

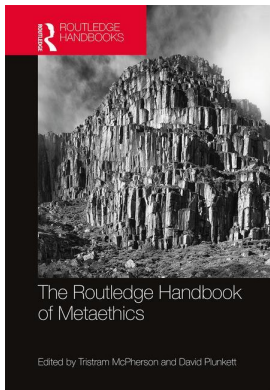
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Tristram McPherson, David Plunkett

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Karen Jones, François Schroeter

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29**Moral Expertise**

Karen Jones and François Schroeter

INTRODUCTION

We recognize the existence of expertise in many domains, from plumbing to physics, meteorology to medicine. Nor do we think it problematic to defer to the opinion of those who have the expertise we lack in these and other fields. When it comes to morality, however, many have the intuition that deference is problematic. This intuition is supported by reflecting on the oddness of, for example, becoming a vegetarian on the basis of someone telling you that meat eating is wrong, without yourself fully considering the matter. This chapter is an exploration of the asymmetry thesis, or the claim that morality differs from other domains of inquiry (with the possible exception of aesthetics) insofar as deference is problematic in the moral domain in a way that it is not in other domains. The asymmetry thesis can be defended using two broad strategies: 1. Challenge the existence of moral expertise, for justified deference must be deference to expertise not mere authority, so if there is no moral expertise then there should be no moral deference. 2. Identify something distinctive about morality that precludes deference. This chapter examines a variety of attempts to pursue each of these broad strategies, and argues they fail to provide adequate support for the asymmetry thesis.

We begin by exploring what moral expertise would be like, if it exists, and how the notion of expertise relates to the notion of experts (“Varieties of Moral Expertise and the Expertise/Expert Distinction”). It turns out that there are at least three different kinds of moral expertise: expertise in judgment, in action, and in giving and assessing reasons. Next, we consider metaethical objections to the very idea of moral expertise (“Metaethics and the Possibility of Moral Expertise”). We argue that moral expertise is compatible with the majority of metaethical views: only simple versions of non-cognitivism and nihilism must be opposed to moral expertise. In the final section (“Expertise and Moral Epistemology”), we explore what follows for communities of moral inquiry, given the supposition that moral expertise exists. Would such expertise support a rich

social epistemology of the kind we find in science? A rich social epistemology includes epistemic divisions of labor, different credibility rankings, relations of deference, and roles for expert testimony and advice. Defenders of the asymmetry thesis claim that nothing much follows for the structure of communities of moral inquiry from the existence of moral expertise: either we cannot or should not access such expertise and our moral epistemology should remain individualist. We raise objections to these arguments against symmetry, arguing that they are inconclusive.

VARIETIES OF MORAL EXPERTISE AND THE EXPERTISE/EXPERT DISTINCTION

There are at least three possible kinds of moral expertise: expertise in judgment, expertise in action, and expertise in giving and evaluating reasons (for a related but somewhat different taxonomy, see Driver 2013). Those with expertise in judgment tend to arrive at true or nearly true moral judgments. Those with expertise in action reliably act well, and those with expertise in giving and evaluating reasons have the ability to articulate the morally relevant features of situations. Each type of expertise can be thought of as extending across the full range of morally significant choice situations, or as being held in a more limited, domain-specific way. A fourth kind of expertise, expertise about how moral cognition and moral language work, or about the development of moral concepts and conceptions, is sometimes confused with moral expertise but is its own distinctive kind of expertise, the kind developed by the study of metaethics or history of ideas.

