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AUTONOMY AND THE ASYMMETRY PROBLEM FOR MORAL EXPERTISE

ABSTRACT. We seem less likely to endorse moral expertise than reasoning expertise or aesthetic expertise. This seems puzzling given that moral norms are intuitively taken to be at least *more* objective than aesthetic norms. One possible diagnosis of the asymmetry is that moral judgments require autonomy of judgement in away that other judgments do not. However, the author points out that aesthetic judgments that have been 'borrowed' by aesthetic experts generate the same autonomy worry as moral judgments which are borrowed by moral experts. The author then explores various approaches to accepting the testimony of moral experts and concludes that the asymmetry may best be explained by (1) the conditions for moral expertise being more difficult to satisfy than those of aesthetic expertise and (2) the intuitive greater *seriousness* of accepting the moral judgments of others, since moral norms are generally viewed as more binding than aesthetic norms.

There is no desire more natural than the desire for knowledge. We try every means that may lead us to it. When reason fails us we make use of experience…which is a feebler and less worthy means. But truth is so great a thing that we ought not to despise any medium that will conduct us to it. – Montaigne[1]

Consider the following puzzle. We are very comfortable with the idea of *reasoning* experts – people who have a greater capacity to analyze arguments and detect flaws of logic. This isn't surprising since we also are committed to a high degree of objectivity with respect to standards for arguments. If someone commits a fallacy, that is considered bad relative to those standards. Further, we are also fairly comfortable with the idea of *aesthetic* experts – as displayed by a willingness to be guided by the advice of art critics as to what movie we ought to see, and what art exhibit is the most worthwhile. But the moral area is different. There is significant discomfort with accepting *moral*

experts and considerable debate about whether or not they can even exist. This is odd, given our intuition that, if anything, morality is *more objective* than aesthetics.[2] There ought to be more for the expert to grab onto in the moral area. I will argue that this puzzle is superficial. However, an investigation into why reveals some interesting features of moral testimony and the acceptance of moral authority.

This puzzle, combined with other worries about moral authority, casts some doubt on the existence of moral experts. This reluctance to endorse moral experts could perhaps be due to the fact that some hold emotivist views about moral judgments. Ayer, for example, did not believe that moral expertise was possible, since a moral judgment was neither true nor false – it was a mere emotional response. This view, however, doesn't really deal with the asymmetry noted above, since the emotivist will be just as skeptical of aesthetic experts.

In this paper I will explore alternative explanations of the asymmetry. Initially, the most promising view appeals to the notion of "autonomy" and its importance to ethical decision-making. However, in the end, the approach I adopt rejects autonomy of moral decision-making as the correct diagnosis. The view I will argue for identifies various important markers for experts, and thus criteria for responsibly trusting another's judgment, and notes a distinction between ways in which we can view a person, or a putative moral expert, as relevantly impartial. She can be impartial in making a judgment, and/or impartial in transmitting the judgment. There may be more reasons to doubt an agent's meeting or satisfying these markers in the case of moral judgments as opposed to some other normative judgments. But one feature of my account also explains why we may be suspicious of people who seek to provide prudential guidance. Again, it will have nothing to do with the special nature of prudential judgment inasmuch as it involves "autonomy" but rather can be explained in terms of the fact that it is harder for another to satisfy markers for expertise when it comes to giving advice for how someone else ought to live his or her life.

1. THE IMPORTANCE OF AUTONOMY

One approach to diagnosing the reluctance to endorse moral experts – and which might point to a difference, at least an intuitive difference between moral and aesthetic norms, is to note that historically there occurred a shift in how moral authority was viewed, particularly after the writings of Kant became disseminated. With Kant there came a rejection of "morality as obedience". J.B. Schneewind notes this when he writes of Kant:

> Kantian autonomy presupposes that we are rational agents whose transcendental freedom takes us out of the domain of natural causation. It belongs to every individual, in the state of nature as well as society. Through it each person has a compass that enables "common human reason" to tell what is consistent with duty and what inconsistent. (Schneewind, 1998, p. 515)

This view was in opposition to an older, and religiously charged, view of authority in morals, which viewed ordinary persons as in need of moral guidance, which could only be provided by a select few with the insight and wisdom required to see beyond immediate desires and to have insight into God's will.

On the new view, obedience to moral authority is obedience to the self. *Moral* knowledge and wisdom is taken to be different from other sorts of knowledge. Anscombe notes this view when she writes (though not endorsing it).

> But is there something essentially less teachable about morals than, say, chemistry or history or mathematics – or, again, religious dogma? This view might be maintained in connection with that *autonomy of the will* about which Kant wrote. To take one's morality from someone else – that, it might be held, would make it not morality at all; if one takes it from someone else, that turns it into a bastard sort of morality, marked by heteronomy. (Anscombe, 1981, p. 45)

Thus, picking up on this special status of moral knowledge – its connection to autonomous decision making – some might argue that the asymmetry can be accounted for by noting that though moral and aesthetic evaluations are both normative,

they are also essentially quite different. Moral judgments are thought to be essentially autonomous in Anscombe's sense – a matter of the individual arriving at the correct judgment for herself.

