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Towards Social Accounts of Testimonial Asymmetries

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1. Introduction

Contemporary epistemologists tend to agree that testimonial knowledge is possible. However, there seem to be asymmetries between testimonial belief, in certain cases, and testimonial belief, in paradigm cases of testimonial knowledge: in the relevant cases, testimonial belief seems bad, by contrast with testimonial belief, in paradigm cases of testimonial knowledge. Consider the following as an unproblematic paradigm case of testimonial knowledge:

- Your friend knows a lot about football. You want to know who won the 1994 Football World Cup. So you ask her, and she tells you that Brazil won, and you believe on that basis that Brazil won.

And compare the following cases:

- Your friend knows a lot about ethics. You want to know whether you ought to support military intervention in Syria. So you ask her, and she tells you that you ought to support military intervention, and you believe on that basis that you ought to support military intervention.
- Your friend knows a lot about art. You want to know whether the Rothko Chapel is a masterpiece.[1] So you ask her, and she tells you that the Rothko Chapel is a masterpiece, and you believe on that basis that it is.
- You friend knows a lot about metaphysics. You want to know whether God exists. So you ask her, and she tells you that God exists, and you believe on that basis that God exists.

In these cases, there seems to be something bad—something wrong, or problematic, or objectionable—about believing on the basis of testimony, which is not present in the paradigm case of testimonial knowledge described above. Generalizing from these cases, there seems to be some kind of asymmetry, at least in some cases, between moral testimony and non-moral testimony, between aesthetic testimony and non-aesthetic testimony, and between religious testimony and non-religious testimony.[2] In these domains, at least in some cases, we object to deference, and for this reason expect people to form their beliefs on non-testimonial grounds, in a way that we do not object to deference in paradigm cases of testimonial knowledge.[3] Our philosophical puzzle is therefore: what explains these (apparent) asymmetries (or are they merely apparent)?

Here I'll assume that these testimonial asymmetries aren't merely apparent. So our **puzzle** is to explain them, i.e. to explain why or how testimonial belief, in the relevant cases, is bad, by contrast with testimonial belief, in paradigm cases of testimonial knowledge.

A rigorous articulation of the phenomena we seek to explain is non-trivial.[4] For example, the badness of moral testimony seems absent when we consider the testimonial beliefs of children: there is nothing objectionable about a small child who believes, just because her parents say so, that stealing is wrong. Accounts of testimonial asymmetries should help explain why this is so. For another, there does not seem to be anything wrong with deferring to members of marginalized or oppressed groups who have a distinctive perspective on some moral question, e.g. whether someone's behavior was subtly sexist.[5] Accounts of testimonial asymmetries should also help explain why this is so. However, and in any event, we should not assume too much in advance: compelling explanations can justify re-thinking the nature of the phenomena explained. Although our target is, roughly, moral, aesthetic, and religious testimony, we should be open to refining this target upon further development of our accounts of these testimonial asymmetries.[6]

Moreover, the "badness" of testimonial belief, in the relevant cases, requires articulation. What exactly is bad, or wrong, or problematic, or objectionable, about testimonial belief, in the relevant cases? Accounts of testimonial asymmetries should provide an account of what this "badness" consists in.

I assume that the idea that there are no experts in our problematic domains (to the extent that this is true) is an alternative formulation of the phenomena to be explained—and so we must look elsewhere for an explanation of those phenomena.[7] However, accounts of testimonial asymmetries should help explain why there are no experts in our problematic domains (to the extent that this is true). I assume the same about the idea that there is no expert agreement in our problematic domains (to the extent that this is true), including that accounts of testimonial asymmetries should help explain why there is no expert agreement in our problematic domains (to the extent that this is true). I will return to the issue of expertise in our problematic domains, below (§5.3).

My aim here is to criticize three accounts of testimonial asymmetries and to suggest an alternative strategy for solving our puzzle. I'll consider the idea that testimony cannot be a source of understanding (§2), the idea that testimony cannot be a source of acquaintance (§3), and the idea that testimonial belief is not conducive to moral virtue (§4). These accounts all explain the badness of testimonial belief, in the relevant cases, by appeal to its consequences for the believer—respectively, a lack of understanding, acquaintance, or moral virtue. I'll conclude by suggesting a way forward (§5): we should try to understand the badness of testimonial belief, in the relevant cases, as deriving from its consequences for the believer's society.

Two controversial assumptions before we proceed. First, I assume that testimonial belief about questions in our problematic domains is possible. You might reject this on the grounds that there are necessary conditions on moral, aesthetic, or religious belief—in the sense that it is impossible to form genuinely moral, aesthetic, or religious beliefs that do not meet these conditions—that cannot be transmitted

via testimony. So, for examples: you might think that genuine aesthetic belief requires acquaintance with its object (which cannot be transmitted via testimony), or you might think that genuine moral belief requires certain non-cognitive pro-attitudes (which cannot be transmitted via testimony), or you might think that genuine religious belief requires a certain kind of religious experience (that cannot be transmitted via testimony).[8]

Second, I assume the falsity of any form of skepticism about our problematic domains on which reasonable belief about questions in those domains, whether testimonial or non-testimonial, is impossible. It certainly seems like there are people who have reasonable beliefs about morality, art, and metaphysics—so why would it be bad to defer to them in forming moral, aesthetic, or religious beliefs? In line with the rejection of such skepticism, I shall assume—call this the **particularity assumption**—that our puzzle concerns testimonial belief, in particular, and not belief, in general. There seems to be something bad about testimonial belief about matters moral, aesthetic, or religious, at least in some cases, not only by contrast with paradigm cases of testimonial knowledge (as per our puzzle, above), but also by contrast with non-testimonial belief about matters moral, aesthetic, or religious. Below, I will reject any proposed solution to our puzzle that violates the particularity assumption.

2. Understanding

Many people argue that testimony cannot be a source of understanding.[9] Some appeal to this to explain the badness of testimonial moral belief, and others to explain the badness of testimonial aesthetic belief.[10] Are these explanations plausible?

In connection with the idea that moral or aesthetic testimony cannot be a source of moral or aesthetic understanding, some people point out that testimonial knowledge that p does amount to understanding why p.[11] However, this isn't a feature unique to testimonial knowledge that p: in general, knowing that p does not amount to understanding why p. As Aristotle points out, you might know that fire is hot, without understanding why fire is hot.[12] What explain this? It is sometimes said that no amount of propositional knowledge is sufficient for understanding, because the latter requires a non-doxastic grasp of explanatory connections.[13] In the same way that knowledge that p requires a representation of the truth of the proposition that p, in the form of a belief that p, understanding why p requires a representation of the explanation of the fact that p. Understanding why p is a species of such representation, just as knowledge that p is a species of belief. In any event, it seems that knowing that p does not amount to understanding why p. Given this assumption, we might then argue that testimonial knowledge about matters moral, aesthetic, or religious is bad in virtue of the fact that testimonial knowledge about matters moral, aesthetic, or religious never amounts to moral, aesthetic, or religious understanding. There are two problems with this proposal. First, this cannot solve our puzzle (§1), because the present point does not suggest an asymmetry between testimonial belief, in the relevant cases, and testimonial belief, in paradigm cases of testimonial knowledge. Just as knowledge that p, about matters

moral, aesthetic, or religious, does not amount to understanding why p, testimonial knowledge that p, in paradigm cases of testimonial knowledge, does not amount to understanding why p. Knowing that Brazil won the 1994 World Cup does not amount to understanding why they won. Second, this would-be solution would violate the particularity assumption (§1), since the present phenomenon has nothing to do with testimonial belief per se: propositional knowledge never amounts to explanatory understanding.