Crosscutting the distinctions between expertise in judgment, action, and giving and evaluating reasons are two polar opposite models of what expertise consists in, which define the conceptual space into a spectrum along which we can locate less extreme views. According to the first model, moral expertise is a matter of knowing, and knowing how to apply, correct moral principles (Caplan 1992; Singer and Wells 1984). This model privileges intellectual abilities—including reasoning ability, knowledge of moral theory, and knowledge of non-moral facts—ahead of perceptual, behavioral, or emotional dispositions and thus can be described as intellectualist. At the opposite pole is Dreyfus and Dreyfus' (1991) model of moral expertise as engaged non-reflective moral coping. Those with expertise transcend the rules that formed part of their moral education and become able to react immediately and without deliberation to diverse moral situations (see also Churchland 1995, chapters 6 and 10). A somewhat weaker position takes moral expertise to be a matter of experienced practical judgment; the moral expert is the virtuous person who possesses practical wisdom (Dancy 1993, 2004; McDowell 1979). The deliverances of practical wisdom cannot be captured in a set of rules; however, unlike the radical approach of Dreyfus and Dreyfus, this approach allows a significant role for intellectual reflection in criticizing the principles and positions governing our moral thinking (McDowell 1994, 81). Clearly, there is room for many other intermediate positions, thereby generating a spectrum of views between the poles of extreme intellectualism and extreme anti-intellectualism.

These two polar opposite models of how moral reliability is achieved have different implications for the relationship between the three types of moral expertise, expertise in judgment, action, and giving and evaluating reasons. The intellectualist's appeal to rules and principles amounts to giving priority to expertise in justification, from which

expertise in judgment will follow, but expertise in action might be entirely lacking. In contrast, anti-intellectualists like Dreyfus and Dreyfus give priority to expertise in action, which can be fully decoupled from expertise in justification and does not require expertise in judgment understood as occurrent, linguistically articulated thought.

If moral expertise exists, do moral experts exist? That depends on what we think an expert is. If we hold a restrictive account of what it takes to be an expert, such that experts must have knowledge rare in kind or degree, must be credentialized, and must occupy a distinct social role that supports deference, then the existence of expertise does not imply the existence of experts. Similarly, if we think experts require comprehensive, articulable knowledge of a field, then the existence of expertise in judgment and action is compatible with the non-existence of experts, as is the existence of domain-limited expertise in giving and assessing reasons. But there is a deflationary account of what it takes to be an expert which does not have these implications, according to which simply possessing expertise is enough to qualify as an expert no matter how widely shared that expertise is, whether or not it receives social recognition, and whether or not it is comprehensive in scope. As we will see in the “Expertise and Moral Epistemology” section, some of the objections to moral deference rest not on concerns about the very idea of moral expertise but about recognizing experts, understood as persons occupying a socially sanctioned role.

METAETHICS AND THE POSSIBILITY OF MORAL EXPERTISE

In this section, we take as our primary example expertise in moral judgment, which has attracted the most attention in metaethics. But our conclusions generalize to other normative and evaluative domains. One might think that moral expertise presupposes strong metaphysical and semantic commitments about the existence of moral facts. For example, it might be thought that only if moral facts are robustly mind-independent does talk of moral expertise make sense. Just as those with expertise in the natural sciences know more about the nature of the world than the layperson, those with expertise in moral matters know more about the nature of the world of value than the moral beginner. Thus one might think that only if we have been able to resolve a complex cluster of metaethical problems can we reach a verdict on the existence of moral expertise. However, what seems crucial for expertise is it being legitimate to posit moral truth and knowledge, and being able to make sense of the idea that there are better and worse epistemic positions with respect to moral truth. If a metaethical position is able to do this, then it is compatible with the existence of expertise, whatever its stance on broader metaphysical and semantic issues.

The pre-conditions for moral expertise are weaker than might be first thought, but they are not trivial. More is required for expertise than the claim that we be able to *talk* of moral positions as better or worse, for someone committed to astrology can rank practitioners’ verdicts as better or worse and there might even be agreement among practitioners about such rankings. If we accept that astrology purports to offer insight into personality and into the future using methodologies that can do neither of these things, then there can be no astrological expertise. Merely being able to say that positions can be ranked as better or worse is insufficient to establish the existence of genuine expertise. In addition, some epistemic positions must be more reliable at getting at the truth than others.