This view of moral knowledge has led to another potential problem, noted in the literature. This has to do with trust in moral testimony. Suppose one trusts the moral claims of another because one takes that person to be morally expert – at least, on the moral issue at hand and relative to one's own level of expertise. This is taken by some to be problematic because – as seems not to be the case with testimony on non-moral matters – there *is* something about making moral judgments that is thought to be essentially autonomous.[3] Though she ends up disagreeing with it, Karen Jones puts the concern this way:

> . . .borrowing moral knowledge appears to be in tension with the ideal of an autonomous moral agent … as involving, among other things, the capacity to reflect critically on the principles that one adopts … If we have borrowed our moral knowledge from others and cannot offer reasons in support of it, then how can we reflect critically on that knowledge? (Jones, 1999)

"Borrowing" moral knowledge is distinct from other forms of acquiring moral knowledge in that the person who borrows moral knowledge believes the moral judgment in question, but fails to *grasp* the reasons for the judgment. So, though there's a sense in which the borrower has been persuaded as to the truth of the moral judgment – because of the expert judger's authority – there's another sense in which he hasn't. We might claim that he isn't directly persuaded because he himself doesn't see the normative force of the reasons used to justify the moral judgment. Cases that involve borrowing give rise to the above autonomy concern.[4]

So, one might think that normative claims in aesthetics are crucially different. For example, one might argue that aesthetic norms are socially derived whereas the moral are not, or are heteronomous – depending on the desires of the judgers – in ways that moral norms do not. No "self-legislation" is required for these judgments. Thus, autonomy is not crucial to aesthetic judgment in the same way as it is for moral judgment. "Bor-

rowing'' in the aesthetic sphere would then be unproblematic because failure to grasp the reasons behind a judgment don't affect justification. So, one might then hold that one is free to rely on the aesthetic expert to a greater degree.

It is worth pointing out, however, that this unease about ''borrowing'' is not restricted to *moral* claims. It can be discerned in any normative area. Suppose Kathy wants to decorate her house but feels that she has no taste, so she hires someone else to decorate it for her. It does seem a bit odd for her to claim that the upholstery and objects d'art selected by her design specialist are beautiful if she herself doesn't see that they are – if she just takes it on authority, so to speak. If she truly doesn't see any aesthetic difference herself between the Braque print and the product of a paint by numbers kit, then she can be thought to not grasp the reasons behind the judgment that the Braque print is beautiful, or to have a grasp of the claim itself.

Also, suppose that Albert is not a very good reasoner, but he believes that Stephen is, so whenever Stephen says that x is an appallingly bad argument, Albert believes him. Again, Albert claiming *for himself* that insight into the argument's badness seems odd and amusing. While he has a grasp of some reasons for holding that the argument is bad – namely, that Stephen says it's bad – those sorts of reasons are only indirectly justifying.

We will return to these intuitions in the course of the paper, but the amorphous feeling at this point is that what is odd in the first case is that there is nothing *of Kathy* in the judgments that x is beautiful, which in turn led up to the purchase and display of those items in her house. Similarly, if Albert doesn't himself see the reasons why the argument is bad, though his judgment that x is a bad argument is true, it lacks traction – he doesn't appreciate the reasons, and thus lacks genuine insight. The worry is that indirect justification just isn't the right sort of justification to warrant a claim of *normative knowledge*. All of this is just by way of noting that the worry or the oddity is not limited to the moral sphere. This worry I shall tentatively dub ''the autonomy problem'' for trust. The worry is that in making genuine *normative* judgments, one must have insight oneself into the reasons used to justify the initial judgment. The justification

must be direct rather than indirect. On this view, there may be moral experts, but, at best, their role would be limited to *pointing out* morally relevant considerations, which the autonomous judger would then accept or reject *for herself*. But the worry does seem incompatible with a more robust moral expert – a person whose superior moral acuity gives her greater authority in moral judgments – to the extent that borrowing moral knowledge from this person would be both possible and warranted.[5] The intuition is that trusting such experts in this way is not a genuine way to transmit *moral* knowledge. If this carries any weight, then one cannot be a true "borrower" of moral knowledge; prescriptive knowledge is not like descriptive.

Since one can generate an autonomy worry for other forms of normative evaluation, the asymmetry problem does not seem solvable by noting that aesthetics lacks a commitment to autonomy of judgment. However, perhaps the asymmetry problem can be handled if we think that the autonomy worry is *more severe* in the area of claims to moral knowledge – presumably the moral expert is making claims to superior moral knowledge.[6] So one problem is that, if it really is a worry about autonomy that generates a concern over accepting the testimony of a moral expert, then why the discrepancy in the reactions to other normative cases? Why wouldn't all cases of abdicating autonomy give rise to the same concern?

Both the asymmetry problem and the autonomy problem present a challenge to the notion of moral expertise and the extent to which it carries weight. Perhaps a solution to both problems is possible – and I believe that it is. My claim will be that the autonomy worry is not a genuine one, but that a confusion over the significance of autonomy for moral decision making is at the basis of the autonomy worry and a general skepticism about moral expertise – which gives rise to the initial asymmetry problem. Examining this approach will involve a closer look at how we think of autonomy. First, however, it would be a good idea to look at what we intuitively think privileges the views of some moral judgers over others.

2. MORAL KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE

Moral experts – those one might hold to be deserving of trust with respect to their moral judgments – are persons who have greater claim to moral knowledge. They may possess local expertise rather than global expertise.[7] Indeed, that seems far more likely. Mary may have a greater sensitivity to issues of sexism than Dan, and thus be an expert relative to Dan on that issue. Dan may possess a greater sensitivity to potential violations of free speech norms, and thus be an expert relative to Mary on those issues. If so, then Dan possesses superior moral sensitivity that gives him a kind of epistemic privilege on moral issues surrounding free speech. He is in possession of moral knowledge, and to be an expert he is in *direct* possession of moral knowledge. Further, if one decides to trust someone in the sense of adopting that person's moral judgment, believing him to be a moral expert relative to oneself on a particular issue, then one must view the expert as experienced, reasonable, and disinterested or impartial.

