1. Is knowledge valuable ‘in itself’? Disambiguating the question

Knowledge is often valuable. The relevant knowledge helps us get where we want to go, interact smoothly with other people, pay our bills on time, keep our jobs! In a million ways, knowledge can be *instrumentally* valuable. But it is sometimes said that *knowledge is finally valuable*: valuable, not merely as a means to some end, or goal, we may happen to have, but valuable as *an end in itself*. And some philosophers have proposed that knowledge is finally *prudentially* valuable. Defenders of (pluralistic) objective list theories, for example, believe that there are a plurality of “basic goods,” i.e. a plurality of general categories of things that directly benefit us; which are, in themselves, good for us. Friendship, happiness, respect, and autonomy, are among the goods that are frequently included on pluralistic lists of basic goods; knowledge is another.¹

¹ Finnis (2011), Griffin (1986, 1996, 2000), Lauinger (2013), Murphy (2001) and Rice (2013) are among those who defend an objective list theory, so understood (or at least a close relative), and include an epistemic good (knowledge, or meaningful knowledge, or understanding, for example) on a list of basic goods.
On the other hand, the status of knowledge as inherently valuable is not uncontested. It’s easy to generate examples of knowledge so trivial that they seem to have little or no value. Here are some:

- What is the 323rd entry in the Wichita phone directory? (Goldman 1999: 88)
- How many grains of sand are in a randomly selected cubic foot of the Sahara? (Sosa 2001: 49)
- How many dust motes are on the table in front of you? (Grimm 2009: 247)

So, is knowledge valuable ‘in itself’? Answering the question requires some disambiguation.

First, we need clarify what is meant by ‘knowledge’. As we have seen, epistemologists use the term “knowledge” to include isolated pieces of propositional knowledge—‘there are 50 dust motes on the table’ or ‘I blinked 16 times in the last minute.’ Is “knowledge”, in this sense, inherently valuable? And is each piece of such knowledge inherently valuable? Or having many such pieces? Or is it perhaps having those pieces ‘fit together’ in a certain way—a way that constitutes an understanding? And then, maybe it’s not even knowledge, per se, that is inherently valuable (if by ‘knowledge’ we mean something like justified true belief); maybe what is inherently valuable is getting at the truth—or some subset of truths—like the deep or worthy truths.

What exactly is it that is claimed to be valuable in itself?

We also need to clarify what is meant by valuable ‘in itself’. Is the claim that knowledge is intrinsically valuable—valuable in virtue of its intrinsic, rather than
relational properties? Or that it is ‘finally’ valuable—worthy of pursuit as an end in itself? (These are, after all, different, as objects may be finally valuable in virtue of their relational properties. (Korsgaard 1983)) Most of the passages above also draw a connection to well-being; is the claim to be evaluated that knowledge is finally prudentially valuable—“partly constitutive of our well-being” (as Neta put it)—or finally valuable in some other way (perhaps not good for us, but ‘just plain good’)?

There are, then, many different questions we could be asking, when we ask whether knowledge is ‘an end in itself’. To keep things manageable, I’ll focus on just one of these questions. My question will be the following:

**Is there an epistemic basic good: some epistemic entity worthy of inclusion on a list of basic goods?**

We may understand “epistemic” broadly, as concerning various kinds of “cognitive contact with reality” (Zagzebski 1996), paradigmatically knowledge, true belief, understanding, wisdom, and acquaintance. I will consider, then, whether there is some epistemic entity worthy of inclusion on a pluralistic list of basic goods, and I will give a broad-strokes account of the epistemic good that I believe is the best candidate for inclusion on a pluralistic list of basic goods. I will argue that this is not knowledge, understanding, or even wisdom, but a high-quality picture of the world.

Before turning to this task, a couple of preliminaries:

First, I am not going to defend the claim that there are general categories of things that directly benefit us; rather, I will address myself primarily to those who are
sympathetic to the idea that there are basic goods, and I will try to articulate the most plausible candidate for a basic good that is epistemic in nature.