Not all metaethical positions are able to meet this bar. For instance, simple non-cognitivism of the kind advocated by Ayer (1952) rejects both talk of moral truth and the idea of better and worse moral positions. Moral statements are simply expressions of pro and con attitudes, attitudes which differ between agents, but which cannot be described as more or less appropriate. However, simple non-cognitivism is now universally rejected as unable to account for the seemingly objectivist features of our moral practices. Contemporary developments of non-cognitivism want to vindicate the idea of moral truth, and once you have the idea of moral truth you open up the possibility of moral knowledge and of more or less accurate positions with respect to moral truth (see Elisabeth Camp's chapter "Metaethical Expressivism"). For this reason, Blackburn (1998) and Gibbard (2003) reject the label of non-cognitivism, finding it misleading for their views.

Whether Blackburn and Gibbard's positions are ultimately compatible with moral expertise depends on how deflationary their account of moral truth is and hence whether it is able to ground the claim that one view is correct and another false. This remains an open question. The problem comes into focus when we consider two people engaged in moral disagreement. Each can say to the other, in seemingly objectivist fashion, "I am right, you are wrong"; the problem is how to break this symmetry. It could be broken if we were able to appeal to a perspective-independent fact, which one person latches onto and the other doesn't. However, the worry is that the machinery developed by Blackburn and Gibbard only grounds *perspective-dependent ascriptions* of truth and knowledge (Schroeter and Schroeter 2005, 5–12) when moral expertise seems to require something stronger: getting things right in a way that can be intersubjectively endorsed. Perspective-dependent ascriptions of truth fall short of this. Blackburn and Gibbard may be able to vindicate the idea that different individuals can ascribe moral expertise to each other, and can *talk as if* there is moral expertise. But this is insufficient to establish the existence of genuine moral expertise.

The other metaethical position that seems in immediate tension with the existence of moral expertise is nihilism. According to the nihilist, there are no moral facts; moral discourse is truth-apt, but there are no true attributions of moral properties to actual states of affairs. Nothing is good or bad, right or wrong. Nihilists typically offer error theories to explain how we could be so very mistaken in our understanding of our own moral practices (see Jonas Olson's chapter "Error Theory in Metaethics"). If all attributions of moral properties are false then there is no moral knowledge and we cannot make sense of the idea that some people's moral judgments are better than others.

Nihilism is sometimes combined with a fictionalist approach to moral discourse (see Richard Joyce's chapter "Fictionalism in Metaethics"). While denying that moral attributions are literally true, fictionalists insist that we evaluate moral claims as true or false in roughly the same way we evaluate claims about Sherlock Holmes' professional life as true or false. Insofar as there are better and worse interpreters of standard fictional claims such as 'SH had a difficult childhood', or 'SH must have had mathematical training', there may be better or worse interpreters of moral fictions: some individuals may be better than others at getting at what's true according to the fictions. Fictionalism thus seems compatible with the existence of moral expertise.

Metaethical positions *prima facie* compatible with the possibility of moral expertise are constructivism and realism. We discuss each in turn. Constructivism takes a variety of forms, united by the core thought that moral facts are constituted by the deliverances

of a deliberative procedure, whether of ideal reason (Kant 1991), ideal discursive practice (Apel 1990, Habermas 1990), or contractual irresistibility (Rawls 1970, Scanlon 1998) (see Melissa Barry's chapter "Constructivism"). All these theories can posit moral truth and moral knowledge because they do not reduce moral facts to the upshot of agents' actual deliberations, but rather to various forms of ideal deliberation. This idealizing move opens up the space between actual attitude and ideal attitude that is required to vindicate classifying moral views as better or worse, more or less accurate. So long as the idealizing moves are justified, constructivism in its various forms is compatible with moral expertise. The same lesson applies to ideal response theories, which take moral facts to be constituted by our idealized conative attitudes, whether idealized desire (Smith 1994) or idealized affective response (Wiggins 1987; McDowell 1998, 151–166). So long as these theorists can make good on their idealizing moves (but see Enoch 2005 for an argument that they cannot), they are compatible with moral expertise.