Let's try a different line of reasoning. In some cases, knowledge that p and understanding why p seem to come together. It is not hard to imagine a mathematical proof of some theorem such that anyone who comes to know that the theorem is true, on the basis of the proof, also comes to understand why the theorem is true, and vice versa. In cases like this, your source of propositional knowledge is also a source of understanding, such that you could not know that p (on the basis of that source) unless you understood why p (on the basis of that source) and you could not understand why p (on the basis of that source) unless you knew that p (on the basis of that source). In such cases, I'll say that propositional knowledge and understanding are **packaged**. Propositional knowledge and understanding are not, in general, packaged, as Aristotle's example shows: sense perception tells us that fire is hot, but not why it is hot. But perhaps there is some relevant difference between moral, aesthetic, or religious testimony, on the one hand, and other sources of moral, aesthetic, or religious belief, on the other, that can be captured in terms of packaging.

You might argue, for example, that testimonial moral knowledge is never packaged with moral understanding. To satisfy the particularity assumption (§1), you would have to argue that (propositional) non-testimonial moral knowledge is sometimes packaged with moral understanding.[14] The problem with the present proposal is that it cannot solve our puzzle (§1), because it doesn't suggest a contrast between testimonial belief, in the relevant cases, and testimonial belief, in paradigm cases of testimonial knowledge. In our unproblematic paradigm case of testimonial knowledge, knowledge is not packaged with understanding—e.g. you only come to know *that* Brazil won the 1994 World Cup, not *why* they won. Propositional knowledge that is not packaged with understanding is unproblematic in paradigm cases of testimonial knowledge, so why would it be problematic in cases of testimonial moral knowledge? Consider the fact that perceptual knowledge, of particular matters of fact, is never packaged with physical understanding, i.e. understanding of the fundamental physical explanation of those particular matters of fact. Does this then imply that there is something bad about perceptual knowledge? If there is something bad about perceptual knowledge, in virtue of this fact, it seems to be this: there is something good that perceptual knowledge does not guarantee, namely, physical understanding. Likewise, on the present proposal, there is something good that (propositional) testimonial moral knowledge does not guarantee, namely, moral understanding. However, for any species of knowledge, there are myriad good things that such knowledge does not guarantee—friendship, happiness, tickets to the Super Bowl, etc. This does not provide, in each such case, a plausible sense in which

the relevant species of knowledge is bad. We need something more to solve our puzzle.

Note that (propositional) non-testimonial moral knowledge is not always packaged with moral understanding. Consider a naïve and conscientious solider who is ordered to participate in a massacre: she thinks that a soldier ought always follow orders, and resolves to participate, but finds herself unable to go through with it—she is viscerally repulsed by the idea of acting in that way. She may now know that participating would be morally wrong, but she does not understand why it would be wrong. When it comes to moral understanding, the relevant contrast is not between testimonial moral knowledge and non-testimonial moral knowledge, but between mere (propositional) moral knowledge and (propositional) moral knowledge that is accompanied by understanding. Robert Hopkins (2007, p. 630) argues that it is morally wrong to form a moral belief that p unless you grasp the moral grounds for believing that p—i.e. unless you understand why p.[15] But why think this? Why think, for example, that it is morally wrong for the naïve and conscientious soldier to believe that participating in the massacre would be morally wrong?

Alison Hills (2009) argues that there is "a tension between forming moral beliefs on the basis of moral understanding and forming them on the basis of testimony" (p. 119). Her argument for this supposed tension runs as follows: "[t]o act well on the basis of moral beliefs ... you need to use [moral understanding] to form your moral beliefs," but "[t]rusting testimony is a rival basis for your belief," since "it could make it less likely that your belief is grounded in the right way" (p. 122). There are two problems with Hills' argument. First, doxastic bases do not compete as rivals. A belief can be based on a plurality of evidential sources, and the fact that a belief is based on one source does not preclude its also being based on another. We can grant that acting well on the basis of a moral belief requires that that belief be based on moral understanding. But this doesn't speak against forming moral beliefs on the basis of testimony, because a belief can be based both on moral testimony and on moral understanding. Second, that a belief is based on one evidential source doesn't prevent it from coming to be based on a different evidential source. Believing that p on the basis of testimony doesn't, in general, make it less likely that you come to believe that p on some non-testimonial basis. As a result of this, you might abandon your testimonial basis—I used to believe, on your say-so, that the cat is in the mat, but now that I've seen the cat on the mat myself, I believe merely on the basis of my perceptual evidence. Testimonial belief doesn't preclude the quest for non-testimonial belief, so long as you want to acquire the latter. So, again, we can grant that acting well on the basis of a moral belief requires that that belief be based on moral understanding, without conceding that there is anything wrong with forming moral beliefs on the basis of testimony.

There is a mistaken picture of the relationship between testimonial knowledge, on the one hand, and understanding, on the other, which might be suggested by the fact that (propositional) testimonial knowledge never amounts to understanding, or by the idea that (propositional) testimonial knowledge is never packaged with understanding. On this misleading picture, we must choose between testimonial

knowledge, on the one hand, and understanding, on the other. But this is false. Testimonial knowledge that p does not compete or conflict with (non-testimonial) understanding of why p, any more than propositional knowledge, in general, competes or conflicts with such understanding. Consider, again, Aristotle's example: knowledge that fire is hot might easily be the impetus, if not a necessary precondition, for inquiry about why fire is hot. Propositional testimonial knowledge is no different: I read in the science pages that there are deep grooves on the surface of one of Saturn's moons, and I want to know why, so I begin inquiry about this. And moral, aesthetic, and religious knowledge are no different—consider the naïve and conscientious solider, who may now want to find out why participating in the massacre would be wrong, and begin reflection on the ethics of war, leading eventually to an understanding of why participating would be wrong. Propositional moral knowledge, in this case, serves as a partial cause of, rather than as a barrier to, moral understanding. (The same, mutatis mutandis, when it comes to propositional aesthetic or religious knowledge.) Related to this misleading picture of the relationship between testimonial knowledge, on the one hand, and understanding, on the other, is the ambiguous slogan that knowledge is the aim of inquiry. The truth in this slogan is that, in some sense, it is incoherent to inquire about whether p when you take yourself to know that p. But knowing that p does not preclude rational inquiry about why p. Indeed, if such knowledge is not a necessary precondition of such inquiry, it at least often is the impetus for such inquiry. Knowing what is the case often makes people want to know why it is the case. (A closely related point is that knowing one thing about a topic often makes you want to know more about that topic.)

Suppose, again, that acting well on the basis of a moral belief requires that that belief be based on moral understanding. (Propositional) moral knowledge without understanding—whether testimonial or non-testimonial—therefore lacks a valuable property possessed by (propositional) moral knowledge based on moral understanding. But this is insufficient to establish the conclusion that testimonial moral knowledge is bad. It might be objected that, given our supposition, it is wrong to base your moral beliefs on testimony and nothing else—e.g. to believe that eating meat is morally wrong whilst refraining from any attempt to understand why eating meat is morally wrong. This would apply to testimonial and non-testimonial moral belief alike, including to the case of the naïve and conscientious solider. On the present objection, then, it is be wrong for the solider to believe that participating in the massacre would be morally wrong, unless she then goes on to inquire about why it would be wrong to participate. However, even given our supposition, if the solider has done anything wrong in this case, it is her refraining from trying to understand why it would be wrong to participate in the massacre, *not* her forming the belief that it would be wrong to participate. She has missed out on an opportunity to acquire moral understanding, you might argue—but testimony is not the culprit here, but rather a lack of curiosity, a lack of the motivation to seek understanding.[16]

We have failed to find a plausible solution to our puzzle (§1) based on the idea that testimony cannot be a source of understanding.[17]

3. Acquaintance

Although testimony can be a source of propositional knowledge, it cannot be a source of acquaintance. Consider the kind of acquaintance afforded by sense perception. Knowing that the cat is on the mat is not the same as being perceptually acquainted with the fact that the cat is on the mat—as when you see the cat on the mat—and while you can know that the cat is on the mat on the basis of testimony, you cannot be acquainted with the fact that the cat is on the mat on the basis of testimony.

What has this to do with our puzzle (§1)? Imagine someone with a wealth of testimonial knowledge about the history of painting, but with no first-hand experience of—no acquaintance with—any of the artworks about which she knows so much. There seems to be something unappealing about such a person; but what is it? And does it explain the badness of testimonial aesthetic belief?