Second, for purposes of this presentation, I am framing my project as one of identifying some ‘epistemic basic good’, realization of which directly benefits a person. But I will note, briefly, that my own view is slightly more complicated. In my broader research project—a book manuscript, provisionally titled *Epistemic Virtue: The Epistemic Dimension of Being a Good Person and Living a Good Life*—I put the notion of a ‘high-quality picture of the world’ that I will develop here to a slightly different purpose. There, I develop an account of epistemic virtue that has the idea of a high-quality picture of the world at its heart. I argue that it is not having a high-quality picture of the world, per se, that is good for a person, but epistemic virtue, where this is understood as being well-oriented to high-quality world-depiction. This is not, on my view, because epistemic virtue itself is a basic good, but because of the role epistemic virtue plays in the realization of other goods, such as friendship and aesthetic experience.

I will return to my own view in §6. Until then, for purposes of this presentation, I will set these nuances aside. My project here is to identify the best candidate for an ‘epistemic basic good’. I will argue that this is not knowledge, understanding, or even wisdom, but a high-quality picture of the world.

2. Kinds of basic goods

To begin, I’ll say a little more about basic goods.
Some philosophers think that there is only one basic good. Hedonists about well-being, for example, hold that there is just one basic good, i.e. pleasure. Pluralists about well-being, by contrast, hold that there are a number of basic goods. In addition to pleasure, the following have been suggested, or defended, as basic goods: knowledge, understanding, deep personal relations, friendship, friendship and community, loving relationships, being loved, being respected, self-respect, health, happiness, enjoyment, inner peace, aesthetic experience, virtue, excellence in play and work, achievement, accomplishment, autonomy, freedom, rational activity, creative activity, practical reasonableness, and religion. (Finnis 2011; Fletcher 2013; Griffin 1986, 1996, 2000; Heathwood 2010; Kagan 2009; Lauinger 2013; Murphy 2001; Parfit 1984; Rice 2013; Scanlon 1998)

Looking at this list, it is immediately apparent that the ostensible basic goods are quite heterogeneous.

Some of the goods are complex, composed of many parts. Take friendship, for example. A friendship is composed of parts: affection, respect, spending time together, and so on. Just as ‘one swallow does not a summer make’, nor does one experience (or action, or attitude) a friendship make. Other goods are simple. Pleasure is an ostensible example here. Pleasure is realized wholly in an experience. When a person has one single experience, of the relevant sort, that person has pleasure.

Of complex goods, some are holistic: in order to be realized, the parts composing the good need to ‘fit together’ in the right way. Others are atomistic: while they are composed of parts, the good is realized any time one has enough of them- they don’t need to fit together in any particular way. Examples to illustrate the holism/atomism
distinction come less easily to hand, in part because whether a good counts as holistic or atomistic depends on how one understands the good. Achievement is a good candidate for a holistic good. On most any account of achievement, one must achieve one’s aim through one’s efforts: one’s efforts must be properly related to the outcome. By contrast, consider autonomy. Autonomy is a good candidate for a complex, atomistic good. It is (ostensibly) complex, in that to realize autonomy, the basic good—to be sufficiently autonomous to have that which is of direct benefit to a person—one must have some ‘collection’ of things. To merely be able to move one’s right pinky finger does not constitute autonomy; to have autonomy requires some number of such abilities. So it is (ostensibly) complex; it is also—or might be—atomistic: it may be the case that when you have enough of these abilities, you have autonomy. This will depend on one’s conception of autonomy, of course—I offer it only as an example.

3 Towards the Epistemic Basic Good

Return now to the idea of an epistemic basic good. What kind of good would this be?

One possibility is that it is simple, like pleasure: that there is some ‘unit’, such as individual truths, that directly benefits us. What makes us well-off is having individual pieces of knowledge: just as (on one type of hedonistic view) each token of pleasure directly benefits us, so- on this imagined view- does each truth or piece of knowledge benefit us (and the more pieces we have, the better off we are).
However, reflection suggests that, whatever the epistemic basic good is, it’s not simple, but complex and holistic: composed of parts, and, moreover, parts that ‘fit together in the right way’. We’ve seen examples of individual epistemic goods—individual pieces of propositional knowledge—that, intuitively, don’t seem to have any value at all.