Moral realism is typically defined as the conjunction of the semantic claim that moral statements are truth-apt, the metaphysical claim that moral facts are independent of our attitudes and norms, and the epistemological thesis that we can know at least some moral truths (Boyd 1988, Sayre-McCord 1988; but see Billy Dunaway's chapter "Realism and Objectivity" for worries about the adequacy of this definition). Moral realists typically endorse context-invariant cognitivism, such that the truth of moral statements does not vary across the context of utterance or standards of assessment—for instance, the truth of the judgment that incest is morally wrong is not affected by the context in which the judgment is uttered or assessed. Moral realism (in its standard, context-invariant form) is so strongly associated with the idea of moral expertise that some theorists (McGrath 2011) who are skeptical of moral expertise take realism's association with expertise to count against it. Nevertheless, realism supports the existence of moral expertise only if it is able to defend its epistemological claim. Some theorists argue that realism makes moral facts so independent of our responses and attitudes that they fall outside our cognitive reach, threatening the very possibility of moral knowledge (Gibbard 2003, Joyce 2006, Street 2006). If it does, this would be a major problem for realism, both as a metaethical position and as a basis on which to support moral expertise.

One might wonder whether moral expertise is compatible with metaethical relativism. Moral relativism can be construed as:

- (i) a metaphysical claim about the world: that there is no single, absolute, universal morality, or
- (ii) a semantic claim about language: that the truth value of moral utterances is relative to some parameter, such as a moral code or a culture (see Isidora Stojanovic's chapter "Metaethical Relativism").

Both versions of relativism seem to be compatible with expertise. Take the metaphysical version first. What's permitted by a moral code may depend on complex facts about prevailing social norms and empirical circumstances. Those who are more reliable in discerning compatibility with the code determined by those circumstances will have moral expertise *relative to that code*. Moreover, some judges may be reliable at discerning which actions are right relative to different codes. So the relativist may hold that there can be experts in more than one moral code. Thus there is room for a kind of code-relative

moral expertise on this relativist view of morality, but this will fall short of the kind of non-code-relative expertise that people might have hoped for. The semantic version will also leave room for expertise, as long as identifying the relevant parameter is not a trivial task. For instance, if the parameter for assessing truth and falsity of moral utterances is determined by mutually negotiable standards within a conversational context, then some of us may be more skilled at determining which standards are invoked and what the content of those standards is. In that case, the semantic relativist can allow for a relativized notion of moral expertise along the same lines as the metaphysical relativist.

EXPERTISE AND MORAL EPISTEMOLOGY

If there is moral expertise in judgment, whether or not that expertise extends broadly or is domain-limited, or even—at the limit case—is just the ability to do better with respect to the truth of some moral claim (Enoch 2014), what follows for moral epistemology? Should moral epistemology be fully social on the model of scientific inquiry, which permits epistemic divisions of labor, deference to expert authority, and testimonial transfer of knowledge? In the literature, these questions are taken up in the context of testimony about moral matters. Some examples support the intuition that moral and other knowledge should be treated symmetrically. For example, if you are not especially good at applying a particular moral concept, such as sexism, then it seems you might defer to someone with better experience in this area (Jones 1999); if you are unsure how to weigh up the various considerations that count for and against an action—for example how solidarity is to be weighed against consumer inconvenience in determining whether to strike—then you might defer to a more experienced friend (Hopkins 2007); or, again, if you think your moral judgment might be tainted by bias, it seems appropriate to defer to someone who is more distant from the situation (Sliwa 2012). The examples that *prima facie* count in favor of moral deference concern particular deficits rather than global moral impairment and subsequent global deference. The issue is whether, and if so under what circumstances, a mature and ordinarily competent moral agent should defer to another agent's expertise. No one denies the importance of deference for the moral beginner or defends global deference on the part of the morally mature to a guru figure.

If some examples seem to support moral deference, others seem to undermine it. For example, there is something decidedly odd about becoming a vegetarian on the basis of someone's telling you that eating meat is wrong (McGrath 2009, Hills 2009); nor is the situation significantly improved if they tell you that the reason meat eating is wrong is because farming methods cause unnecessary animal suffering (Hills 2009). Unless you yourself understand why causing unnecessary suffering makes an action wrong, and are therefore able to dispense with reliance on the authority of the other, there remains something odd about your deference. There is no parallel oddness in deferring to the views of your physician about what treatment to take.

