Deference and the Moral Properties of Imaginative Experience

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Abstract

When our moral views are based on the moral views of another, we are in a state of deference to that person. There are philosophers who think that such a state is not ideal. Sarah Sarah McGrath[1] defends moral deference arguing that it is no different than non-moral deference. It is natural for us to accept the moral views of others even if we have not critically examined the views for ourselves. Court opinions can be justified by the views of expert testimony, say when a Supreme Court justice rules on whether a given interpretation of the constitution is accurate or not. However, this assumes cognitivism, which is a narrower understanding of how we can know moral facts. While such an understanding may or may not be true in the non-moral realm, there are important differences between the moral and non-moral claims. Most important among these differences is how we feel about them. This means that our understanding of how we come to know moral facts may be too narrow.

1 Knowledge First Justification

McGrath[2] defends moral testimony arguing that when we adopt the beliefs of others without critically analyzing them first, we are deferring our moral decisions to that person. Imagine a younger sibling calling an older sibling in front of his friends. Perhaps the younger sibling has told his friends that the exact position and momentum of sub-atomic particles cannot be known and has called his brother, a physicist at the University of Hawaii to confirm this fact for him. It is natural for us to accept the non-moral views of others, even if we have not

[1] *Moral Knowledge* (Oxford University Press, 2019), https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198805410.001.0001.

[2] Ibid.

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2. Remove line numbers, and generally make it look as you would if sending it out in an app. (Unless one of us asks otherwise.)
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Also, SCOTUS is not a great example of a reliable source these days, so I'd not use that.

Also, a SCOTUS ruling isn't testimony; it is an exercise of legal authority that establishes what the law of the land is.

Commented [MR4R3]: Would you say expert testimony justifies belief? Our beliefs are often justified by the views of expert testimony, for instance, regarding the intent behind an article in the constitution.

A better example: expert testimony in court cases, if the testimony influences the judgment of the jury or the defendant. Although the plaintiff's expert testimonial witness was found to be inadmissible, in the case Daubert v. Merrell Dox … [1]

Commented [DH5]: Why think it assumes cognitivism? Perhaps her view does, but nothing in this abstract gives reason to think it does.

Once again: **what do you mean by cognitivism and non-cognitivism**? It can't be what these terms mean in most … [2]

Commented [MR6R5]: Moral properties are like secondary qualities in that they are response-dependent properties. They cause a certain experience in us when we taste them. (Cognitive, metaphysical emotionism, realist about moral properties)

… [3]

critically examined them ourselves. Moral deference then is no different from observation. Therefore, there is reason to think criticisms against deference over intellectualize the transmission of knowledge.

Here, I first articulate McGrath's cognitivism showing that it raises important questions for moral realists. Specifically, I highlight the importance of social networks for our apprehension of the validity of moral truth claims. Next, I develop a view that aligns with McGrath's cognitivism as a kind of social science, recognizing the importance of peer networks. Following this, I argue that these are central to our intuitive notions of right reason. Ultimately, I defend the view that the kind of reasons which we look for in right action, are a special kind of sensitivity to the plight of others.

1.1 A Theoretical Approach to Moral Realism

Before progressing further, it will be helpful to establish some previous committments. Moral knowledge is the view that moral propositions like other non-moral propositions are knowable. But there are many questions surrounding what it means to know a moral proposition, that may not apply in the same way to non-moral propositions. One question has to do with how moral knowledge is transmitted. Although many of these kinds of questions are applicable in the non-moral context also, they are magnitudes more challenging in the moral context. Take the question of whether there is a theoretical science of ethics or ask whether there are moral experts.

In one given case, a man defers to his wife because he believes that she knows the correct *theory* of morality, and that it is her application of this theoretical knowledge that allows her to judge correctly on particular occasions. In another, the wife simply

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Commented [MR8R7]: Therefore McGrath argues that moral deference is no different from observation. From this, it would follow that there is reason to think criticisms against deference over intellectualize the transmission of knowledge.

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judges, in the manner of a would-be Aristotelian *phronimos*, that such-and-such an action is the thing to be done in the circumstance. Sam adopts these judgments as his own.