You might appeal here to the idea of "packaging" (§2). Testimonial aesthetic knowledge is never packaged with aesthetic acquaintance (e.g. perceptual acquaintance with a painting and its aesthetically relevant properties). Aesthetic acquaintance is valuable. Testimonial aesthetic belief is therefore bad.

To satisfy the particularity assumption (§1), we would have to say that non-testimonial aesthetic knowledge is sometimes packaged with aesthetic acquaintance—but this seems right: visiting the Rothko Chapel, coming to know about it through perception of it, provides such acquaintance. This is just a consequence of a more general thought: that non-testimonial knowledge (e.g. perceptual knowledge) is sometimes packaged with acquaintance.[18] However, the present proposal cannot solve our puzzle (§1), because it doesn't suggest a contrast between testimonial belief, in the relevant cases, and testimonial belief, in paradigm cases of testimonial knowledge. Testimonial knowledge that p is never packaged with acquaintance with the fact that p, even in paradigm cases of testimonial knowledge. (Even when you have both testimonial knowledge that p and acquaintance with the fact that p (e.g. you are listening to a radio broadcast about a baseball game while watching the game at the ballpark), these two are modally independent: you could have the one without the other and the other without the one.) Your unproblematic testimonial knowledge that Brazil won the 1994 World Cup is not packaged with acquaintance with the fact that Brazil won the 1994 World Cup. (This is why tickets to the match cost more than a newspaper.) But if this knowledge is unproblematic, despite not being packaged with acquaintance, then we cannot explain the badness of testimonial aesthetic knowledge by appeal to the fact that it is not packaged with aesthetic acquaintance. The person who lacks acquaintance with artworks is missing out on something intuitively valuable—but so is the person who lacks acquaintance with the 1994 World Cup. Again (cf. §2), we might say there is something good that testimonial knowledge does not guarantee, namely, acquaintance, but this applies to both aesthetic and non-aesthetic testimony, and does not provide a plausible sense in which the testimonial knowledge is bad. So we need something more to solve our puzzle.

The problem here is that there does not seem to be any relevant difference between aesthetic and non-aesthetic acquaintance. Aesthetic appreciation requires acquaintance with the thing appreciated[19]—but so do other forms of appreciation (e.g. enjoyment of food, enjoyment of watching a sporting event). Acquaintance with artworks enables you to think and talk about them intelligently—but acquaintance with many things (e.g. seabirds, politicians, aircraft engines) has the same virtue. Acquaintance with artworks is sometimes appealing because it is pleasant, as when you enjoy the quality of a good painting—but there are many other types of pleasant acquaintance.

You might appeal here to what Richard Wollheim (1980) calls the "acquaintance principle," on which "judgements of aesthetic value ... must be based on first-hand experience of their objects and are not ... transmissible from one person to other" (p. 233). On one interpretation, the "must" here is metaphysical, and the acquaintance principle implies that testimonial aesthetic belief is impossible; we set that idea aside, above (§1). However, on another interpretation, the "must" here is normative, and the principle implies that testimonial aesthetic belief, which is conceded to be possible, violates a normative requirement.[20] Hopkins (2011, §VI) develops a version of the principle, so interpreted, on which "having the right to an aesthetic belief requires one to have experienced for oneself the object it concerns" (p. 150). On the present proposal, there is a normative requirement not to form aesthetic beliefs without acquaintance with their objects, and, in virtue of this, testimonial aesthetic belief is bad.[21]

The challenge is to explain why this is so. Without such an explanation, the acquaintance principle looks like nothing more than a re-articulation of our puzzle (§1). Aesthetic acquaintance is valuable, let us concede, but why would there be a normative requirement to acquire, in every case of aesthetic belief, the relevant aesthetic acquaintance? There isn't in general a requirement to seek out valuable instances of acquaintance when forming beliefs. Something like the acquaintance principle may well be true, but without an explanation for why it is true, we lack a solution to our puzzle.

4. Moral Virtue

In his essay on enlightenment, Kant suggests that deference is a sign of cowardice and immaturity, and, in his essay on self-reliance, Emerson sings the praises of iconoclastic inquiry and opinion. Along these lines, you might think that there is an important connection between testimonial moral belief and moral virtue.[22] Is there a connection between testimonial moral belief and moral virtue to which we can appeal to solve our puzzle (§1)?[23]

Here is a plausible thought: testimonial belief is not conducive to the development of the believer's moral virtue. The reason is that moral virtue requires the ability to "think for yourself" about moral questions, i.e. to form reasonable non-testimonial moral beliefs, and testimonial belief formation does nothing to develop this ability. But this cannot solve our puzzle (§1). Many things are not conducive to the development of moral virtue—sleeping, playing Cribbage, taking vitamin

pills—and they are not therefore *bad*. Testimonial moral belief, let us concede, is not conductive to the development of moral virtue, but this doesn't explain why testimonial moral belief is bad.

Robert Howell (2014, p. 404) argues that testimonial moral belief is evidence that the believer lacks moral virtue. Given the idea that moral virtue requires the ability to form reasonable non-testimonial moral beliefs, this idea has some plausibility—deferring to someone else about whether p seems to suggest that you did not have the ability to form a reasonable non-testimonial belief about whether p. Does this explain the badness of testimonial moral belief? Let's assume for the sake of argument that it is bad to lack moral virtue. The present proposal implies, then, that testimonial moral belief is evidence of something bad. But evidence of something bad isn't generally itself bad—consider the valuable historical records that provide evidence of some atrocity. Nor, specifically, is evidence of a lack of moral virtue generally bad—that I didn't drive home is evidence that I lack temperance, since it is evidence that I drank too much, but my not driving home wasn't bad. Compare manifestations of a lack of virtue—such as my drinking too much—which are, plausibly, bad.[24] What we would need, to explain the badness of testimonial moral belief, is to show that testimonial moral belief manifests a lack of moral virtue. But it seems like the opposite it true, as Howell (2014, p. 411) points out: to defer to someone more expert seems like a manifestation of virtue, not of its lack.

Howell (2014, p. 403) makes a more promising suggestion when he says that the formation of testimonial moral beliefs may frustrate the development of the believer's moral virtue. He offers two defenses of this idea. First (pp. 404–5), testimonial moral knowledge, by contrast with non-testimonial moral knowledge, generally fails to provide various non-doxastic aspects of moral virtue, including dispositions to have morally appropriate emotions, motivations, and intuitions. As Howell (2014) points out, "when one receives moral knowledge by testimony, it is very unlikely that one is receiving the disposition to react emotionally as well" (p. 404). Just as testimony seems incapable of transmitting acquaintance from one person to another (§3), testimony seems incapable of transmitting emotional dispositions from one person to another. And so:

> [because] deference fails to bring with it feelings, intuitions and motivations, the resulting belief does not give rise to a virtue or reinforce existing virtues in the way the belief might if it were gained in other ways. Because these features are lacking, the agent is not guaranteed to have the relevant motivations, so there is little guarantee that the agent will be a reliable ethical actor. (p. 408)

Second (pp. 407–8), testimonial moral knowledge, by contrast with non-testimonial moral knowledge, tends not to be cognitively integrated with the believer's other beliefs—and such cognitive integration is an important aspect of moral virtue:

> [B]ecause integration of the belief into his own reasoning about the moral domain is not guaranteed, the [testimonial moral] belief will be too isolated to affect the agent's other virtues and beliefs, and the agent will be unable to provide his reasons for his beliefs, or develop a more complete, integrated type of virtue. (pp. 408–9)

The problem with both of these ideas, however, is that neither suggests cases in which the formation of testimonial moral belief *frustrates* the development of the believer's moral virtue. All that they suggest are cases in which testimonial moral knowledge *fails to guarantee* the development of the knower's moral virtue. But for any species of knowledge, there are many valuable things that it fails to guarantee; species of knowledge are not bad in virtue of failing to guarantee something valuable (cf. §2). We are back to the idea that testimonial moral belief is not conducive to the development of the believer's moral virtue, but, as I argued above, this fails to explain the badness of testimonial moral belief.