Moral knowledge is knowledge of a moral proposition. For example, Arthur knows that

(A) Sylvia killed Bob for no good reason, and this is wrong.

If Arthur has a reliably formed and justified true belief that unjustified killing is wrong, then he has moral knowledge that unjustified killing is wrong, and, of course, that a particular case of unjustified killing is wrong. Contrast this with, Sophie knows that

(B) Emma killed Dan.

Sophie may know this, but this is not moral knowledge since the proposition isn't making a normative claim.

Compare (B) with Sophie knows that

(C) Emma murdered Dan.

"Murder" seems to involve unjustified killing of another – thus, (B) and (C) are quite different – (B) making a descriptive claim whereas (C) is making a normative one. All this simply points to the fact that we need to be careful in judging what counts as

making a normative claim in ordinary contexts. Moral knowledge is evaluative.

This distinction is important, because it better helps us to understand certain claims of moral knowledge. For example, Karen Jones discusses an interesting case in which a judger is called upon to trust others' moral judgments due to their experience. The case is the case of Peter, who lived in a co-op involved in interviewing potential new members, and who:

> … could pick out egregious instances of sexism and racism, and could sometimes see that "sexist" or "racist" applied to more subtle instances when the reason for their application was explained to him, but he seemed bad at working out how to go on to apply the words to nonegregious new cases. Problems arose for Peter when he could not grasp the reasons why the women were calling someone sexist, when he either could not see, or could not see as evidence, the considerations that the women thought supported viewing the would-be members as sexist.[8]

One might argue that this case is one of superior sensitivity to behavioral cues rather than a case of superior moral knowledge. However, if the knowledge that the other co-op members have is knowledge that "We *ought* not to let that person into the co-op" that *is* moral knowledge since they are making a claim to know another claim that is a prescriptive claim.

There is a powerful intuition at work here. We do seem to privilege experience in many cases. As Jones' Peter case highlights, discussions of moral expertise often bring up the issue of how experience can privilege the views of those who make moral judgments. One of the better known examples of this is Mill's discussion of the inadequacies of simple hedonism in *Utilitarianism*. Mill argued that there is a distinction between higher and lower pleasures, and that the higher are superior to the lower. The argument for the latter claim rested on granting more weight to the views of those who had experienced both:

> … it is an unquestionable fact, that those who are equally acquainted with and equally capable of appreciating and enjoying both do give a most marked preference to the manner of existence which employs their higher faculties. (Mill, 1998, p. 56)

And then, even more strongly, he goes on to say that "From this verdict of the only competent judges, I apprehend there can be no appeal".

Here, Mill is not addressing the issue of trust, or the question of whether and under what circumstances, those lacking experience of higher pleasures should trust those with the experience, but his argument here does make a case for privileging the view of those with a particular sort of broadened experience. Mill's case might serve better than the Peter case to illustrate the value of experience, because he is arguing that higher pleasures are superior to the lower, and thus that if one has a choice of promoting the higher over the lower, all other things equal, one *ought* to do that. That is a moral claim, and one who claims to know that is making a claim of moral knowledge. My point here is not to endorse Mill's argument or his claim. Whatever we think of the truth of Mill's claim, this is a genuine putative claim to moral knowledge. Further, Mill makes the claim that those with experience of the higher pleasures have a privileged epistemic status in this case – they are the only competent judges. If such a person claims that the higher are superior, and thus the higher *ought* to be promoted over the lower, lesser beings (to the extent they can) should take his word for it. Pigs might not agree (as opposed to disagree) but that's because they lack the right sort of experience. Similarly, within the class of human beings a fool might disagree, but then the fool has only experience of the lower type.

Mill isn't the only one to appeal to the privileging role of experience – that goes back at least to Aristotle, who argued that understanding requires experience: " … we must attend, then, to the undemonstrated remarks and beliefs of experienced and older people … no less than to demonstrations. For these people see correctly because experience has given them their eye". (NE, 1143b10-14) Tony Coady echoes this, and even seems to explicitly endorse this, though he does hint at dangers (Coady, 1992, p. 74). In any case, many writers seem to endorse the view that experience privileges. But surely we will want to constrain this somehow? Not just any experience matters, and it must be experience of the right sort.

For example, we generally hold that one ought to consider the broadness of a person's experience. In the moral realm, then, one might give greater weight to the view of someone who has experienced both freedom and repression regarding which is the preferred mode of existence, and which is to be morally supported or promoted.

We also weigh the deepness of the experience. For example, Maria's experience working with refugees for many years may privilege her views on the value of freedom more than Connie's experience working with refugees for a very brief period before moving on to a job at Greenpeace. Connie has broader volunteer experience, but when it comes to the issue of refugees, Maria's experience is deeper. Also, some forms of experience will be relevant, whereas others will not.