Moreover, one can apparently have a large collection of truths, or individual pieces of knowledge, without having very much of value at all. Think of a being whose knowledge comprises a large body of unconnected truths—that the sun is 93 million miles from the earth, that Jon Voight’s daughter is an actress, that cats have retractable claws. These unconnected truths are not worth very much at all, no matter how many of them a person collects; they only become valuable when they are related to one another in a certain way, e.g. in a way that constitutes an understanding.

Yet understanding can also be trivial. For example, I can understand why a particular Pokémon evolved at a particular time (e.g. because they had reached a certain level, at a certain time of day, or in a certain region, or came into proximity with certain elements…). In the absence of some feature that makes this understanding relevant, this doesn’t seem like the kind of collection of truths that, considered in itself, make a person better off. Just like propositional knowledge, understanding can be trivial.

Understanding can also be isolated in a way that casts doubt on it as a viable candidate for ‘the epistemic basic good’. Understanding can be piecemeal in just the way that individual pieces of knowledge can be piecemeal. Consider, for example, someone who has an understanding of psychology, and is well-read in classical fiction, but doesn’t
‘synthesize’ these understandings, such that her understanding of psychology informs and 
enriches her interpretation of the Classics.

All this suggests a change of approach. We have been attempting to ‘build up’ a 
basic good from pieces: truth, knowledge, and even complex pieces like understanding. 
But what happens if we take the opposite approach? What happens if we begin from the 
broadest possible ‘epistemic unit’—say, one’s representation of the world—and then we 
consider what makes that representation, or picture, of the world a high-quality one.

The quality of a picture of the world will, no doubt, be enhanced by things like 
truth (or accuracy), understanding, relevance, and worthiness. But the parts composing a 
picture of the world don’t contribute value in an additive way; the quality of a picture of 
the world is, in part, a matter of its holistic features: how all these parts ‘fit together’ into 
a high-quality picture of the world.

By way of analogy, consider how the aesthetic quality of a painting is not 
determined by adding up the aesthetic values of its individual brush strokes, considered 
individually; an art object’s aesthetic quality supervenes on certain holistic features of the 
art work of which they are a part. I propose the ‘epistemic basic good’ be understood in a 
similar way.

4. The Epistemic Basic Good: A High-Quality Picture of the World

I propose that the best candidate for the ultimate epistemic good will be a kind of 
comprehensive representation: a kind of representation, not of some narrow field or
subject matter, but of the world. Each of us has a representation of the world—or, as we may say more casually, a picture of the world (where this doesn’t imply that all parts of the world may be represented pictorially). This picture of the world can be of a higher or lower quality. One factor that contributes to the quality of a picture of the world is accuracy: a picture of the world comprising mostly true beliefs is, other things equal, of a higher quality than one comprising wholly false beliefs. But there are other factors that contribute to, or detract from, the quality of a picture of the world, for example, how its ‘parts’ fit together. Just as the aesthetic quality of a painting is a matter not only of the aesthetic values of each brush stroke considered individually, but of certain holistic features of the art work of which they are a part, so is the quality of a picture of the world a matter not only of how many true beliefs (or other accurate representations) it comprises, but how these beliefs ‘fit together’: for example, whether they fit together so as to constitute an understanding of the world, or some part of it.

The best candidate for the epistemic basic good is a high-quality picture of the world, where quality is a function of the following factors (to be explained in the following): accuracy, breadth, understanding, synthesis, relevance, worthiness, acquaintance, and collectivity. In what follows, I will develop this notion of a high-quality picture of the world by saying more about each of these factors.

Accuracy. A high-quality picture of the world is, first and foremost, sufficiently accurate. (See also Ahlstrom-Vij and Grimm 2013) Paradigmatically, accuracy is a matter of the truth or falsity of one’s beliefs: other things being equal, a true belief makes one’s picture of the world more accurate, and a false one makes it less so. As I am
understanding accuracy, a picture of the world comprising just one true belief, and no false ones, will be perfectly accurate (though it will be low-quality for other reasons, such as that it lacks breadth—more on which below).