Appeal to examples alone cannot resolve the asymmetry debate. Those who argue in favor of asymmetry take on the burden of demonstrating what the relevant difference is between the two cases, if that difference does not lie in general metaethical worries about the possibility of moral expertise. Arguments in favor of asymmetry divide into two kinds:

epistemic and non-epistemic (Hopkins 2007). Epistemic arguments purport to show that we cannot get moral knowledge from moral testimony; non-epistemic arguments claim that while it might be possible to get moral knowledge second-hand, there are political, moral, or other reasons for not getting our knowledge in this way.

There are two main epistemic arguments against moral testimony, even granting the existence of moral expertise: the practicality argument and the argument from the impossibility of identifying experts. According to the practicality argument, the close link between moral judgment and action makes moral knowledge a matter of knowledge how, rather than knowledge that. Testimony can transfer knowledge that, but not knowledge how; hence it is useless in the moral case (Anscombe 1981, 47–48; Hopkins 2007). This argument overstates the role of knowledge how in morality. Though it is plausible that our moral competences include some knowledge how, it is implausible to suppose that they are not in large part constituted by propositionally articulated beliefs that could be transferred by linguistic means and so could be acquired from testimony (Hopkins 2007, 618–620).

In order to gain knowledge from testimony, one must be able to pick out those who are likely to have the required expertise. If this cannot be done, then no matter whether there is expertise out there, it is unavailable to us as an epistemic resource. McGrath (2008) claims that while we can pick out experts in other domains, the existence of moral disagreement means that we cannot do so in the moral domain. In some fields we can check expertise independently; for example, we can check the expertise of weather forecasters by seeing if their predictions hold, of engineers by seeing if their bridges hold. In addition, for a wide class of experts, from plumbers to physicists, there is agreement about appropriate training. But, claims McGrath, neither of these apply in the moral case. McGrath argues that, in the moral case, there is a danger that many explanations that purport to show why one side is more likely to be in error than the other will be question-begging or circular (McGrath 2008, 99). Thus, we lack an error theory as to why one side should be right and the other wrong; hence, deferring to either would be problematic.

The problem of how to pick out those with expertise is important; however, it is not clear that it supports the asymmetry thesis, for where there is controversy about, for example, medical matters, testimony is also ruled out because even if one side or the other is correct, no one is in a position to tell which side is which (Sliwa 2012, 190). Moreover, McGrath only considers all-in judgments, and yet they form just a fraction of our moral judgments. We not only form verdicts about what is right and wrong, but also about what is just and courageous; about what kinds of moral considerations are relevant to settling an issue; about the nature and significance of different values, such as the nature and significance of respect; and so on. It is easier to understand what kinds of experience and training would put an agent in a better epistemic position with respect to the nature and significance of these specific values or virtues. Think, for example, of the moral understanding of the need and frailty of human beings that can emerge from a life, such as Mother Teresa's, spent caring for the dying destitute. Such lives might not present equivalent lessons in the value of social justice as lives spent resisting political repression (Jones 1999, 65).

When it comes to disagreement about all-in verdicts such as whether an action is right or wrong—that is, when it comes to correctly applying our thin moral concepts—it can be harder to assess the comparative epistemic qualifications of potential authorities than

it is when it comes to claims using thick moral concepts such as those expressed by the virtue terms or terms for specific moral values such as respect. We currently do not have the kind of story about how such all-in expertise, especially in domain-unrestricted form, is acquired. Nevertheless, we do have theories about factors that are likely to distort all-in judgment. For example, when there is reason to think that someone is likely to be biased because they are too close to the situation and have vested interests, we have no difficulty identifying who might be better placed than them with respect to forming an all-in verdict about the right thing to do (Sliwa 2012, 179).