Someone who has actually experienced a tragedy is frequently taken to be a greater authority on that tragedy than someone who has not. The idea is that imagination, empathy, and sympathy take you only so far.[9] One can't know what it is like to lose a loved one, it is claimed, unless one has lost a loved one. Of course, one needs to be careful here, since this sort of "knowledge" is not propositional. But the intuition carries over. If Alice asserts "Losing a loved one is the most miserable experience of a person's life" and Alice has in fact lost a loved one, then her assertion is taken to have greater authority than the same assertion from someone lacking that experience. One might view Alice as having direct experience relevant to making that judgment. And, if someone disagreed with Alice, but lacked the experience, then there would be some reason to discount the other person's views. To use Karen Jones' terminology, when I trust Alice in this regard, I am "borrowing" *her* moral knowledge, and it makes sense to do that because the trust is warranted – warranted in part by her greater experience.

As discussed here, though the importance of experience in privileging moral judgment has been noted in the literature, it is surprising to note little discussion of the various ways in which experience can distort one's perceptions and lead to loss of knowledge or failure to know. This highlights the need for a

more fine-grained discussion of how experience both helps and hinders acquisition of moral knowledge. The psychology literature, for example, is rife with examples of various fallacies people are prone to – hasty generalization, for example, where a single negative or positive experience takes on exaggerated significance.

If one claims that the moral expert is one who has the right kind of experience – i.e. experience that is both broad and deep enough, with respect to the relevant issues to the question at hand, etc. then the question is why? If the right experience is the experience that produces the right answer, then there should be some other criterion for right answer that the moral expert has some insight into. That's what's doing the work. Otherwise, the account is at risk of circularity. So, experience is really just a marker, neither necessary nor sufficient for expertise. One could imagine an utterly naïve moral expert or a sort of *idiot savant* with respect to moral judgment – a person who simply has a superior natural sensitivity to morally relevant considerations.[10] The best way to think of experience is as providing a plausible mechanism for development of moral sensitivity. But an awareness of this function needs to be tempered with caution, and an awareness of how experience can have a negative impact on reliable judgment. If we believe that the experience in question has led to greater insight, then it does seem a significant factor to weigh in judging the credentials of the putative moral expert. But presumably our judgment of greater insight will depend on our views of previous judgments that person has made in the past.

3. MORAL EXPERTISE

In the previous section I made the claim that the moral expert is one who possesses moral knowledge to a superior degree, or at least possesses superior moral judgment.[11] Another issue is whether or not we should defer to the judgment of someone whom we are justified in taking to be a moral expert. It doesn't automatically follow that we ought to defer to one with supe-

rior knowledge. While we might regard such a person as an *expert in judgment* we might also have reason to avoid treating the person as an expert because we do not believe he is a reliable transmitter of moral knowledge – other conditions would have to be met for that. For example, Satan could well be an example of a being with superior moral knowledge, but it would be unwise to defer to Satan's judgment on what to do. I might be confident in his ability to know, but not confident in his accurate transmission of that knowledge, because I view him to be deceitful.

So what are some of the conditions the expert must meet? Traditionally, people tend to focus on conditions like reasonableness and impartiality. So, to possess moral knowledge the expert must be reasonable and impartial. These considerations carry over from qualities one would like to see in any expert. They are qualities that help to ensure reliability. But we should note that these are not, strictly speaking, necessary for moral expertise if my account of what a moral expert is correct. On my view, just making the right judgments is sufficient. This may well turn out to be correlated with these other qualities, but they themselves are not necessary. We might view them, rather, as "markers" that play an epistemic role – the role of helping us to identify likely prospects for expertise.

The moral expert forms his beliefs under "conditions of cognitive reliability" (Brink, 1989, pp. 132–133). So, the trick of identifying moral experts will be to determine those conditions, identifying the markers, and then ways of discerning when they have been satisfied to a superior degree.

Generally agreed on conditions have been mentioned before. They are those which will be conducive to reliable moral judgment (reliable in terms of the truth), and they will include: using the available evidence in making the judgment, rationality or reasonableness (e.g. good reasoning skills), lack of distorting influences – lack of prejudice and self-interest, for example, which can be cashed out in terms of a desideratum of impartiality.[12] It is no coincidence that the qualities one tends to identify as important in the moral expert are those one sees

identified with ideal observers. But in discussing expertise, we are not discussing an ideal. The expert has these qualities to an adequate degree – one which we understand to be superior when compared with most others.

Most agree that impartiality is very important. Montaigne tells an interesting story of villagers who, whenever an internal dispute arises, grab a passing stranger to settle the dispute.[13] While I'm not recommending this as a decision procedure for selection of moral experts, the villagers' method points to the view that to get an impartial judge – which is desirable – one needs someone who does not have a stake in the current dispute, or any personal interest in the judgment at hand. Of course, one could challenge this, and I'd like to stress that my view is that impartiality is a marker, but is not a necessary condition for moral expertise. It may well be that those who are not impartial have a greater claim to moral knowledge at least in some cases. Louise Antony goes over arguments for why we might give up neutrality as an *epistemic* ideal – for example, given underdetermination of claims by evidence, neutrality is only a fantasy.[14] One could imagine a similar view about impartiality as an ethical ideal. Perhaps parents are better knowers with respect to their children precisely because they lack impartiality with respect to their children. But note that in *transmitting* knowledge one may quite justifiably be skeptical of what a parent says about a child, precisely *because of* the lack of impartiality.