However, although paradigmatically accuracy is a matter of the truth or falsity of one’s beliefs, accuracy may not be only a matter of the beliefs one has. It may be that there are ways of representing the world that cannot be captured without remainder by the beliefs one has. So, consider how a model can accurately represent the solar system, or how a work of art can represent complex concepts like war. It may be that our minds, likewise, have ways of accurately representing the world that are not reducible to collections of beliefs, however large.2

Moreover, false beliefs don’t all detract from the accuracy of one’s picture of the world to the same degree. It can make a difference how wrong a person is—whether she’s misjudged some distance by an inch or a mile, for example. It also makes a difference how much ‘hangs’ on the belief: whether it’s on the fringes of one’s noetic structure, or whether it is central to one’s picture of the world. (See also Roberts and Wood 2007, Chapter 7)

**Breadth.** Given that a picture of the world that contains just one true belief and no false ones can, in principle,3 be perfectly accurate, it is clear that there is a second factor that makes a difference to the quality of one’s picture of the world, and that is breadth. A person could, in principle, devote her life to understanding just one narrow subject matter—the biology of deep sea life, or the influences of scientific advances of

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2 Compare Catherine Elgin’s example of scientific idealizations, such as the ideal gas law, in support of her view that scientific understanding at least is non-factive. (Elgin 2009)
3 And assuming that a belief is the kind of thing that can accurately represent the world.
the early 1900s on the Montessori Method of education, for example—and have as much knowledge or understanding as it is possible for a person to acquire in a lifetime. But the world is a complex entity, with many different parts to be known and understood, and a picture of the world that is confined to just one tiny square of it—no matter in what depth or detail that picture is—is, other things being equal, lower quality than a picture of the world that is more broad. It is not merely the amount of knowledge, or the depth of understanding, that makes a difference to the quality of one’s picture of the world, but the breadth.

**Understanding.** A third factor that makes a difference to the quality of a person’s picture of the world is understanding; a person with a high-quality picture of the world has understanding, of some depth, of some parts of the world. Epistemologists distinguish various kinds of understanding whose inclusion in our picture of the world plausibly enhances it. One is ‘understanding why’. It is one thing to know that John Wilkes Booth shot Lincoln, or that a tennis ball that has been dipped in liquid nitrogen will shatter when thrown against a hard surface; it is something else to know why. Other things being equal, a picture of the world is better to the extent it includes not only knowledge, but understanding why (though not all understandings will contribute much, if anything, to the quality of one’s picture of the world—see further worthiness and relevance, below). Such understanding can be quite narrow—one can, for example, understand why a bicycle is failing to run smoothly. Another kind of understanding is what is called ‘objectual understanding’: understanding of a complex object or subject matter, grasping all the disparate elements of a system, seeing how they all fit together—
as when one understands politics. (Kvanvig 2003: 191) Someone who understands politics will be able to explain why some actor acted as they did, as well as speculate intelligently about what would have happened had things been otherwise, and so on. For those of an academic bent, this understanding might be understanding of the kind that is pursued by researchers in universities. But the kind of understanding that contributes to the quality of a person’s picture of the world needn’t be of the traditional subjects of academia, nor need it be achieved through traditional academic methods. Imagine Cathy, who, after seeing the gorgeous quilts at the State Fair, begins experimenting at home, finding resources online and through her local fabric store, trading tips with other novices and learning from local experts, and, eventually, comes to understand quilting: the various patterns, techniques, and materials one can use to achieve different effects, and so on. Or imagine Mary, who, in an attempt to save money, begins growing her own vegetables, and is surprised by the difficulty of it; through trial and error, and with help from local growers, she comes to understand the things about soil, temperature, saturation, and so on, that are important for growing vegetables in her area.