You might object that the formation of a testimonial moral belief constitutes a failure to cultivate moral virtue. Given a pressing moral question, deference amounts to a missed opportunity to become more virtuous. But testimonial moral belief is not incompatible with the cultivation of moral virtue—forming a moral belief *sans* the emotional dispositions and cognitive integration required for full moral virtue is perfectly compatible with seeking to acquire said emotional dispositions and cognitive integration. It may be wrong to form testimonial moral beliefs whilst refraining from cultivating moral virtue, but what is wrong in such cases is the refraining from cultivating moral virtue, not the forming of a testimonial moral belief (cf. §2).

You might argue that the formation of a testimonial moral belief may frustrate the development of the believer's *intellectual* virtue (and, perhaps, in virtue of this, frustrate the development of her moral virtue).[25] Forming testimonial moral beliefs habituates the believer to moral deference, so the argument might go, and she is thus prevented from learning to "think for herself."[26] Two objections to this.

First, the present proposal fails to establish an asymmetry between cases of testimonial moral belief and testimonial belief, in paradigm cases of testimonial knowledge. To the extent that forming testimonial moral beliefs habituates the believer to moral deference, it is because, in general, forming testimonial beliefs habituates the believer to deference. To solve our puzzle (§1), we need to establish an asymmetry between testimonial belief, in the relevant cases, and testimonial belief, in paradigm cases of testimonial knowledge.

Second, the idea that deference is counter-conducive to the development of intellectual virtue sounds plausible only given an overly narrow conception of intellectual virtue.[27] Testimonial belief formation, just as much as non-testimonial belief formation, involves the exercise of intellectual virtue. Successful solitary meditations on first philosophy require curiosity, open-mindedness, and intellectual humility—but so do successful testimonial exchanges. And there are distinctive virtues, or at least intellectual abilities, that are needed to form reasonable testimonial beliefs, such as:[28]

- A sensitivity to evidence of sincerity or insincerity on the part of the speaker, e.g. that she has a motive to lie, that she appears nervous, etc.
- A sensitivity to the plausibility or implausibility of what the speaker asserts, e.g. that it contradicts something you know to be false, etc.

- A disposition to select reliable sources of testimony, e.g. to ask particular speakers questions about particular topics, to believe on the basis of the testimony of particular speakers on particular topics, etc.

Non-testimonial belief formation involves the exercise of some of our intellectual virtues and abilities, but others are not exercised—our sensitivity to signs of insincerity, for example, or our ability to find a reliable informant in a community full of frauds. The same, mutatis mutandis, when it comes to testimonial belief formation. Neither species of belief formation has pride of place vis-à-vis the development of intellectual virtue. Just as we should practice forming non-testimonial beliefs, to develop those intellectual virtues and abilities that are needed to form beliefs of that kind well, we should practice forming testimonial beliefs, to develop those intellectual virtues and abilities that are needed to form beliefs of that kind well.

I conclude that we have failed to solve our puzzle (§1) by appeal the idea of a connection between testimonial moral belief and moral virtue.

5. Social Accounts of Testimonial Asymmetries

The way forward, I want to suggest, lies in an investigation of the social consequences of testimonial belief, in the relevant cases. Instead of thinking about the consequences of testimonial belief for the believer—e.g. whether testimony can be a source of understanding, acquaintance, or moral virtue—we should think about the consequences of testimonial belief for the believer's society.[29] In what follows I'll sketch an account of the badness of moral, aesthetic, and religious testimonial belief, which is a paradigm of **social accounts** of testimonial asymmetries—i.e. it is an account that appeals to the social consequences of testimonial belief, in the relevant cases.[30] The account that I'll sketch is distinctive in virtue of providing a unified treatment of moral, aesthetic, and religious testimony. This is by no means mandated by the move towards social accounts of testimonial asymmetries. More important, one way in which we might extend this sketch would be to provide details pertaining to distinctive aspects of moral testimony, aesthetic testimony, and religious testimony. So the fact that the proposed account provides a unified treatment of our three phenomena doesn't mean that it implies that there aren't important differences between their respective explanations. Moreover, another way in which we might extend my discussion here would be to explore alternatives to the account I'll sketch, which is just one example of a social account. (And accounts of testimonial asymmetries needn't be seen as competitors, since testimonial belief, in the relevant cases, might be bad in more than one way.) My aim here is to advocate for social accounts of testimonial asymmetries, by articulating one promising example of this kind of account.

5.1. A social account of three testimonial asymmetries

A thought experiment motivates my proposed account of the badness of moral, aesthetic, and religious testimony. Imagine a society rife with moral, aesthetic, and religious deference. When members of this deferential society are curious about

some moral, aesthetic, or religious question, they seek out experts—those who know a lot about the topic of the relevant question—and defer to their authority. Deference about matters moral, aesthetic, and religious, in this society, is as widespread as deference about matters of sports trivia is in our society. Just as our practice is to defer about who won the 1994 World Cup, their practice is to defer about the morality of military intervention is Syria, or about the quality of the Rothko Chapel, or about the existence of a deity.[31]

Our hypothetical deferential society will have two notable features. First, to the extent that there is agreement about who the moral, aesthetic, and religious experts are, and to the extent that there is agreement among those experts, there will be agreement among non-experts about moral, aesthetic, and religious questions. In particular, there will not be cases in which non-experts disagree about some moral, aesthetic, or religious question, whilst agreeing that there is expert consensus about that question. Compare: art critics generally consider the paintings of Cy Twombly to be excellent, but I disagree with this assessment, whilst acknowledging the expertise of the critics. In our hypothetical deferential society, there are no cases like this when it comes to moral, aesthetic, and religious questions. We can put this by saying that there are no moral, aesthetic, or religious iconoclasts—no people who disagree with the experts about morality, aesthetics, or religion.[32]

Second, when there is moral, aesthetic, and religious disagreement among non-experts, in our hypothetical deferential society, it will prompt debate about who the moral, aesthetic, and religious experts are, about whether there is agreement among them, or about what their agreement view is. Compare: I disagree with my friend about Twombly, so we head to the museum and take a closer look, argue about what we see, argue about how these paintings compare to other significant works, and so on. In our hypothetical deferential society, non-expert disagreement about moral, aesthetic, and religious questions will not prompt debate about said questions per se, but rather debate about the existence of expert agreement about those questions.

It seems to me that these two notable features amount to differences between our hypothetical deferential society and contemporary liberal societies, in which moral, aesthetic, and religious deference is not widespread. First, there is a difference when it comes to **diversity of moral, aesthetic, and religious opinion**: there is more diversity of opinion about moral, aesthetic, and religious questions in contemporary liberal societies than in our hypothetical deferential society. This is due to the existence of moral, aesthetic, and religious iconoclasts in contemporary liberal societies. Second, there is a difference when it comes to **first-order moral, aesthetic, and religious dialogue**: there is more discussion and debate about first-order moral, aesthetic, and religious questions in contemporary liberal societies than in our hypothetical deferential society. Non-experts in contemporary liberal societies engage in arguments and conversations with other non-experts about moral, aesthetic, and religious issues, like military intervention in Syria, the status of the Rothko Chapel, and the existence of a deity.

The reason these differences matter is that diversity of moral, aesthetic, and religious opinion and first-order moral, aesthetic, and religious dialogue are (pro

tanto) socially valuable. Our hypothetical deferential society is deficient vis-à-vis these values—it is (pro tanto) worse off than it would be were it more like contemporary liberal societies, i.e. if moral, aesthetic, and religious deference were not widespread. These are values that flow from the liberal ideal of public reason, comprising sincere and fair-minded discussion among free and equal citizens.[33] From this perspective, diversity of moral, aesthetic, and religious opinion and first-order moral, aesthetic, and religious dialogue are constitutive of a flourishing space of public reason, and their absence a problematic deficiency.