So, if an agent is to trust the moral expert, he must feel confident in that person's reliability, and this involves confidence in among other things, that person's impartiality. But, again, there's a difference between acknowledging the expertise of the judger, or being confident, for example, that a certain person is a moral expert who does arrive at impartial moral judgments, and then *trusting* the person to (impartially) provide one with reliably true moral judgment. Thus, there is a distinction between impartiality as a condition of expertise in judgment, and impartiality as a condition of taking someone's expressed judgments as honest or sincere. Trust can be judged appropriate relative to both levels. Self-interest can distort the

judgments themselves, but it can also impede the sincere and honest transmission of that judgment. Thus, we might hold that one reason we value impartiality, and view it as a marker for expertise is that it is correlated with veracity – not only is it important to making correct judgments, it matters to the honest transmission of those judgments. It is not infallible of course – and that is why it is only a marker – loved ones may be more truthful in some contexts when they are lacking impartiality. But then we use our judgment about whether the context in question is just such a context.

Someone may possess the disinterest, or impartiality, etc. required to arrive at reliably true moral judgments, but lack the impartiality to deliver those judgments, and thus even reliability in judgment isn't enough to generate *trust*. So it is possible for some one to believe in a moral expert or authority, but harbor a healthy skepticism about particular instances of testimony on moral matters.

This distinction could be important in helping us understand the puzzles we started out with. The autonomy concern focuses on the first level – that of making the judgment. A person who borrows moral knowledge is not taken to be responsive to moral reasons, and thus fails the autonomy requirement. The lack of trust in moral expertise can involve both levels, because one is concerned that crucial conditions have not been satisfied at the level of transmission of judgment, as well as the level of making the judgment. To accept the testimony of the moral expert I must not only have confidence in his judgment, but confidence in the impartial transmission of the judgment, and this may be harder to achieve in cases involving moral judgments.

Experience, reasonableness and impartiality aren't the only markers for reliability. Another good marker is the extent to which prior judgments of the putative expert have been confirmed. Confirmation of judgment figures heavily, for example, in Hume's account of aesthetic expertise.[15] On his view of expertise, the expert works in part to point out aesthetically relevant features that others miss. However, others are generally able to see them once pointed out. This seems to make a lot

of sense. Sylvia may not be able to detect, on her own, the aesthetically interesting features of a Rothko painting. However, when Aurelia – her friend with the cultivated taste – points out the relevant features to her, she does see them, and then is able to appreciate the work of art on her own, and perhaps even generalize to other works of art. In this way, Aurelia's judgment is confirmed. Note that in these cases, the knowledge is not "borrowed" since the recipient of expert opinion accepts for herself as relevant the features pointed out by the expert. However, with enough confirming episodes, Sylvia may then completely trust Aurelia's aesthetic judgment to the point where she accepts that judgment even in cases where she simply fails to see for herself the aesthetic merit of the art work. One could imagine similar cases involving moral judgment.

But mere reliability may not be sufficient to warrant trust. Richard Holton, for example, points out that we trust persons and thus feel betrayed when they prove unreliable, or willfully unreliable, whereas we don't feel betrayed by objects we've mistakenly taken to be reliable (Holton, 1994). The case of the anti-expert also illustrates, I think, how reliance and at least one sense of "trust" can come apart. The anti-expert is one who is always wrong. Whenever he judges "p" to be true, "−p" is in fact true. The anti-expert is one who is reliably unreliable. I may rely on the falsity of what the anti-expert says, but if, on occasion, he turns out to be correct – again, disappointment might be warranted, but hardly disappointment in him *as a person*. And, certainly, a sense of betrayal would not be warranted absent the nasty intentions. Further, it would seem odd to say that I "trust" the anti-expert, though not odd to say that I trust him to always get it wrong.

My view is that trust and reliance are very closely connected indeed. When x trusts y he relies on him for something, and while this may not assume actual good will, it does assume absence of an effective bad will (in a being with a will at all). In the cases we are particularly concerned with here, x relies on y's moral judgment and testimony because he has good reason to believe it reliable (because the markers, or at least a preponderance of them, have been satisfied). He trusts the expert in

that he takes the expert to be telling the truth. He relies on the expert's track record in making reliable judgments.

Edward Craig notes that being a good informant (and we can take the moral expert to be a kind of good informant with respect to moral knowledge) "… means more than just being right; in addition to that the good informant must possess some characteristic that makes him recognizable as such and supports confidence in his information".[16] To know on the basis of what the informant says is to be cognizant of this extra condition or characteristic. Similarly, on my analysis, what I term "markers" must be satisfied. Of course, there is also the possibility that one is mistaken when one thinks of a "marker" for reliability.[17] For example, years ago some would have thought a husband to be a better informant about a wife's well being than the wife herself. This is because they made certain assumptions about male intellectual superiority and benevolence as well as female inferiority, assumptions which are discredited. But this observation simply shows that we can be mistaken about what we *take* to be a marker of reliability. This makes them very much open to discussion.

4. AUTONOMY

I've listed some of the markers for moral expertise – ones which seem plausible and which a responsible judger of moral expertise should look for.[18] But how is any of this related to the problems we started with – the asymmetry problem and the autonomy problem?