Understanding such as Cathy’s and Mary’s can be quite narrow: understanding of just one kind of quilting, and from the perspective of a practitioner, rather than, for example, a historian; understanding of just one kind of gardening, and in one specific region, and from the point of view of someone interested in growing vegetables, rather than, say, a plant breeder. These understandings also do not need to be of an especially impressive depth to contribute to the quality of a person’s picture of the world: even if Cathy or Mary cannot answer every conceivable question about quilting or gardening, their understanding contributes to the quality of their picture of the world.4

4 Note also that a person may realize a high-quality picture of the world even if she isn’t disposed to regard
**Synthesis.** Part of breadth is knowing about, understanding, or otherwise being in cognitive contact with, a diversity of subjects. But just as a person can have a massive amount of information about political figures and systems and fail to understand politics, so can one have understanding in a diversity of subjects but fail to draw the kinds of connections among the different subject matters such that one has a unified picture of the world. To distinguish this kind of understanding from the kind of understanding discussed above, which can be of narrow subject matters, call it *synthesis.* Other things being equal, a picture of the world is higher-quality to the extent that it includes some synthesis of one’s knowledge, understanding, etc. of the various parts of the world, as when an understanding of human psychology informs our understanding of history or enriches our experience of a novel, or an understanding of anatomy informs our appreciation of aesthetic representations of the human form.

**Relevance.** A fifth factor that makes a difference to the quality of a person’s picture of the world is *relevance*: a high-quality picture of the world is one that represents accurately (or accurately enough) the parts of the world that are *relevant* to the person whose picture it is. Relevance is relative. Knowledge of the location of my keys is relevant to me; knowledge of the location of your keys is not. Knowledge of the number of grasses in a bed of sand is not relevant to me, but it might be relevant to someone engaged in an experiment on soil erosion. There are different accounts one
could give about what it is that makes a subject relevant to a person: whether, for example, it has to do with what the person is curious about or desires to know, or whether knowing it would serve some practical interest of hers. I am inclined to understand relevance in terms of the (genuine, normative) reasons a person has: a proposition, subject matter, etc. is relevant to a person if it connects appropriately to the reasons she has—roughly, it’s relevant if she has reason to want to know it (understand it, etc.). This general proposal requires spelling out, and the verdicts it generates will depend on the account of reasons one gives (e.g. whether one acknowledges the existence of ‘external’ reasons). But it seems to me to be the approach that is best capable of giving the intuitively correct verdicts about when a subject matter etc. is relevant to a person.

**Worthiness.** While there are some things worth knowing about because they are relevant to me, there are other things that seem worthy of knowing or understanding for anyone: whether God exists, for example. By contrast, one can have knowledge and understanding of subjects or propositions that are, in the grand scheme of things, somewhat trivial: knowledge of how many times I blinked in the last five minutes, for example, or understanding of why a particular Pokemon evolved at a particular time. Thus a sixth factor that makes a difference to the quality of a person’s picture of the world is what we might dub *worthiness*.

Here are some ostensible examples of such worthy objects, given by Roberts and Wood:

“Organisms are excellent and beautiful things in their own right… The universe, with all its processes, is worthy of respect. And this worthiness of the objects of knowledge is tied to their particular character—their particular complexity and
simplicity, the particulars of their structure and composition and functions. The human genome is interesting because of what it is, whereas [a] cubic centimeter of the Sahara, simply as so many grains of sand together, is uninteresting because of what it is.” (Roberts and Wood 2007: 158)

I take these to be paradigmatic examples of things that are worth knowing about. A high-quality picture of the world includes knowledge (understanding, etc.) of parts of the world that are worth knowing about.

**Being part of a shared epistemic enterprise (Collectivity).** In principle, one could put together a picture of the world alone, in isolation from any other being’s attempt to do the same. But there is something especially valuable about a picture of the world that dynamically inherits from, and contributes to, others’ representations of the world. The person with a high-quality picture of the world has a picture of the world that is **part of a shared epistemic enterprise**, a collective epistemic endeavor in which others partake, connecting those from whom we learned what we know (and those from whom they learned what they know, and so on) to those we teach what we know (and those they teach, and so on), linking us all together. We are not only individual beings with a picture of the world; we are part owners of, and stakeholders in, our picture of the world.

It is in this capacity that I believe that considerations of justification can be constitutive, rather than merely instrumental, contributors to the value of a high-quality picture of the world. One contributes to, and draws from, others’ representations of the world through not just listening, but questioning, debating, brainstorming, arguing, evaluating, formulating and testing hypotheses, engaging in intellectual play.
Considerations of justification play a substantive role in our engagement with other epistemic agents.