The second family of arguments against symmetry are non-epistemic and argue that the problem with moral testimony is not that it cannot transmit knowledge but that it should not be used as a source of such knowledge for moral or other practical reasons. The first argument of this type can be quickly dispensed with, as it rests on a slide from expertise to the socially sanctioned role of experts. On this view, experts occupy distinct and certified roles in our economy of credibility: their opinion is sometimes to be taken as definitive and always to be taken more seriously than that of a non-expert. 'Expert' is thus not only an epistemic status, it is also a social role. Some wonder whether that social role is compatible with democratic decision-making, since it privileges the views of some over others and that appears incompatible with granting equal respect for different ethical stances. Likewise, the social role of moral expert seems incompatible with joint deliberation (e.g., ethics committees), and with legal reasoning where it risks usurping deliberation by testifying to the matter at hand (Nussbaum 2002). In pluralist democratic societies committed to neutrality among conceptions of the good, it seems that there can be no space for the social role of moral expert. Perhaps it could be argued that even in such societies there can be a role for moral experts in providing specialized input into deliberation while not determining its outcome. However, in the face of moral disagreement, even this more modest proposal would face insuperable practical difficulties, for how would the experts be selected (Jones 1999)? Nevertheless, these arguments against the socially sanctioned role of moral expert do not count against recognizing the moral expertise that individuals can bring to deliberation.

The remaining two main arguments—the argument from autonomy and the argument from moral worth—are not so readily dismissed. Deference in moral matters might be thought to be incompatible with autonomy; insofar as we defer to others on moral matters, it might be thought that we are no longer self-legislators (Kant 1991), or properly in charge of our deliberative decision-making (Driver 2006, Jones 1999). The argument from autonomy is a better way of pressing the objection that might lie behind the thought that the importance of moral matters is incompatible with deference regarding them. After all, we willingly defer on important non-moral matters such as cancer treatments.

Whether the autonomy argument supports asymmetry depends on the account of autonomy you hold. If you think of autonomy as requiring independence from others, then our epistemology, whether moral or otherwise, must be individualistic. However, such accounts of autonomy have been roundly criticized, for it is hard to see why autonomy conceived as independence should be something valuable. A more plausible account of autonomy views it as involving, among other things, the capacity to reflect critically on the principles and beliefs that one adopts. Through such reflection, one exerts agency and takes responsibility for one's own views. This model of autonomy does not support the asymmetry thesis. Just as in the non-moral case, where there can

be non-reflective servile deference to others, there can be non-reflective servile deference about moral matters. Just as in the non-moral case, where there can be engaged, critical deference to others, likewise there can be in the moral case. A Kantian account of autonomy, according to which the will must determine its own guiding principles free from the influence of incentive or other outside influence, would provide the necessary support for the asymmetry thesis. Such an account of autonomy, however, is highly unattractive unless combined with the additional Kantian thesis that the demands of morality are a priori knowable and equally available to all rational agents. If there is equal accessibility, then we all of us are equal in expertise, and there is no need for deference. Hence accepting this account of autonomy takes you out of the deference debate altogether.

There remains the argument from moral worth (Nickel 2001, Hills 2009). Hills offers the most systematic elaboration of this line of argument. Hills argues that agents who rely on moral testimony may get moral knowledge but they will continue to lack moral understanding. Because they lack this understanding their actions, and they themselves as agents, are morally deficient. Knowing that *p* is different from knowing why *p*, and knowing why *p* is different again from *understanding* why *p* (Hills 2009, 100–106; Hills 2016). To understand why an action is morally wrong, you must understand the reasons why it is wrong. Understanding requires more than knowing that there is a reason why it's wrong, or even knowing what that reason is; you must also grasp the support relation linking the consideration that is the reason to the action for which it is a reason. This support relation cannot be grasped in isolation from understanding the relative importance of that consideration in relation to other considerations that might bear on that action as well as how that consideration might support other actions in different contexts. Thus, this understanding cannot be easily isolated in a well-defined set of local knowledge-that claims. Hills argues that understanding why *p* involves the abilities to follow someone's explanation as to why *p*, give an explanation in your own words, draw the conclusion that *p* from the considerations that support it, make related inferences to somewhat different conclusions in similar but not identical cases, and give the right explanations in relevantly similar cases, even where those explanations differ somewhat (102–103). Clearly, you can know why *p* (that is, know what reason supports *p*) without having these further capacities.