According to particularism, some facts are true in a given context, but may be false in another. There are several ways to contrast moral and non-moral domains with respect to particularism. This is in part because it is not always the case that scientific disciplines are defined perfectly by boundaries. For instance, while physics and medicine are distinctive scientific disciplines, they are largely ordered according to the same laws and experts generally understand how to apply the laws relevant to their domain. The law of gravity affects both planetary objects and cochlear fluid. When there is an exception, say in the case of quantum particles, experts largely begin looking for a new unifying law. While one may be an expert in a given moral domain, it is possible that different moral domains are also governed by the same laws. Such an individual does not need to have a better grasp of those laws, just the applicability of them in a given scientific domain.

If realism is true, then moral inquiry is an attempt to discover moral facts and the proper aim of moral judgment is to depict or represent the facts correctly, perhaps by looking for reliable methods for detecting their properties. The judgment, *Murder is wrong*, is a representation of a given action. When one morally judges correctly, this just means to say that they have correctly identified the property of wrongness on a given action or behavior. In the non-moral realm, we may use engineering, models, and algorithms to detect the presence of properties. A progressive view of ethics would make the case that we may one day discover technological approaches to detecting moral properties, such as brain scans.

Perhaps there may be a worry that this commits us to moral realism too quickly. That the fact that there are moral facts as evidenced by our emotional experiences, does not necessarily mean that we are detecting moral properties. For instance, a standard utilitarian argues that the good is what maximizes happiness, an emotion and therefore we might think that our emotions could not exist without moral properties. But it could also be the case that our perception of moral properties depends on our emotions. 'Compassion is Good' may be a fact determined by our emotions, constructed by our emotions, or discovered by our emotions. In the one, the fact is true in virtue of our emotional response while on the other, our emotion either is or is not accurate with respect to our experience of 'good'. "The term 'realism' is sometimes reserved for a kind of mind-independence: on this interpretation, *a* is *F* is real, if *a*'s being *F* does not depend on our regarding *a* as *F*'."[3] But this only specifies external realism. An internal realist may say that *compassion is good* depends on our regarding *compassion as good*. E.g., see Hilary Putnam[4]. Some sensibility theories fit the internalist view by equating moral properties with secondary qualities.[5] There are many more thorny issues with respect to non-cognitivist moral views. My aim in this section however, was not to defend one over another. Rather, as I will show further down, McGrath rules out non-cognitivism too quickly.

[3] Jesse J. Prinz, *The Emotional Construction of Morals*, repr. 2013 (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013), 14.

[4] "Why There Isn't a Ready-Made World," *Synthese* 51, no. 2 (1982): 141–67, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20115741.

[5] See Stephen Darwall, Allan Gibbard, and Peter Railton, "Toward Fin de Siècle Ethics: Some Trends," *The Philosophical Review* 101, no. 1 (1992): 115–89, https://doi.org/10.2307/2185045; John McDowell, *Morality and Objectivity (Routledge Revivals): A Tribute to J. L. Mackie*, ed. Ted Honderich (Routledge, 2013), https://books.google.com?id=IrkdjkBVNY4C; and David Wiggins, *A Sensible Subjectivism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

Against the Critical Reflection View

After having specified some committments of moral realism more generally and non-cognitivism more particularly, it will be helpful to highlight some committments of cognitivism with respect to moral realism. McGrath defends a knowledge first view of justification. According to the standard account of non-moral justification, if our beliefs are justified, then they are based on adequate grounds and lack sufficient overriding reasons against them. Thomas Scanlon[6] argued that moral reasons are fundamentally grounded in desire in that they give an agent non-reducible reasons for acting in some way. Here, it is true that some agent *S* ought not to ϕ because *S* has a reason not to ϕ. This is true in one of two ways: First, either *S* has a reason to do *A* just in case doing *A* would promote the fulfillment of some desire *S* has, or *S* has a reason to do *A* if doing *A* would promote the fulfillment of a desire that *S* would have if *S* were fully aware of the relevant non-normative facts and thinking clearly. Therefore reasons are reasons for a person if that person has the relevant desire or would have the relevant desire if fully informed and thinking clearly.