*Acquaintance.* Frank Jackson gives the example of Mary, the scientist who acquires “all the physical information there is to obtain” about the neurophysiology of vision, but who has never seen color. Jackson asks: “What will happen when Mary is released from her black and white room or is given a colour television monitor? Will she learn anything or not?” (Jackson 1982: 130) Whether or not Mary learns anything when she sees color for the first time, she certainly has something she did not previously have, namely, personal acquaintance with color. The person with a high-quality picture of the world has a representation of the world that incorporates acquaintance. *Hearing* Martin Luther King’s voice, *touching* a rock from the moon, *holding* a newborn enriches one’s picture of the world in a way that cannot be ‘made up for’ by any number of beliefs. It’s unclear how much quality an individual instance of acquaintance adds to one’s picture of the world when it is stripped of context—if, for example, I were to hear MLK’s voice without knowing that it is MLK (or even that it is a voice). In this respect, acquaintance is no different than true belief: a true belief, on its own, connected to nothing else, does little to contribute to the quality of one’s picture of the world. What really makes a difference to the quality of one’s picture of the world is when true belief, or acquaintance, is integrated into that picture (see ‘synthesis’ and ‘understanding’, above).

To sum up: The best candidate for an epistemic basic good is a complex entity, in which the various elements are integrated in a certain way, to constitute a representation
of the world—or, as we might say, a ‘picture’ of the world—that is high-quality. And a high-quality picture of the world is one that:

- Is accurate, broad, and synthesized;
- Incorporates representations of parts of the world that are relevant to the person, or otherwise worth knowing;
- Is dynamically related to others’ representations of the world by way of its possessor participating in a shared epistemic endeavor, characterized by teaching, learning, debating, brainstorming, and so on; and
- Incorporates understanding and acquaintance (again, especially of parts of the world that are relevant or worthy).

This, I propose, is the ‘epistemic entity’ that has the best claim to being a basic good.

5. The intuitive plausibility of high-quality world-depiction as a basic good

It is this epistemic entity that, I propose, has the best claim to being a basic good. To give it a mass noun—akin to ‘friendship’ or ‘autonomy’ (or knowledge)—we can call it ‘high-quality world-depiction’.

So, what exactly does that imply, to say that high-quality world-depiction is a basic good: that it is among the things that, in themselves, make our lives go better?

One thing it does not imply is that we have some imperative to pursue high-quality world-depiction at all costs, or weigh it above all other values. The view that having a high-quality picture of the world directly benefits a person is, as I’ve suggested,
most at home in a pluralistic conception of well-being: one that treats it as just one of the things that directly benefits a person, and so just one factor to be taken into consideration.

Furthermore, well-being itself is, presumably, just one source of our reasons for action: presumably we have not only prudential reasons for action, but moral reasons—reasons to be considerate of other people, for example.

So granting that having a high-quality picture of the world is (one of) the things that directly benefits us does not imply that we ought to pursue it at all costs.

What it does imply is that high-quality world-depiction has a certain special status: that having a high-quality picture of the world is among the things that, in itself, contributes to the prudential value of a life.

How would one go about supporting the view that something ‘in itself’ contributes to the prudential value of a life? One way pluralists about well-being do this is by way of Rossian- (and Moorean-) style thought experiments. Compare two people whose lives are equal in every aspect relevant to well-being—equally rich in pleasure, friendship, achievement—whatever you think makes a life a good one—except that one person has a high-quality picture of the world—rich in understanding, acquaintance, and so on—while the other does not (she is deeply ignorant of the world, lacks understanding, and so on). Which person is better off? If you think the person who has, on top of everything else, a high-quality picture of the world, is better off, this is some evidence that having a high-quality picture of the world, in itself, makes a person’s life go better.

Other thought experiments may be brought to bear as well. Consider the experience machine. Not everyone agrees that they would be better off in the imagined
experience machine, even a super-boosted experience machine that’s able to provide a higher-quality experience than one could have ‘in the real world’. And I think at least part of the reason for this is that having a high-quality picture of the world—an accurate picture of the world, personal acquaintance with the objects of one’s understanding, and so on—is valuable in itself. This isn’t to say that the value of having a high-quality picture of the world will always ‘trump’ any other value—at some point, if you make the experiences the machine provides good enough, a person might decide that they are better off in the machine. But it does suggest that it is one of the things that matters- and matters for its own sake.