Hills' account of moral understanding could be challenged as overly intellectualist, given that it requires articulacy and so demands expertise in giving and evaluating reasons. However, the articulacy requirement could be dropped in favor of a notion of implicit or tacit understanding (Hills 2016, 7). For this reason, we set aside concerns about articulacy to focus on Hills' core claim that the moral worth of action requires the agent to have abilities that extend beyond getting it right in the particular case to getting it right in related but different cases.

Moral understanding has epistemic value insofar as it equips us better to contribute to shared inquiry and insofar as it helps us get things right in a range of related cases (Hills 106–107). But, according to Hills, the central value of moral understanding is itself moral: moral understanding affects the moral worth of actions. The reasons for which an action is done make a difference to what is done: though Kant's self-interested shopkeeper does the right thing, he does not do it for the morally right reason and this deprives his action of moral worth (Kant 1991). What is distinctive about Hills' development of this thought is the requirement not only to know what the reason is, but to act

with the kind of orientation towards that reason that presupposes the broader abilities required for understanding.

Hills argues that when someone does the right thing simply because they have been told that it is right by a trustworthy informant, they do not act for the right reasons and so their action lacks moral worth. While they are concerned about doing the right thing, they do not have access to the reasons that make their action right and so cannot act for them. At best their reason is “it is right, he told me,” and that is no genuine right-making reason. This claim could be challenged; perhaps someone else’s say-so can be a genuine right-making reason (Markovits 2010, 219), but let us grant, for the sake of argument, that there is something deficient about the actions of a person who acts from bare testimony about all-in rightness. Their actions are better than those of someone who doesn’t care about the moral quality of their actions, but they are not responsive to that which makes the actions right.

Hills’ point is not yet established, however, since very little moral testimony uses only thin moral concepts such as rightness. Most moral testimony concerns what reasons are and are not relevant in a particular context and even testimony about all-in rightness is typically also reason-rich: we are not told simply that ϕ -ing is the right thing to do, but that ϕ -ing is right because of reason R. The real test for Hills’ view are cases where the testifier transfers their knowledge of the right-making reasons to the recipient of their testimony, as when, for example, someone says that it is right to give money to people living in poverty because justice, not just charity, requires it. In cases of this kind, the recipient of testimony is concerned about doing the right thing and has chosen a knowledgeable informant on the basis of whose testimony she now knows that an action is right, and knows the reason why it is right but still lacks the abilities required to understand why it is right. Hills claims that “more is required for morally worthy action: you need to act for the reasons that make your action right” (2009, 117). The puzzle, however, is why having been granted testimonial access to the reasons that make your action right, you are still not acting for those reasons. Hills claims you are not because you are not properly oriented towards those reasons, but that is disputable. You are not independently oriented towards those reasons—you require the assistance of someone else to turn your attention and motivation in their direction—but still it seems, with this assistance, you can come to respond to them. What is at issue here is whether an agent needs the kind of rich orientation towards reasons that requires the understanding characteristic of virtue before she counts as responding to them. Hills has not given an argument that this is necessary. We might think that those with understanding have a stronger counterfactual link to reasons than those who lack it: that is, were the situation to be somewhat changed, they would still be capable of responding appropriately to their reasons. However, reliability can be achieved second-hand, provided an agent correctly chooses their informants. Moreover, it is unclear why responding to reasons on one occasion would require the ability to reliably respond to similar reasons in different cases. In sum: acting on the basis of someone else’s all-in judgment about what action is right without any explanation of what the reasons are might indeed be incompatible with the moral worth of that action; but for all that has been argued, when knowledge of the right-making reasons is also transferred, and one acts on that basis, the action has moral worth.