What speaks in favour of this perspective? And, more important, what speaks in favour of the (pro tanto) social value of diversity of moral, aesthetic, and religious opinion and first-order moral, aesthetic, and religious dialogue? There are several compatible accounts of these values to which we might appeal; I'll describe two of these, with which I am sympathetic, and go on to articulate and defend a third.

First, there is the idea that diversity of opinion and first-order dialogue (in certain domains) are necessary for, or at least conducive to, collective acquisition of so-called **"epistemic goods"** (in those domains), such as true belief, knowledge, and understanding. In his defense of a prohibition on censorship, Mill argues that diversity of opinion and first-order dialogue are conducive to *individual* acquisition of knowledge: beliefs are "held in the manner of a prejudice" unless "vigorously and earnestly contested."[34] Whether or not this is right, it is plausible that a vigorous and earnest contest between partisans of a plurality of diverse views has collective "epistemic" benefits. A group of people can be more confident that they have arrived at the truth, having engaged in a debate in which a wide range of positions were represented; such debate roots out errors and prompts the articulation of reasons and evidence. This thought is central to the idea of "epistemic democracy"—on which political debate is understood as truth-conducive collective deliberation.[35] In any event, we might argue that diversity of opinion (in the relevant domains) and first-order dialogue (in the relevant domains) are (pro tanto) socially valuable in virtue of being contributors to collective acquisition of "epistemic goods" (in those domains). This might require refinement of our target (§1), e.g. the inclusion of some instances of scientific belief.

Second, there is the idea that diversity of opinion and first-order dialogue (in certain domains) are necessary for the **legitimacy** of collective decisions. Consider the idea of "deliberative democracy"—on which, as Joshua Cohen (1996) puts it, "state power must arise ... from the discussions and decisions of its members, as made within and expressed through social and political institutions designed to acknowledge their collective authority" (p. 95; cf. 1989, p. 91). We might argue that diversity of opinion (in the relevant domains) and first-order dialogue (in the relevant domains) are (pro tanto) socially valuable in virtue of being essential parts of the collective deliberation necessary for the legitimacy of collective decisions.[36] This might require refinement of our target (§1), e.g. the inclusion of politically relevant non-moral, non-aesthetic, and non-religious beliefs, or the exclusion of politically irrelevant moral, aesthetic, or religious beliefs.[37]

Third, there is the idea that diversity of opinion and first-order dialogue (in certain domains) are (pro tanto) **finally** socially valuable. At least part of the value

of diversity of opinion and first-order dialogue (in these domains) is not explained in terms of their connections to other socially valuable things (e.g. "epistemic goods," legitimacy), but by appeal to the idea that they are themselves constituents of the welfare of society.

To say that diversity of opinion and first-order dialogue (in certain domains) are finally valuable isn't to say that these values are inexplicable or that we can't criticize or defend them. However, the present idea is motivated by an evaluative intuition about the hypothetical deferential society described above, namely, that there is something intrinsically unappealing about such a society. When it comes to morality, aesthetics, and religion, diversity of opinion and first-order dialogue are (pro tanto) socially valuable. For those people moved by the aforementioned evaluative intuition, a society lacking diversity of moral, aesthetic, and religious opinion, or a society lacking first-order moral, aesthetic, and religious dialogue, would be a bad society, a flawed society, a society of which said people would not want to be members.

This evaluative intuition isn't universal. For some, there is nothing good about moral, aesthetic, and religious difference: these are either problems to be overcome or annoyances to be tolerated. And even for those who share the intuition that moral, aesthetic, and religious difference are (pro tanto) valuable, there is a conflicting evaluative intuition, namely, that moral, aesthetic, and religious sameness are (pro tanto) valuable aspects of the solidarity of a community. However, despite the fact that the present idea is motivated by intuition, we can go some way towards defending it by explaining why moral, aesthetic, and religious sameness are bad. It seems to me that this ultimately has to do with our understanding of ourselves as a community of individual persons whose distinctness is grounded in fundamental differences in our identities—in the sense of "identity" on which my identity is a matter of "who I am." We think of ourselves and the other members of our community not only as numerically *distinct* from one another but also as *distinctive*—if not as unique, then at least as differing in many ways from many other people. But our identities, in this sense, are partly constituted by our moral, aesthetic, and religious identities—by our views, commitments, principles, and values in these domains. A society rife with moral, aesthetic, and religious sameness is, at least to some extent, a society whose members are not individual persons, in the sense of having their distinctness grounded in fundamental differences in their identities. They are numerically distinct, but not distinctive. (This idea is expressed in science fiction's dystopian narratives in which everyone wears the same outfit.) I do not mean to suggest the idea that sameness is incompatible with having an identity, nor that sameness is bad for the individual—e.g. that individuals cannot flourish or be happy unless they are different from other people. The problem of sameness arises not at the level of the individual but at the level of the group—what is wrong with such a society is a matter of how its members are related to one another. Something similar applies when it comes to a society that enjoys moral, aesthetic, and religious difference, but in which such difference is not expressed in discussion and debate. We think of ourselves as distinctive—but our distinctive identities must be expressed and articulated in conversation with other people. We

define ourselves as individuals in terms of our differences from other people, by actively engaging with other people who are different from us. (In another kind of dystopia, everyone is silently ignoring each other.)

Do all, or only some, instances of moral, aesthetic, and religious diversity of opinion enjoy the proposed final value? Consider actually held moral, aesthetic, and religious views that are, by your lights, offensive and pernicious. Does final value supervene on the diversity partially constituted by the holding of such views? We have two plausible options here. First, we might say that moral, aesthetic, and religious diversity are only finally valuable within certain limits—diversity is appealing when constituted by a plurality of "reasonable" moral, aesthetic, and religious views. This would require us to refine our understanding of the badness of testimonial moral, aesthetic, and religious belief—since, for example, there would be nothing bad, vis-à-vis the final value of diversity of moral opinion, about believing on the basis of testimony that some "unreasonable" moral view is false. Second, we might say that moral, aesthetic, and religious diversity are always pro tanto finally valuable, but that this value is decisively trumped in the case of offensive and pernicious moral, aesthetic, and religious views, which are all-things-considered bad for society.

Given the idea that diversity of moral, aesthetic, and religious opinion and first-order moral, aesthetic, and religious dialogue are (pro tanto) finally socially valuable, we are now in a position to solve our puzzle (§1) by arguing that testimonial moral, aesthetic, and religious belief are bad, by contrast with testimonial belief, in paradigm cases of testimonial knowledge. Testimonial belief, in these domains, is (pro tanto) bad because counter-conducive to diversity of opinion and first-order dialogue, in these domains, in the believer's society. Such beliefs undermine the liberal ideal of a morally, aesthetically, and religiously diverse and dialogically engaged society. Therefore, testimonial belief, in these domains, is (pro tanto) bad, in virtue of its consequences for the believer's society. However, testimonial belief, in paradigm cases of testimonial knowledge, is not (pro tanto) bad in this way. There is nothing intuitively valuable about diversity of opinion and first-order dialogue about, for example, sports trivia. The present account explains why: our identities are partly constituted by our moral, aesthetic, and religious views, commitments, principles, and values. Our beliefs about sports trivia, by contrast, are irrelevant to who we are. A society rife with moral, aesthetic, and religious sameness is unappealing; but there is nothing unappealing about a society rife with sameness when it comes to sports trivia. The present account provides a criterion for dividing problematic cases of testimonial belief from unproblematic cases: if the domain is one where widespread sameness would be unappealing, testimonial belief is problematic; otherwise it is unproblematic. These boundaries might be contingent: we can perhaps imagine a liberal society in which diversity of opinion and first-order dialogue about sports trivia is the essence of the space of public reason. On the present account, this would be the result of a society whose members' identities were tied up with their beliefs about sports trivia. It is because morality, aesthetics, and religion are central to the identities of the members of a society that diversity of opinion and first-order dialogue are good for that society.