First, the autonomy problem. Autonomy is a murky concept, but I take the worry to be concerned with the sense of autonomy that involves viewing the moral agent and the moral judge to be self-legislating in some sense.[19] I'll leave aside for now any concerns that self-legislation is incoherent. (Anscombe, 1996). Still when most people think of autonomy they do think that the autonomous agent is one who decides for herself using her own reasons.[20] This intuition may well be conflating distinct senses or uses of "autonomy". For example,

there is a sense of autonomy which seems to involve "independence of mind", where if a person lets someone else make up her mind for her, she lacks autonomy in this sense. Persons who are overly deferential lack this sort of autonomy.[21]

Then there is a sense of autonomy that involves responsiveness to reasons – the ability to act from reasons. On this view, roughly, we act autonomously when we act for reasons that we endorse. When one turns down that extra piece of chocolate cake because one takes it to be too fattening, one is displaying responsiveness to reasons. Technically, though the two senses here may overlap, they aren't identical since the deferential spouse may or may not endorse the reasons of her husband.

As noted, there seems to be a very strong worry that someone who simply borrows moral knowledge from an expert is like a parrot that utters "p" after hearing "p", but fails to grasp the reasons for p. The parrot simply repeats what it has heard without understanding. But there is still a big difference between the parrot and the borrower. The borrower at least understands what he's saying. The borrower does not accept "p" on the basis of "independent considerations", nevertheless the borrower does have the ability to do so – unlike the parrot. That ability can also account for another relevant distinction between levels of autonomous decision-making. When an agent decides to accept the testimony the agent is acting autonomously. There is an autonomous decision not to make one's own decision. So, one does display independence of thought at this level.

If the worry is that one is failing to make up one's own mind, then the worry involves a confusion over levels of decision-making. If I *decide* to trust the expert, I have made an autonomous decision. That trust is not like infant trust nor does it involve the blind deference of one who has been cowed. A responsible truster is one who looks for the cues and markers outlined in the previous section. This *seems* paradoxical because there is a confusion made over the relevant reasons. While it is true that when I trust the expert judgment, and borrow, I am not myself grasping the reasons for the expert

having made that judgment. However, if the reasons for accepting the testimony are good ones – i.e. the expert has the right sort of experience, her judgments have been confirmed in the past, etc., then that acceptance is warranted. The decision to trust has been made for reasons the agent grasps and endorses, and thus the agent is also displaying responsiveness to relevant reasons.

There are many contexts in which it is quite rational for someone to decide to not decide for himself. Consider an analogy with freedom of choice. Many people accept the view that freedom involves choice, which naively leads to the view that the more choice one has the freer one is. But this isn't true. More choice can actually be confusing and unhelpful. I have difficulty shopping in large shopping centers because I can't make up my mind. There is too much choice for me. I like to shop in stores where the selection is smaller, but where the person who runs the store has a taste that is compatible with my own. In this case I have freely decided to limit my options. So, there's a loss of freedom in the sense of a loss of some choice – but this loss isn't bad. It's one that I desire for very good reasons.

A similar point can be made with respect to autonomy. A decision is made at a higher level – a higher legislative level, if you will – to trust the judgment of a person one has good reason to trust. The trust is not blind, it is not faith. Thus the agent exhibits both independence of mind and responsiveness to reasons.

But the critic of borrowed moral knowledge – the person who believes that it isn't even possible – will argue that this strategy misses the point entirely. A judger may well decide for herself not to decide for herself (with respect to some other judgment), but this just shows she has reasons to believe that the judger is an expert and is correct. However, the moral proposition in question – the one she is supposedly taking the expert's word on – she is not justified in accepting because she doesn't have a grasp of the reasons for *that*. The claim must be something like: to understand the moral proposition and that it applies here, one must understand the reasons and see that they

obtain. Without seeing for oneself that they obtain, one cannot be said to have moral knowledge and be responsive to the right sorts of reasons. The skeptic would argue, for example, that a variation of Jones' Peter case – let's call him Paul – who accepts the testimony of his fellow co-op members, cannot know that the rejected candidates are sexist. Or, to use the Mill example, a person who doesn't see for himself that the higher pleasures are better cannot just take Mill's word for it. Not only does the fool not know, the fool *cannot* know that the "higher" are superior to the "lower." And, if one sees what the reasons are and that they obtain, then one need *not* trust to the extent of "borrowing" her knowledge. There can still be a weak role for the expert, of course, which does not involve borrowing. But the more interesting, and more robust, role for the expert views her as a source of moral knowledge indirectly – by authority, and that is what the skeptic about borrowing challenges. Thus, he will argue that there is a difference between the Department store case, where I am simply for my own convenience deciding to make a choice within limited options – in letting the store decide what my choices will be, in effect, and a case where I purportedly *believe* – and am supposedly justified in believing – what the moral expert claims simply on the basis of the expert making the claim. And, again, there is some pull to it. The truly analogous case is one where I can't see for myself why these clothes are tasteful, yet defer to the buyer's taste utterly. I judge the outfits to be tasteful, but without seeing why. And – again – the oddity seems preserved.

However, this skeptic must absorb another oddity. If not endorsing borrowing, the skeptic will then be committed to saying that one may know that the expert knows "p", but not know "p" oneself, in circumstances where one understands "p". Of course one could bite the bullet on this, but it is a bit odd. I suspect that the skeptic is making a confusion between evidence for a proposition and reasons why the proposition is true. In cases of knowledge claims justified by direct observation – e.g. I know his shirt is red – there is overlap. But in the case of testimony there is no overlap. My evidence that the utterer's testimony is true is not the same as the reasons that

make the proposition uttered true. Now, we may want to claim that knowledge based on a full comprehension of the reasons is somehow better – maybe a kind of "super-knowledge" or "knowledge-plus" or "*uber*-knowledge", because it does involve an appreciation of the reasons, and possesses "traction" – can be generalized to other contexts, for example. But this doesn't mean that "knowledge" of a proposition which does not involve an appreciation of the reasons that directly justify the proposition does not count as true knowledge. When the proposition is understood and there is good evidence for it and it is true – that is what warrants the claim of knowledge, both in normative and non-normative areas.

