is that a non-reductive, non-naturalist version of *Realism* can overcome the challenge Hazlett lays at its feet.

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