Can the present account satisfy the particularity assumption (§1)? To do so, we must defend a contrast between testimonial belief, in the relevant domains, and non-testimonial belief, in those domains. But the present account does so: non-testimonial moral, aesthetic, and religious belief, far from being counter-conducive to diversity of opinion and first-order dialogue (in these domains), seem like preconditions of diversity of opinion and first-order dialogue (in these domains). The present account implies, therefore, that non-testimonial moral, aesthetic, and religious belief are (pro tanto) socially valuable, by contrast with testimonial moral, aesthetic, and religious belief.

5.2. Objections and clarifications

The present account (§5.1) is premised on the idea that testimonial belief (in a given domain) is counter-conducive to diversity of opinion and first-order dialogue (in that domain). You might object to this premise on the grounds that diversity of opinion and first-order dialogue are compatible with widespread deference. Consider, for example, a version of our thought experiment on which different non-experts are disposed to defer to different (putative) moral, aesthetic, and religious experts and on which said (putative) experts generally disagree amongst themselves. However, tthe present objection faces two problems. First, in the present version of the thought experiment, although there will be diversity of moral, aesthetic, and religious opinion, there will be no first-order moral, aesthetic, and religious dialogue. At best, there will be dialogue about to whom one ought to defer (e.g. about who is really expert, or about which experts are worthy of deference). But dialogue of this kind does not plausibly enjoy the (pro tanto) value enjoyed by first-order moral, religious, and aesthetic dialogue—i.e. the value of a society whose members distinctive moral, aesthetic, and religious identities are expressed in discussion and debate (cf. §5.1).

Second, consider the question of the basis on which the non-experts decide to whom they defer, in the present version of the thought experiment. We might imagine that their deference is a matter of non-rational allegiance—different factions are loyal to their preferred experts, not for any reason, but just as a matter of psychological, historical, or sociological fact. But in this case we have bought diversity of moral, aesthetic, and religious opinion at the cost of rationality. I said that testimonial belief (in a given domain) is counter-conducive to diversity of opinion and first-order dialogue (in that domain), but we should amend this to the claim that testimonial belief (in a given domain) is counter-conducive to diversity of opinion and first-order dialogue (in that domain), so long as people are rational. The conclusion that testimonial belief (in the relevant domain) is (pro tanto) bad is still supported: if testimonial belief (in some domain) is counter-conducive to something (pro tanto) valuable, so long as people are rational, then testimonial belief (in that domain) is (pro tanto) bad. Perhaps then we should imagine, in the present version of the thought experiment, that non-experts defer on the basis of reasons—for example, they evaluate the track records of putative experts for reliability. But in this case we have bought diversity of moral, aesthetic, and religious opinion at the cost of moral, aesthetic, and religious deference. To evaluate the track record

of a putative expert for reliability, you must form non-testimonial beliefs about questions in her domain of putative expertise.[38] Our imagined society is no longer rife with moral, aesthetic, and religious deference—and this is the explanation of the presence of diversity of opinion (without the sacrifice of people's rationality). This supports my premise, for in the present version of the thought experiment, the reduction in deference is the explanation of the increase in diversity of opinion.

You might object that moral, aesthetic, and religious difference is explained by what John Rawls (1996, Lecture II, §2) calls the "burdens of judgment" in these domains: the complexity of the relevant evidence, the difficulty of weighting said evidence, the vagueness or indeterminacy of the relevant concepts, the relevance of background experience, the difficulty of comparing different kinds of normative consideration, and the plurality of competing values (pp. 56–7). All this means, you might argue, that moral, aesthetic, and religious difference "is the normal result of the exercise of human reason" (p. xviii). However, this is compatible with the present account (§5.1). The burdens of judgment in the domains of morality, aesthetics, and religion may explain why difference in these domains is compatible with widespread rationality. A social ideal that called for diversity of opinion and first-order dialogue about plain matters of fact—e.g. about whether there is a tree in the quad, where everyone is able to see and touch the tree quite easily—would require for its fulfilment that some members of society be irrational. The burdens of judgment in the domains of morality, aesthetics, and religion may explain why the liberal ideal of public reason implies no such requirement. But the present account goes beyond Rawls' conclusion, by arguing that moral, aesthetic, and religious difference is not only normal, but valuable as well.

You might object that *one* instance of testimonial moral belief, for example, will not have any adverse affect on society. Two replies to this objection. First, the present account (§5.1) implies that testimonial moral belief is *pro tanto* bad for society, and we should concede that the pro tanto social badness of individual instances of testimonial moral belief is of a relatively low degree. But compare: the pro tanto social badness of individual instances of littering is of a relatively low degree. Nevertheless, we think that individual instances of littering are bad. Second, we might retreat to the view that testimonial moral belief is not bad in virtue of its consequences for the believer's society, but rather bad in virtue of the fact that, were it widespread, it would be bad for the believer's society. Compare abstaining from voting. You might argue that this has no adverse affect on society vis-à-vis a democratic ideal of legitimate government, but we nevertheless think that it is bad not to vote, and the reason is that, were such behavior widespread, it would be bad for society. So we might make the same argument, mutatis mutandis, about testimonial moral belief, as well as about testimonial aesthetic and religious belief.

How different is the present account (§5.1) from Howell's (2014) virtue-theoretic account (§4)? The two accounts agree that the badness of moral testimony does not derive from narrowly "epistemic" considerations, but rather from considerations that are more broadly "moral." The present account says that moral deference is bad for the society of the person who defers. If that is just to say that moral deference implies a lack of moral virtue, because anything you do that is bad for

your society is morally vicious, then the present account overlaps with Howell's, at one level of generality. However, when we look at the specifics, the two accounts seem substantially different. Howell's account appeals to the affective, motivational, and cognitive profile of the deferential believer, and concludes that this profile is incompatible with (at least the highest levels of) moral virtue. The present account appeals to holistic and practical features of the society of the deferential believer, and concludes that these features undermine a liberal ideal. Howell's account is psychological; the present account is sociological. As well, you might think that moral virtue is essentially good for the virtuous person. In that case, the difference between the present account and a virtue-theoretic account is more stark. For the present account makes no appeal to the drawbacks of testimonial belief, in the relevant cases, for the believer. For all we have said, testimonial belief, in the relevant cases, is good for the believer—in virtue of being a source of knowledge, say. On the present account, and for social accounts of testimonial asymmetries in general, the badness of testimonial belief, in the relevant cases, derives from the fact that testimonial belief, in the relevant cases, is bad for society, not from the fact that it is bad for the believer (even if, as it turns out, it is).

5.3. Issues of expertise

We need to return to the issue of expertise in our problematic domains. Above (§1), I said that the idea that there are no experts in our problematic domains is an alternative formulation of the phenomena to be explained. However, the claim that there are no experts in some domain is ambiguous. On one disambiguation, an expert is someone to whom deference is appropriate. On an alternative disambiguation, an expert is someone relatively knowledgeable or experienced. Only on the former disambiguation is it true that the idea that there are no experts in our problematic domains is an alternative formulation of the phenomena to be explained. However, on the latter disambiguation, the idea that there are no experts in our problematic domains is implausible.[39] It is obvious that some people are more knowledgeable and experienced, in the domains of morality, aesthetics, and religion, than others. Specific examples would be controversial—which is an issue to which we'll turn in a moment. But we are all familiar with people who know more about these domains than we do, or who have spent much more time studying and thinking about them, or who have relevant first-hand experiences that we have not had. Our puzzle (§1) is not solved by denying the obvious fact that there are people like that. Rather, our puzzle is to explain why experts, on the second disambiguation, do not count as experts, on the first disambiguation, in our problematic domains. In other words, it is to explain why, in our problematic domains, people who are relatively knowledgeable and experienced are not people to whom deference is appropriate.