A person sympathetic to both my analysis and what one could loosely be termed the Kantian view of judgment could sensibly maintain that there is a distinction between *making* a judgment and *accepting* a judgment. Making a moral judgment plausibly requires grasping the justificatory reasons oneself; accepting does not. But accepting someone else's judgment is still a viable source of knowledge, though one may feel it inferior somehow since it lacks what I have termed "traction." That is, if one lacks a grasp of the reasons then one is not as likely to be able to generalize the knowledge into new contexts.

The skeptic about borrowing could respond by noting that "I know that he knows that 'p' but I don't know that 'p'" is odd, but only in non-normative contexts. Consider: "I know that the expert knows that the Mona Lisa is beautiful, but I don't know that the Mona Lisa is beautiful." The skeptic will argue that in order to know that the Mona Lisa is beautiful I must have a certain emotional response, of pleasure, let's say, to the painting. Without that I do not really know that it is beautiful. However, this emotional response is not necessary for non-normative judgment. So, if I know that x knows that p, it doesn't follow that there is a corresponding feeling.

However, those who hold this view must maintain that the feeling goes not with knowledge per se, but with belief. And those critical of borrowing moral knowledge don't argue that one cannot believe that "p" on the basis of testimony. Rather, they argue that one cannot know because the belief that one has

is not properly justified. So the issue of feeling the right way is moot.

That being said, there is something special about this sort of moral trust, which makes it different from the aesthetic case and thus we get to the asymmetry problem. One could argue that it is incumbent on a moral agent to try to learn to appreciate the moral reasons, to the extent that the moral agent can do so without undue interference with other projects. Call this the goal of moral perfectionism. However, spelling out this sort of perfectionism can be tricky. Presumably it would involve trying ones best to make good moral judgments and to act rightly. But even if there is some duty to self perfection like this, it can't provide a complete explanation, since there will be many cases where we do not think someone has a moral duty to understand everything that is relevant to making a moral decision – even an extremely important moral decision. It might make perfect sense, for example, for someone to delegate a decision to an expert. Suppose that Stanley must decide whether or not to authorize keeping his ailing father alive using "extraordinary" means. Suppose that Stanley has good reason to trust another person – someone with experience, perhaps the family's physician. Then, when the physician says "Trust me, Stanley, you ought not to do it – it will cause unnecessary pain", doesn't it make sense to say that Stanley *knows* it (given it is true and he believes it)?

Instead, the worry about borrowing moral knowledge may be due to the worry that it is much harder to enter into reliable trust with respect to a putative moral expert. Disinterestedness or impartiality is harder to achieve, for example. Upon reflection we may recognize the possibility of moral experts, yet withhold granting authority as readily as we do in the case of aesthetic experts. This is because it is more difficult for someone to demonstrate satisfaction of the relevant markers in the case of moral judgment and/or transmission of the judgment. But it is not a manifestation of the autonomy worry in a way peculiar to moral judgment.

One can draw an analogy with Hume's views on why one should not trust reports of miracles. Whether or not miracles

actually exist, there is generally some other hypothesis that best explains the testimony and does not appeal to miracles. Now, the testimony of moral experts is not incredible, or need not be incredible – so I don't mean to draw the analogy along those lines. But the case illustrates the point that one can well believe that for all one knows moral experts exist, while having other reasons for not endorsing their testimony. If this merely seems to be more true of moral experts than aesthetic ones, we have one way of diagnosing the asymmetry problem.

Combine this with another sort of autonomy worry, and you begin to have a pretty good idea of why people would tend to discount moral expertise relative to aesthetic expertise. To many, acceptance of moral expertise might mean a loss of control. If there are moral experts and if borrowing is justified, the expert judgment becomes binding in a way that the aesthetic expert's judgment does not. I'm free to thumb my nose at Martha Stewart, but not so in the case of the moral expert. Many view moral reasons as actually overriding, but even those who reject overridingness will concede that moral norms are to be taken very, very seriously indeed. Thus, the impact on one's life of accepting the testimony of the moral 'expert' can be far greater. This consideration offers an *explanation* for the reluctance, but not yet a *justification*. But combine this with the other factor – the epistemological worry about being able to identify and trust the expert, and what's at stake, and you've got a bit of a justification. But it's important for the cost issue to be considered only in combination with the epistemological worry. Clearly, if I decide not to consult the moral expert simply because finding out the moral truth makes my life more difficult – that really won't do. But if it is just harder for me to determine the expert in the moral case, the cost issue becomes relevant because it also won't do to just flip a coin. In that case, I may as well consider the burden the moral ''expert'' places on me. But this doesn't justify in those cases where I do know who the moral expert is, and I know that I can trust her – or, more weakly – I have justified belief. And this isn't so in the aesthetic case, normally. But hold these factors constant, and you get the same issues coming up and the asymmetry between moral and

aesthetic disappears. Consider a situation in which one must decide who gets a coveted grant in circumstances where resources for supporting aesthetic projects are scarce. Imagine also that one really can't tell very well who the aesthetic experts are – or trust them (let's say, because there aren't any impartial experts). The stakes are high and the epistemological worry surfaces. Then, there will be more reluctance to defer to a putative expert, as in the moral case. For these reasons I find that the puzzle is superficial. But the autonomy of the decision makes no difference in either case. This analysis has the added benefit of explaining why we might view prudential experts with suspicion. As Mill noted, the individual is usually the best judge of what is in the individual's interest (Mill, 1966). Given competing interests that exist between individuals, given lack of neutrality or impartiality, one perhaps ought to find the delivered judgments of the "life expert" to offer no guide – or, at least, no improvement over one's own independently arrived at judgment. Again, it isn't autonomy that proves crucial, but our views about the reliability of the judgment and its transmission.