Any argument that purports to show that actions based on reasons, access to which is at second-hand, lack moral worth must also offer an account of how to weigh up the

significance of this lost moral worth relative to the significance of the moral risk of acting wrongly because we choose to rely on our judgment rather than on the judgment of someone else who is better placed to get it right (Enoch 2014). Perhaps if we are justified in thinking that the other is more likely to be right about the matter than we are, we can be required to defer and can even be blameworthy for not doing so (Sliwa 2012, 193; Enoch 2014). There are reasons to be concerned at the very idea of weighing the value of performing a morally worthy action, understood as requiring exercise of one's own moral understanding, against the disvalue of risking a morally wrong action. An agent who is concerned with the worth of their actions, even at the risk of acting wrongly, seems overly focused on the quality of their own agency. Anyone who would weigh the value of their having the opportunity to perform a morally worthy action against the risk of performing a wrong action seems to have the vice of moral self-involvement, a vice analogous to that of the person who acts out of concern for their own virtue rather than in response to virtue-relevant features of the situation. Thus granting the highly controversial claim that moral worth requires moral understanding in fact places fewer restrictions on the scope of moral deference than it might first appear. It would prohibit deference only in cases in which you justifiably believe that your judgment is at least as good as anyone else's. But in those cases, there is no need to defer in the first place, just as there is no reason to defer regarding mathematical or scientific matters when your judgment is at least as good as anyone's to whom you might defer.

Yet the thought that there must be some asymmetry might persist: if we don't care to go in for mathematics or medicine, there is nothing wrong with our simply not developing the capacities that would be required to have an informed judgment about such matters. We are allowed to stand as consumers of, rather than contributors to, inquiry regarding non-moral matters. Life is short, and we cannot develop all our intellectual capacities; indeed, our collective ability to know as much as we know rests on epistemic divisions of labor and on our willingness to defer to those with the relevant expertise. In contrast, it seems that we cannot escape participating in moral inquiry, just by virtue of the fact that we each of us must deliberate about what to do and our individual verdicts about this, as well as the verdicts we arrive at when we deliberate together, amount to taking a stance on what ought to be done, what things matter, and how best to live. Moral decision-making is embedded in the fabric of our everyday lives and is thus inescapable. Unless we are to have someone constantly at our side making each and every decision for us, it seems that we cannot avoid developing at least those moral skills that are required to navigate that range of ethical problems we routinely encounter. Our moral outlooks might be significantly shaped by deference and we might choose to defer when it comes to novel non-everyday situations but we cannot stand as global consumers of the deliverances of other people's moral expertise in the way that we can stand as wholesale consumers of medical expertise. Even if it is an overstatement to claim that we must each of us exercise our moral understanding whenever we can, there is surely something right in the thought that we are required to develop and exercise our moral understanding in at least that range of ethical problems that form part of our daily lives. This demand does not apply in other domains of inquiry. Moreover, given the assumption that moral expertise is developed by experience, the inescapability of moral significant encounters suggests that we each have something to contribute to the necessarily shared task of working out what is worth pursuing and how to live well. If we are overly deferential, we fail to hold up our end in this communal task.

Neither of these observations establishes an obligation to cultivate all our moral capacities. Nor do they support the claim that we should use testimony only when there is no other way to secure the knowledge we need (Hills 2012), and thus that there should be no moral “specialization” equivalent to the specialization permitted in other areas of inquiry. The suggestion that we have an obligation to reduce the need for moral testimony as much as possible rests on assumptions about the nature of the world of value and about our own capacities. If the world of value is complex and if our understanding of it rests on our experience, then there is reason to think that we cannot develop all our moral capacities to an equivalent extent and we may do worse by trying than by practicing wise deference (Jones 1999, 77). Limited forms of moral specialization, with their accompanying practices of deference, will be permissible.

CONCLUSION

The question of whether there is moral expertise is connected to questions in metaethics and moral epistemology. However, the relation between these questions is not as straightforward as it might first appear. Many metaethical positions are compatible with the possibility of moral expertise, which requires not robustly mind-independent moral properties but only positing moral truth, moral knowledge, and the possibility of better and worse moral verdicts. The existence of moral expertise is compatible with denying that moral epistemology should become fully social on the model of science, for there might be epistemic, political, practical, or moral objections to accessing such expertise. Nevertheless, arguments in defense of the asymmetry thesis and hence against a genuinely social moral epistemology remain inconclusive.

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