You might object that there is no reasonable way to identify moral, aesthetic, and religious experts—thus explaining why moral, aesthetic, and religious deference are inappropriate.[40] However, while it seems right that there are no uncontroversial examples of moral, aesthetic, and religious experts, as I have just suggested, it seems like, at least for most of us, there are people whom we regard, or ought to regard, as more knowledgeable and more experienced, in the relevant domains. Although

we may disagree about who these people are, we all think there are people who fit this description. I can give an example of what seems to me like a case of moral expertise (in the relevant sense)—a friend who teaches courses in bioethics, who has spent years thinking about issues and arguments and principles in bioethics, whose moral emotions are consistently virtuous—but the point is not to convince you to accept this as an example of moral expertise, but to suggest how you, too, can come up with an example that seems to you like a case of moral expertise (in the relevant sense).

You might object that there is insufficient agreement among moral, aesthetic, and religious experts to justify forming any belief on the basis of deferring to them—thus explaining why moral, aesthetic, and religious deference are inappropriate.[41] Above (§1), I said that this was an alternative formulation of the phenomena to be explained. Why is it that moral, aesthetic, and religious experts so often disagree with each other? The present account (§5.1) can help provide a (partial) answer to this question. Consider Hopkins' (2011) idea that "an expert is someone who ought to settle for herself questions in her domain of expertise" (p. 146). Forming non-testimonial beliefs about questions in her domain of expertise is part of the expert's job *qua* expert in that domain. This all seems right, but it also calls out for further explanation. Why is this the job of the expert? What explains our practice of requiring of certain people that they form only non-testimonial beliefs about questions in some domain? If diversity of opinion and first-order dialogue are valuable, in some domain, whether finally or instrumentally, it would make sense to develop a practice of requiring of certain people that they form only non-testimonial beliefs about questions in that domain.[42] The theoretical activities of moral, aesthetic, and religious experts are often sensitive to these values, as when they do not seek consensus, but rather prize novelty, creativity, and imaginative speculation. (This sketch would need to be supplemented with an investigation of the nature and value of the institutions that regulate expert moral, aesthetic, and religious inquiry.) So, it seems to me, the phenomena of expert disagreement about morality, aesthetics, and religion does not undermine the present account, which has the tools to (partially) explain said phenomena.[43]

Above (§1) I said that accounts of testimonial asymmetries should help explain why there are no experts in our problematic domains (to the extent that this is true) and should help explain why there is no expert agreement in our problematic domains (to the extent that this is true). The present account (§5.1) fulfils both of these criteria. It is true that there are no experts in these domains, in the sense that we have pro tanto reason not to defer to experts in these domains, which is explained by the (pro tanto) values of diversity of opinion and first-order dialogue in these domains, which also plausibly explain (at least in part) the existence of expert disagreement in these domains.

5.4. Appealing consequences of the account

The proposed account (§5.1) implies that the badness of testimonial moral, aesthetic, and religious belief is pro tanto. This is an appealing consequence, for we want to be able to say that sometimes moral, aesthetic, and religious deference

are best, all things considered. A silly case is that of a snap referendum: there is simply no time for you to deliberate about whether you ought to support military intervention, and so you just ask a trustworthy friend how you ought to vote, since (so you reason) it's more important to get this decision right than to promote the liberal ideal.

The proposed account can help explain why deference on the part of children seems unproblematic (§1). Children are not paradigmatically members of the diverse and dialogically engaged community of interlocutors that constitutes the liberal ideal. To the extent that we find non-deference on the part of children appealing, our intuitions are forward-looking: non-deferential children are precocious citizens in training.

The proposed account can help explain why moral deference to members of marginalized or oppressed groups is sometimes unproblematic (§1). Liberal societies need to listen to the voices of such people, whose voices are too often silenced or ignored. Even if deference, in such cases, is pro tanto disvaluable, this disvalue is outweighed by the value of attending to the concerns of disenfranchised members of society. However, at least when it comes to the value of diversity, there does not seem to be anything unappealing about deference, in the present case: deferring to members of marginalized or oppressed groups will contribute to diversity of moral opinion in your society, by providing wider adherence to an under-represented view.

The proposed account may suggest ways in which we should refine our target (§1): perhaps there are other domains in which diversity of opinion and first-order dialogue are valuable. Philosophical deference seems bad in something like the same way that moral, aesthetic, and religious deference seem bad[44]; or perhaps a suitably broad conception of the philosophical would include the moral, the aesthetic, and the religious. The present account suggests a principled way to explain and articulate the relevant phenomena.

Finally, the proposed account may explain differences in intuitions about the badness of moral, aesthetic, and religious testimony. Those philosophers with sympathies for liberal pluralism are apt to see something wrong with moral, aesthetic, and religious deference, whereas those philosophers who incline more towards communitarianism are likely to have a more positive response to moral, aesthetic, and religious deference.

6. Conclusion

My aim here has been to advocate for social accounts of testimonial asymmetries. Having articulated our puzzle (§1), I criticized three alternative accounts (§§2—4), before articulating a paradigm social account of three testimonial asymmetries, which appealed to the values of diversity of moral, aesthetic, and religious opinion and first-order moral, aesthetic, and religious dialogue (§5). Additional work to be done includes the exploration of alternative social accounts of testimonial asymmetries, further articulation of the present account (with attention paid to differences between moral, aesthetic, and religious testimony), and further defense

of the values of diversity of moral, aesthetic, and religious opinion and first-order moral, aesthetic, and religious dialogue, which constitute its foundation.[45]

Notes

[1] I mean whether it is really a masterpiece, not whether it is considered a masterpiece. Cf. the previous example, where I mean whether you really ought to support military intervention, not whether conventional morality says that you ought to do so.

[2] On moral testimony see Anscombe 1981, Estlund 1993, §V, 1997, pp. 181–7, Coady 1994, pp. 69–75, Jones 1999, Fricker 2006b, pp. 237–9, Hopkins 2007, Hills 2009, McGrath 2009, 2011, Zagzebski 2012, Chapter 8, Howell 2014. On aesthetic testimony see Meskin 2004, Hopkins 2011, Robson forthcoming. On religious testimony see Zagzebski 2012, Chapter 9.

[3] I understand testimony (roughly, belief on the basis of another person's assertion) as a species of deference (roughly, belief on the basis of another person's belief), of which there are other species. In any event, what I say here about testimony applies, mutatis mutandis, to deference in general (cf. McGrath 2011, p. 115, Howell 2014).

[4] One issue concerns "pure" vs. "impure" moral, aesthetic, or religious testimony (cf. McGrath 2009, p. 322, 2011, pp. 113–15). You might defer to a friend about intervention in Syria because she, an expert on Syrian politics who visits the country frequently, knows more than you about what is going on in Syria—this seems unproblematic, by contrast with deference that is, in some sense that would need to be articulated, "purely" moral. In connection with this, consider the fact that deference about the quality of restaurants and films seems less problematic, and more common, than deference about the quality of paintings (cf. Robson 2014).

[5] See Jones 1999; cf. Young 1997, p. 403. Some cases of this kind look like cases of "impure" moral testimony (cf. footnote 4), e.g. you think that behavior that fits a certain description is morally problematic, but are unsure whether a particular token behavior fits that description, so you defer to people who are better at spotting behavior of that kind. Others, however, are plausibly cases of "pure" moral testimony, e.g. you are unsure whether behavior that fits a certain description is morally problematic, so you defer to people who have a superior perspective on the relevant moral problem, about whether behavior of that kind is morally problematic.

[6] We should also be open to the possibility that our intuitions about the badness of accepting moral, aesthetic, or religious testimony may be influenced by our views about morals, aesthetics, or religion: I might take offense when someone believes that homosexuality is immoral just because some preacher says so, but have no complaint when someone believes that animal testing is immoral just because some philosopher says so.

[7] Alternatively, the idea that there are no experts in our problematic domains might be understood as a version of skepticism about those domains (see below).

[8] On testimony and the requirement of acquaintance for aesthetic belief, see Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §33 (cf. §8, §34), Pettit 1983, §§III—IV, Tanner 2003, p. 33; and see also §3, below. On testimony and the requirement of non-cognitive pro-attitudes for moral belief, see McGrath 2009, pp. 321–22, 2011, §II, Fletcher unpublished.