Of course, this assumes a pluralistic approach to well-being. Hard-core hedonists in the crowd will likely not be moved by puny intuition pumps like these. As I have said, I take it to be beyond the scope of this paper to defend pluralistic theories of well-being. But—just to report my own experiences—if I set aside theoretical commitments, and think about what I want out of life—and what I want for my friends, loved ones— my daughter—I think a life would be impoverished if it lacks the kind of understanding, synthesis, acquaintance… with the world that characterizes what I’m calling high-quality world-depiction. And when it comes to explaining the importance of things like public education, public libraries, ensuring access to the internet… I don’t feel like we need to appeal to evidence about how more education correlates to higher salary or better health outcomes, or how communities with public libraries have less violent crime. I think we just need to appeal to the fact that these institutions enrich the high-quality world-depiction of those they serve.
Thus, to conclude: High-quality world-depiction is a plausible candidate for a basic good; and the best candidate—among other possibilities, like knowledge (understood atomistically)—for an epistemic basic good.

6. High-quality world-depiction as part of epistemic virtue

I have introduced the idea of a high-quality picture of the world in the context of objective list theories of well-being. But the notion of high-quality world-depiction is a useful one, even outside the context of pluralistic objective list theories of well-being. One role that it is well-suited to play is as the central epistemic good in an account of epistemic virtue. Normally, accounts of epistemic virtue are offered as accounts ‘from some narrow epistemic point of view’. I am interested in something different. I am interested in what we might call the epistemic part of ‘personal goodness’—of being a good person. Not merely good from some point of view—epistemically good, or aesthetically good, for example—but good, all things considered. We are all familiar with the idea that ‘being a good person’ has a moral dimension—that it involves things like being kind, respectful, generous; I think it also has an epistemic dimension—that it involves being open-minded; fair-minded; responsible with the truth. (See also Baehr 2011.) In my broader research project, I propose that the epistemic part of personal goodness may best be understood in terms of high-quality world-depiction: the epistemically virtuous person is the one who is well-oriented to high-quality world-depiction. To be ‘well-oriented’ to high-quality world-depiction isn’t just to be well-
equipped to realize it oneself, or even to promote it generally; rather, it involves bearing a plurality of relations to epistemic goods—relations such as appreciation, respect, admiration, caring about. And it comprises relations not only to epistemic goods, but to epistemic agents and their projects, and epistemically relevant social institutions and practices.

I argue, then, that high-quality world-depiction plays a central role in an account of ‘epistemic virtue’ (that is, the epistemic part of personal goodness); I also argue that epistemic virtue is importantly implicated in well-being. Not because epistemic virtue is itself a basic good, but because it is importantly implicated in many of the other goods often claimed to be basic goods: goods like friendship, and aesthetic experience. To illustrate, consider aesthetic experience: in an aesthetic experience of *Guernica* or *Silas Marner*, a person may express epistemic virtue, by charitably interpreting the work, open-mindedly engaging with it, honestly assessing it, and so on. In fact, exercising epistemic virtue in these ways is part of what it is to have an aesthetic experience: the expression of epistemic virtue ‘constitutively overlaps with’ the token realization of the good, such that it is, at the same time, both an expression of epistemic virtue and a realization of the good. In this way, there is a constitutive overlap between epistemic virtue and certain basic (or prudentially important) goods. If, as objective list theorists have proposed, such goods are, in turn, constitutive contributors to well-being, then there is a constitutive overlap not only between epistemic virtue and such goods, but between epistemic virtue and well-being. But whether such goods are basic, or merely prudentially important (as common and fecund sources of happiness, for example), given
the role of epistemic virtue in realizing these goods, we can see that epistemic virtue is an important, and thus-far underappreciated, contributor to well-being.

This, then, is—very briefly—the way I see high-quality world-depiction fitting in to well-being: via epistemic virtue. But, in this paper, my main aim has been to make a case for a simpler claim: that, if we are sympathetic to the idea there are various things that, in themselves, make our lives go better, there is good reason to include ‘having a high-quality picture of the world’ among them.

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