For McGrath however, the desire is not central. According to the critical reflection view, if one is critically reflective of a given belief and just in case one may have adequate grounds to hold the view, then that moral belief is justified. Mary, Sue and Clarice may be justified on the assumption that they fulfilled their obligations in gathering evidence to support their belief about the importance of

[6] *Being Realistic about Reasons*, First edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

inoculation. Once they have considered all the plausible reasons against holding that belief, then their belief lacks sufficient overriding reasons against it and they would be justified in assenting to it.

The activity of justifying one's belief, is the activity of an agent identifying a set of judgments she has, 'genocide is morally impermissible', 'murder is wrong', 'one should not plagiarize'. Typically, one justifying a belief begins by defining concepts and terms that comprise that belief. Justice is an important concept related to obligations we have towards one another. When we meet our obligations towards one another, we are acting justly. Murder is unjust killing meaning that murder represents an instance of failing to meet one's obligations towards another. Genocide constitutes many individual instances of murder such that it amounts to an entire population being unjustly killed. We then justify the claim "genocide is wrong" by pointing out inconsistencies in the alternative view, 'genocide is not wrong'. Genocide is wrong on this account because murder is wrong and genocide is multiple instances of murder.

Therefore, a set of conditions that a belief needs to satisfy to be justified includes the ability to critically reflect on that belief and equilibrium between it and the principles it is grounded in.

Critical reflection refers to the activity of an agent identifying a set of judgments she has, genocide is morally impermissible, murder is wrong, one should not plagiarize. She then attempts to formulate a set of general principles which account for her judgments. She might argue, for instance, that murder is wrong because it undermines the autonomy of moral agents. She then attempts to determine whether

her principles are compatible with her judgments, recursively modifying either until they are.[7] On such views, one's knowledge is primarily grounded in her ability to engage in critical reflection. For us to acknowledge that another has knowledge, we must access whether the other is able to demonstrate her ability to critically reflect on her claims or show us that she has done so. If a friend tells us that we should not harm a fly, but is unable to ground this judgment in a principle that they also hold, for instance "harming is wrong", we would not recognize their belief "harming the fly is wrong" as knowledge. Accordingly, there are times wherein our ability to critically reflect on a given claim is undermined by environmental factors. Such factors can include for instance, the death of a loved one causing extreme emotional instability, a real and present danger such as a gunman in our home, or perhaps significant depression etc.

According to the standard account, we show that we understand when we are able to establish cohesion between our beliefs and the principles they are grounded in.[8] Following Rawls and Scanlon, McGrath argues that what we know about the world depends on evidence. However, she diverges arguing that this evidence is provided by observation rather than critical reflection. We defer all the time in non-moral cases. We often attribute knowledge regardless of whether the knower appreciates why a moral claim is true (against the critical reflection view) and therefore a moral knower does not need to appreciate why a moral claim is true.

[7] McGrath, *Moral Knowledge*, ch. 2; also see Scanlon, *Being Realistic about Reasons*, 76–77.

[8] Alison Hills, "Moral Testimony and Moral Epistemology," *Ethics* 120, no. 1 (October 2009): 94–127, https://doi.org/10.1086/648610, 167

Justification could also be achieved through observation. The fact that I am blinded by the sun's rays when I open my bedroom curtain is a sufficient overriding reason against my belief that it is still night out. Further, my perception that the sun is shinning is direct. Direct perception then is an adequate ground to hold a given belief. Mary, Sue, and Clarice can be overwhelmed by the force of an argument in favor of inoculation. But what this shows us, is that to suppose that our judgments need to correspond with held principles is too stringent of a demand as it does not explain all that we know. The problems McGrath finds in this account are as follows. For one, it does not account for a lot of our knowledge about the world. For instance, we do not need to critically reflect on our beliefs about feeling the sun's rays on our skin to know that the sun is shining. Similarly, we do not need to reflect on the fact that some actions seem morally right while others wrong.

Furthermore, it is unclear whether moral perceptions unlike non-moral ones can be highly context dependent. During stressful moments, a harmless joke may seem incredibly insensitive. Moral perceptions can be amenable to change, but this does not mean that non-moral perceptions are less so. Although it would be odd to think that the sun is more harsh on one's skin because of the loss of a loved one, it can be that the sun is less tolerable given the loss of a loved one. While it may feel perfectly just to young Mary to deny credence to Sam's testimony given his less than perfect command of the English language, older Mary can look back on her young self with regret and remorse for the beliefs she once held. But it is more likely that we would think that Mary has developed moral understanding, or is now better able to recognize finer distinctive properties, and therefore xenophobia no longer feels right to her.