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NOTES

[1] See Montaigne's essay "On Experience," in *The Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Cohen (Harmondsworth: Penguin), pp. 343–344.

[2] See Smith (1994, pp. 4–13) on objective commitments with respect to moral language.

[3] Anscombe is concerned with making the very nice distinction between acting (on authority) and believing (on authority). When it comes to belief she points out that it is possible to have moral beliefs purely on authority, but when one acts one *decides* and here one "… can hardly escape being one's own pilot". (p. 48). See "Authority in Morals", pp. 43–50.

[4] Another interesting distinction made by Anscombe, op.cit., is the distinction between moral truths that are *per se* revealed and moral truths that are *per accidens* revealed. Those which are *per se* revealed are those which could not otherwise be known – that is, they could only be known through revelation by some authority (probably prophetic), and "…not for any reason, not because of any facts, not because of any hopes or prospects, but simply: such and such is good to do, this is to be believed, and could not be known or inferred from anything else." (p. 49) There is good reason for skepticism regarding the *per se* revealed truths. Moral truths (or judgments) revealed *per accidens* are those that one comes to believe on the basis of authority, but they *could have*, in principle, been worked out for oneself. It is this category that includes both borrowed moral knowledge and other moral knowledge based on authority. Even borrowed moral knowledge could be figured out (by the borrower or by someone else). Its warrant doesn't depend on faith.

[5] As it turns out this is a complicated claim, hopefully to be clarified later in the paper.

[6] Again, the non-cognitivist might point out that he has no problem with this since it follows that there can't be moral experts, except as experts on typical human reactions to cases, for example. Presumably aesthetic experts would be handled the same way, and it would be pointed out that there are fewer practical problems associated with accepting aesthetic experts as opposed to moral ones.

[7] See Jones (op. cit).

[8] Ibid.

[9] Thomas (1992), in a very interesting article, "Moral Deference," discusses how this is the case. He writes "No amount of imagination in the world can make it the case that one has the subjective imprimatur of the experiences and memories of another. And an individual's subjective imprimatur makes a very real difference." (p. 235) Thomas' claim is that we owe *prima facie* moral deference to those who, with a good will, also have experience that privileges them to speak authoritatively about the significance of their experiences. This is entirely consistent with the view I have that experience is an important mechanism in providing moral sensitivity relative to the given experience.

[10] Note that this is compatible with Singer's views.

[11] It is important to note that there is another sense of expertise, associated with skill, that is not the sense I am talking about here. For example, one may be an expert masseuse because one has a skill at massaging muscles. This may or may not involve being an expert in judgment.

[12] Brink adds the beliefs should be "held with confidence" and "stable over time".

[13] Montaigne *Essays*, op. cit.

[14] See her essay "Quine as Feminist," in *A Mind of One's Own*, edited by Louise Antony and Charlotte Witt (Westview, 1993).

[15] In "Of the Standard of Taste" David Hume recounts a story from *Don Quixote*, related by Sancho, in which two wine tasters who happen to be his kinsmen have their taste confirmed:

Two of my kinsmen were once called to give their opinion of a hogshead, which was supposed to be excellent, being old and of a good vintage. One of them tastes it; considers it; and after mature reflection pronounces the wine to be good, were it not for a small taste of leather, which he perceived in it. The other, after using the same precautions, gives also his verdict in favor of the wine; but with the reserve of a taste of iron, which he could easily distinguish. You cannot imagine how much they were both ridiculed for their judgment. But who laughed in the end? On emptying the hogshead, there was found at the bottom, an old key with a leathern thong tied to it. (p. 282, in *Hume's Ethical Writings*, ed. Alasdair MacIntyre, University of Notre Dame Press, 1965)

Hume also, elsewhere in the essay, discusses the significance of this sort of confirmation for establishing credentials, though the delicacy of taste of course exists independent of the establishment of the credentials.

[16] See Craig's (1990, pp. 158–159). Craig is actually discussing the concept of "knowledge" in terms of an informant, or a good informant.

[17] For more on this, and the resulting possibility of "epistemic injustice" see Fricker's (1998).

[18] This raises the possibility of an expert in judging moral experts – a kind of meta moral expert. Since the properties not specific to experience would be the same between the moral expert and the meta moral expert, and since it seems counterintuitive to just hold that meta moral expertise just collapses into moral expertise, then experience plays an important role in establishing the credentials of the moral expert.

[19] See Arpaly, (2003, Chapter 4) for a delineation of the variety of senses. Arpaly distinguishes at least eight different senses of "autonomy," among them are making up one's own mind and responsiveness to reasons.

[20] Susan Brison also discusses different ways in which "autonomy" is used. See her "The Autonomy of Free Speech", *Ethics* (1998).

[21] Such as Tom Hill's example of the "deferential wife" indicates. This case is also discussed by Arpaly, op. cit.

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