[9] See Zagzebski 2007, p. 260, Roberts and Wood 2007, p 261–6; cf. Grimm 2006, pp. 531–2, Pritchard 2010, pp. 82–3. See also Plato, *Theatetus* (201b–c), Locke, *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (Book I, Chapter III, Section 24; cf. *On the Conduct of the Understanding*, §24), Descartes, *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* ("Rule Three," AT 366). It is sometimes said (Coady 1994, p. 68–9, Hills 2009, p. 121) that testimony cannot be a source of practical knowledge: you cannot come to know how to Φ on the basis of testimony. Everything for which I'll argue here, when it comes to propositional knowledge and understanding, applies, mutatis mutandis, when it comes to propositional knowledge and practical knowledge.

[10] See Hopkins 2007, Hills 2009 (on moral testimony) and Hopkins 2011, §V (on aesthetic testimony). The same argument could be made in the case of testimonial religious belief.

[11] See Hills 2009, p. 100; cf. Hopkins 2007, pp. 629–31, Zagzebski 2012, pp. 174–5.

[12] *Metaphysics* I.1 (981b10–15).

[13] See Zagzebski 2001, pp. 240–3, 2012, p. 175, Kvanvig 2003, pp. 188–96, Riggs 2003, p. 217, Grimm 2006, pp. 532–3, forthcoming, Hills 2009, p. 100–1; cf. Hopkins 2007, pp. 633.

[14] Non-testimonial moral knowledge is not always packaged with moral understanding; cf. the case of the naïve and conscientious solider, below.

[15] He says the same, mutatis, mutandis, about aesthetic belief (2011, §V), and gives an explanation of "grasping the grounds for a belief": it is to "grasp those facts in virtue of which the belief is true" (p. 150).

[16] The case of the naïve and conscientious solider might also make you wonder whether it really is wrong to act on the moral premise that p without understanding why p. To refrain from participating in the massacre, despite not understanding why participating would be wrong, seems like the right thing for the solider to do, as well as a manifestation of some degree of moral virtue, and certainly the best outcome, both for her and all things considered. For further discussion, see McGrath 2011, §V.

[17] The initial plausibility of this kind of solution may derive from the fact that there are cases in which belief requires understanding, in this sense: sometimes it would be unreasonable for you to believe that p unless you could understand how it could be the case that p. Imagine that you recommend the novels of Cormac McCarthy to your sensible and trustworthy friend, who refuses to accept your recommendation on the grounds that reading McCarthy causes lung cancer. You should not believe this, however, until you first come to understand how such a thing could be true. (Is it the result of prolonged exposure to dramatic tension? Is it that the bleak portrait of human existence makes you take up smoking? Has it something to do with horses?) In such cases, you have background beliefs that suggest that it could not be the case that p, such that even substantial (testimonial) evidence that p may be insufficient to justify believing that p. But this is not what is going on in our puzzling cases (§1)—it is not that I cannot understand how it could be the case that I ought to support intervention in Syria, or that the Rothko Chapel is a masterpiece, or that God exists.

[18] As with understanding (§2), (propositional) non-testimonial knowledge is not always packaged with acquaintance, e.g. inference to the best explanation enables us to know about the Higgs boson, but does not provide acquaintance with the Higgs boson.

[19] See Budd 2003, p. 392.

[20] An argument in favor of the principle, so interpreted, as opposed to the principle, as interpreted previously, is that the acquaintance principle seems to admit of exceptions, as when a rushed decision is required (Hopkins 2011, pp. 153–4).

[21] Perhaps something similar could be said about testimonial moral belief and testimonial religious belief; cf. Tanner 2003, p. 30.

[22] Perhaps something similar could be said about testimonial aesthetic belief or testimonial religious belief.

[23] One idea can be bracketed from the start (cf. Howell 2014, pp. 399–400): the idea of a connection between testimonial moral belief and autonomy. So, for example, you might argue that testimonial moral belief is incompatible with autonomy. But this proposal faces a dilemma. Philosophers have offered plausible accounts of autonomy on which testimonial belief formation involves no failure of autonomy—you can be perfectly free and self-governing in deferring to someone else (cf. Zagzebski 2012). Suppose you were then to treat it as a matter of the definition of "autonomy" that testimonial belief is incompatible with autonomy. Then the present proposal seems like a re-statement of our puzzle (§1), for why should we care about autonomy, so understood?

[24] Cf. Hazlett 2009, §3.

[25] Cf. Hills 2009, p. 120.

[26] The same could be said about testimonial aesthetic beliefs and testimonial religious beliefs.

[27] Cf. Howell 2014, p. 402.

[28] Cf. Fricker 1994, pp. 135–5, pp. 148–51, 1995, pp. 404–8, p. 409, Lackey 2008, pp. 160–4, pp. 178–85. This assumption, it seems to me, is neutral on the debate between reductionists and anti-reductionists in the epistemology of testimony (cf. Burge 1993, Fricker 1994, 1995, 2006a, Coady 1994, Audi 1997, Lipton 1998, Lackey 2008, Chapters 5–6). If it isn't, so be it.

[29] "Consequences" here needn't be read as referring only to *causal* consequences; so e.g. if some species of testimonial belief *constitutes* something bad for society, then this is a social consequence, in the intended sense.

[30] In general, if something has consequences for a member of a society, then it will have consequences for that society, and if something has consequences for a society, then it will have consequences for the members of that society. For this reason, we must distinguish social accounts of testimonial asymmetries from alternative accounts by appeal to what does the explanatory work: on social accounts, the badness of testimonial belief, in the relevant cases, is *explained* by appeal to the consequences for the believer's society.

[31] Cf. the practice of using "Google Morals" (Howell 2014).

[32] Alternatively, no moral, aesthetic, or religious "renegades" (Frances 2010, 2013).

[33] See Cohen 1989, Rawls 1996, Lecture VI, 1997, Habermas 1996, Chapter 7.

[34] *On Liberty*, Chapter II (Mill 1978, p. 50); cf. Howell's virtue-theoretical critique of testimonial moral belief (§4).

[35] See Estlund 1993, 1997, Young 1997, and, in connection with testimony, List and Pettit 2004, Hazlett forthcoming, §2.1.

[36] On this idea in connection with testimony, see Hazlett forthcoming, §2.2.

[37] However, see Hazlett forthcoming on the relatively broad scope of our politically-relevant beliefs.

[38] Alternatively, you might defer to popular opinion or conventional wisdom about who the experts are. But even in that case, we are still buying diversity at the cost of deference—for the people to whom you defer about who the experts are must themselves evaluate the track records of putative experts for reliability by forming non-testimonial beliefs about questions in their domains of putative expertise. If not, then your deference looks more like a case of non-rational allegiance—in this case, to groundless popular opinion or conventional wisdom.

[39] Cf. Estlund 1993, §V.

[40] Cf. Estlund 1993, §VII, McGrath 2011, §IV.

[41] Cf. Estlund 1993, p. 85.

[42] Cf. Hopkins' (2011, p. 147) explanation in terms of collective knowledge.

[43] I say "partially" here because something like the "burdens of judgment" (§5.2) in these domains is clearly also part of the explanation.

[44] Cf. Hopkins 2011, pp. 146–7.

[45] I presented versions of this paper in 2013 at the University of Texas at Austin, Southern Methodist University, the University of New Mexico, the National University of Singapore, the University of Sydney, the Australian National University, a conference on *Evidence, Reliability, and Group Epistemology* in Bled, Slovenia, and the University of Rochester, and in 2014 at the University of Connecticut. Thanks to my audiences for valuable feedback, as well as to an anonymous referee for this journal. Research on this paper was supported by an Early Career Fellowship from the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council, by the Department of Philosophy at the University of New Mexico, and by a pilot grant from the University of Edinburgh's School of Philosophy, Psychology, and Language Sciences.

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