Believing that *p* in a way that is good from an epistemic point of view satisfies the chief desiderata for a concept of epistemic justification.

Having these beliefs signifies that we have *done* something to show *'that p'* or that we are justified in believing *'that p'*. We might recognize that the believing subject has not violated any epistemic, cognitive, or intellectual obligations which may include refraining from believing *'that p'* in the absence of sufficient evidence, accepting implications of the belief *'that p'*, etc. But we have many more beliefs which are involuntary, and these we treat the same as we do the justified beliefs. Though it is plausible, I would be hard pressed to disbelieve that the traffic light is green.

As such, it would seem that whatever concept of justified beliefs we hold under the critical reflection view, it is too stringent to explain much of the knowledge we are supposed to have. Therefore, given that many of our beliefs are involuntary, that I have hands for instance, we often are thought to have fulfilled our obligations with respect to such beliefs. Following this, McGrath then points out that what this means, is that we often act as though being justified is a more important epistemic state than is the state of justifying. Being justified is being in a state of knowledge and while we do think of justification as important, a different path to justification rests on what we know.

Therefore, by the time a typical moral agent is capable of the kind of reflection or other justifying devices necessary for knowledge acquisition, she already has a substantial amount of justified moral beliefs.[9]

[9] McGrath, *Moral Knowledge*, ch. 2; also see William P. Alston, *Epistemic Justification: Essays in the Theory of Knowledge*, 1. publ, Cornell Paperbacks (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1989).

In the traditional arrangement, beliefs meet various criteria including justification and truth. Knowing first means that prior to belief, an agent already possesses knowledge that justifies the belief. We would think that having knowledge, knowing for instance *that p* means that whatever grounds we were previously looking for, are present already prior to cognitive states such as belief or justification. Knowing is a basic form of cognitive access to the world. On the critical reflection view then,

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A moral belief *M* counts as knowledge *mK* for moral agent *S* just in case *M* is the result of critical reasoning or deliberation performed by *S*.

However, we often credit an agent with knowledge by the time she is capable of the kind of critical reasoning required under the critical reflection view. In this case then, many of our justified beliefs derive from a kind of perception. I know that the sun is shinning because I can perceive that it is shinning. I am having a given perception that happens before critical reflection. Therefore direct perception is one source of knowledge.

Justification regarding moral testimony, in part, depends on whether we can defend our belief on the basis of the testimony we received. We often take testimony as a source of evidence. This is because testimony is a natural source of belief. We think someone should receive a given vaccine if all the leading experts in a given medical field have testified to its efficacy. We often cite various medical reports in defending our medical decisions. Therefore it seems plausible that we can defend our moral beliefs in the same way, what McGrath calls *moral inheritance*.

Being justified is a more important state than justifying and a justified belief for S is one based on adequate grounds and where S lacks sufficient overriding reasons to the contrary.[10]

Therefore,

What justifies is restricted to a subject's perceptual ability to observe various facts about the world.

In defense of Moral Inheritance

McGrath[11] defends a social epistemology, according to which, a person's earliest moral views are "inherited from her social environment." We do often rely on another's testimony when it comes to things we do not know, such as knowing how to get around in an unfamiliar city. This is because knowledge is a communal enterprise, and it is difficult knowing what to do outside these social contexts.[12] We are dependent on others for much of what we know morally about the world. We often receive testimony in the same way that we observe facts about our environment. Observation and testimony then are both sources of evidence. Therefore, moral testimony as a form of deference refers to our natural tendency to adopt beliefs held by those around us. The moral beliefs of a given agent are often shared by the members of her community. There are times when there is disagreement, but these cases are typically exceptional. For instance, Martin

[10] Alston, *Epistemic Justification.*

[11] *Moral Knowledge.*

[12] C. A. J. Coady, *Testimony: A Philosophical Study*, 1. ed. in paperb (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Nick Leonard, "The Transmission View of Testimony and the Problem of Conflicting Justification," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 55, no. 1 (2018): 27–35, https://www.jstor.org/stable/45128596.

Luther King may have a different set of moral beliefs from those in his community, but the disagreement is a source of conflict until the conflict is resolved through something like moral equilibrium. Here the moral beliefs of Martin Luther King, and the other members of his community begin to converge. What is important here, is that the moral conflict is not in a community, but shows a split between communities. Martin Luther King's community is still the source of his moral beliefs, for instance the Ebenezer Baptist Church pastored by his father Martin Luther King Sr.

There are two questions in particular that may help us to understand what is strange about unquestioningly adopting the moral views of others. To understand these, it will be helpful to understand the contexts in which they are important. First, we should not confuse questions about whether we should accept another's testimony, with the observation that we often do. It can be unproblematic that we accept a friend's directions to the stadium because we often defer in non-moral testimonial cases. An example of this is apparent when we are in an unfamiliar city or other kind of setting. Similar to other instances of testimonial transmission cases, a child who learns the capitals of various cities and states as a part of her primary education, is treated as though she possesses a distinctive kind of knowledge, namely the capitals of various states and cities. She obtains this knowledge primarily because she accepted the testimony of her parents or older siblings. That Cheyenne is the capital of Wyoming for instance.

McGrath then argues that in non-moral contexts, we are "prepared to sweepingly defer to others about what to do in particular cases. This is true even when we do not suspect that they have some general theoretical knowledge that we lack."[13] But there is a difference

[13] McGrath, *Moral Knowledge*, 77.

between moral and non-moral cases. We might think that there is no theoretical science of ethics while there is a theoretical science of other fields. We will go to a physicist for questions about gravitational waves but an epidemiologist for questions about vaccine efficacy. Who could we defer to in cases of moral belief? There are some reasons why we might think that moral cases are analogous. I.e., moral particularism, one may be an expert in particular cases only. We may talk to a relationship expert when unsure of what to do to improve our relationship with family members. In such cases however, theoretical, broad sweeping knowledge, is unnecessary.

2 Social Reflection

The problem is that defending deference via cognitivism, fails to appreciate all the ways in which our faculties enables us to recognize the truth of a given moral proposition about the way that the world is. Especially that it neglects the important role that our perceptions play in our moral cognition. What it in effect says is that while we may be incapable of perceiving for ourselves the truth of a given proposition, our apprehension of the given truth by way of testimony or deference is a valid substitute. However, while this may or may not be true in the non-moral realm, I give some reasons to think that there is an asymmetry between the moral and non-moral realms with respect to such claims. We can come to know the truth about the way the world is in more ways than that recognized by McGrath and it may be possible that we have an ulterior obligation to do so. For instance, we can come to perceive the truth about a given proposition in the same way that we can perceive the sun shinning on our face. In the next section, I suggest that narrative is a form of moral testimony which fine-tunes those faculties central to moral perception enabling us to better perceive the moral truth of a given moral proposition.

Social epistemologists often question whether some individuals can have a better grasp on the moral particulars of a given social order, or given the current social environment, than others. Someone might know what to do relative to others, when conflicts arise among members of a given culture for instance. The concern here is that someone may strictly rely on another's testimony for their own moral views in a given context only. But while one action may be right in one context but not another, it is still possible that there is a general theory of rightness that explains why an action is the right one in one context but the wrong one in another.

2.1 Epistemic Standpoints

Consider a case by Karen Jones[14]. Peter lives in a cooperative house. Lately he has been feeling uneasy about the various decisions being made. In one case, the women in the home had withheld their support for several member applicants on the basis of sexism. Peter wanted to understand their allegations but was unable pick out the exact instances in question. Although with some cases, when the allegations were explained more carefully to him, he was able to understand the accusations, he was never able to see the evidence for himself. He was never able to point out specific instances without a careful explanation of why a certain look or tone of voice was deemed sexist [59–60].

[14] "Second-Hand Moral Knowledge," *The Journal of Philosophy* 96, no. 2 (February 1999): 55, https://doi.org/10.2307/2564672.

Epistemic standpoint theorists such as Jones[15]; Patricia Hill Collins[16]; Catharine Saint-Croix[17]; Helen Longino[18]; Susan Hekman[19]; have given us some reasons in defense of such views. For instance, some individuals have a better appreciation of, or are better able to recognize some moral facts because of their epistemic standing in a given society or their own personal experiences. Such sensitivity confers moral worth onto an agent's action and while they may or may not think that the sensitivity in question cannot come by way of moral testimony, the problem with some accounts is that they fail to recognize the importance of moral knowledge for moral understanding.[20] However, there are some accounts that provide room to go into this direction: "Reliably acting rightly is a part of having a good character, of course, but a good, virtuous person is someone whose whole self—her thoughts, decisions, feelings, and emotions as well as her actions—is structured by her sensitivity to morality."[21] Perhaps some of the confusion can be found in the possibility that these seemingly contradict this view: "Understanding is often associated with certain sorts of feeling: a flash of enlightenment; a light drawing.

[15] Ibid.

[16] *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2005), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203309506.

[17] "Privilege and Position," *Res Philosophica* 97, no. 4 (2020): 489–524, https://doi.org/10.11612/resphil.1953.

[18] "Subjects, Power, and Knowledge," in *The Gender of Science*, ed. Janet A. Kourany (Prentice-Hall, 2002), 310–21.

[19] "Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, January 1997, 341–65, https://doi.org/10.1086/495159.

[20] E.g., see Hills, "Moral Testimony and Moral Epistemology".

[21] Ibid., 112.

But these are not necessary . . ."[22] Perhaps the confusion consists in the fact that while one can recognize both moral and non-moral feeling: ". . . respect for others can be a feeling which is not explicitly moral,"[23] they may diverge some from the standard account. A point I worry about throughout this section, is whether feeling is distinctively important for moral consideration. This is perhaps what Scanlon hopes to show in his defense of irreducible normative reasons. This is because understanding requires more than knowledge or true belief in the way of cognitive appreciation of and facility with a given proposition–related reasons and reasoning,[24] which for Scanlon are grounded in desire.

Social Testimony

There is one particular direction for moral action that is gaining increased attention recently, is that of the fundamental purpose of moral behavior. Traditionally, ethicists such as Jocke, Mill, Kant were interpreted as defending accounts of moral behavior based on logic, reason, rationality. However, if we consider, for instance, Mill's famous line about the end of all action being happiness, and his definition of such as being more comprehensive then that which would only be fit for pigs, a picture emerges of ethics as being part of what makes a life good or well-lived. Conversations about ethics may then be conversations about what makes a life good.

[22] McGrath, *Moral Knowledge*, 103.

[23] Ibid., 109.

[24] Laura Frances Callahan, "Moral Testimony: A Re-Conceived Understanding Explanation," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 68, no. 272 (July 1, 2018): 441, https://doi.org/10.1093/pq/pqx057.

But lets imagine John. John is a professional soldier during a particularly fraught era in European history. As such, John has fought in many wars and has seen many good friends die. It may be that we can imagine John having difficulty having any sort of meaningful emotional attachment. For the cognitivist, John's emotional states do not matter. As long as John can recite the reasons why one does a given action, we might say that John *knows* a given moral proposition.

Assuming that John heard his commander give a list of reasons why a given action is right, and is able to appreciate why those reasons are valid, then John understands. Here, John has knowledge and understanding of a given proposition. Now lets imagine that both of John's parents have died recently. John's commander tells him to go to the store, buy a bouquet of roses, take them to the funeral, stay for one and a half hours, then he is free to leave. John faithfully follows the instructions his commander gives him, and accepts the reasons why these actions are the appropriate ones. If John did not have the experiences which he did, loosing many friends, seeing good people die, etc., we might find it odd that John isn't able to grieve on his own, but is told how to show that he is grieving.

The important point here, is that the emotional states which we expect John to have, have certain characteristic actions that follow them. Some think that moral behaviors too, can be actions characteristic of one's emotional state. This is because our faculties enable us to perceive moral properties. Some philosophers call this kind of perception sensibility and argued that our emotions are representations of this special kind of sensibility.[25] We can imagine earlier in one of the wars John fought in, that his friends were stuck behind enemy lines.

[25] Early sentimentalists included David Hume, Francis Hutcheson, The Earl of Shaftsbury and Adam Smith

John successfully motivates the unit he is a part of to conduct a very risky mission to free them. The only reason why they do so however, is because of a complex set of emotions which they all experienced upon hearing what happened to the friend's unit.[26]

If this is right, then what it shows us, is that morality is affective. It may be a good state of affairs for Peter to be able to trust reliable sources when he himself lacks the perceptual capacity to see what his moral obligations are in some given circumstance. However, a better state would be one wherein Peter acts out of direct rather than indirect appreciation for the right reasons. The important concern here is whether such perceptions are necessary or only sufficient for morally worthy action. An emotionist is going to say that such perceptions are necessary for morally worthy action. As such, morally right reasons here are essentially related to one's emotional states. Acting for the right reasons, means being moved by the appropriate feels [For some important emotionist theories, see; Darwall, Gibbard, and Railton[27]; John McDowell[28]; Wiggins[29]].

This helps us to understand why reasons are irreducibly normative, and because they are, moral testimony should motivate such reasons. Narratives have often been supposed to do just this. However there are some points that should be stressed first.

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[26] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Terence Irwin, Second (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1999) provides a well-known of moral virtue based on close intimate relationships.

[27] "Toward Fin de Siècle Ethics."

[28] "Values and Secondary Qualities," in *Morality and Objectivity*, ed. Ted Honderich (Routledge, 1985), 110–29.

[29] *A Sensible Subjectivism*.

There are often varying levels of truth found in narratives and as such, narratives are not always accurate with respect to various truths. A literary artist for instance, may imbellish on one claim while truthfully expressing another. For instance, a comic book author may create a character with super hero strength and the ability to fly, in order to communicate the importance of responsibility with one's unique strengths.

However, I suspect that some falsehoods are even more problematic than those often presented in narratives of virtue. Compare an individual with malevolent intentions falsely portraying members of a community. Because he dislikes the members of that community, or holds particular biases about what kinds of character the member possess, he intentially portrays them in such a way that will skew the public's perceptions of that community's members. Maybe with the intention of motivating beliefs about *what they are like* to more closely resemble those that he holds. Fans of a certain sports team may falsely portray fans of the opposing team at a sporting event by falsely representing them in a given false narrative, e.g., *Raider's fans are all violent*. Perhaps, regardless of the intentions of the one portraying falsehoods, some falsehoods cause harm while others elevate.

One available explanation as to why some inaccuracies are more harmful than others, is that when maligning others, we think that we have an obligation to be as truthful as possible. This is because the harms here outweigh the benefits. We are harming a particular person. In the virtuous narrative, the benefits provided by moral education outweigh the harms of inaccuracy with respect to the truth. As such, there are two kinds of inaccuracy in the narrative. One concerns the inaccurate narrative of the malicious individual attempting to harm others, while another seeks to represent reality. They lie (or embellish the truth) in order to communicate some aspect of moral reality that would be difficult or impossible to do without such embellishments.

This suggests that narrative accounts have an obligation to faithfully represent the landscape in a way dis-analogous to narratives of non-normative facts about the real world.[30] Facts such as the chemical composition of pool cleaner for instance. But we are still concerned with facts. As such, truth, faithfulness and accuracy are still requirements for representing the moral landscape. But this says nothing about our emotional responses. Our emotional responses to fiction aid in our moral understanding of a moral proposition. If an audience member is unhappy with the emotion prescribed by an artist, she declines engaging with that work of art. Even more damning for my argument, is the fact that sentimental optimists accept this conclusion. Only some literature is a source for moral knowledge. Accordingly, while some literature is a source for moral knowledge with the potential to undermine knowledge about moral reality, this is not the case for all literature. The rest is merely a-moral.

Similarly, relying on testimony in a range of situations confers justification to one's belief of a proposition. In a robust sense for example, when a child obtains true beliefs from a reliable source, for instance in primary education, we credit her with knowledge.[31] Similarly, the student who sits through forty hours of lecture on thermonuclear astrophysics has more justified beliefs about thermonuclear astrophysics than the student sits through five. However, the main reason for relying on moral testimony is not primarily to confer justification, to justify her beliefs, but rather to motivate behavior. To be trusted with the kinds of finances required for testing one's theories regarding thermonuclear astrophysics, one might need additional lecture hours in addition to a proven research record. There are

[30] E.g., Martha Craven Nussbaum, "Flawed Crystals: James's The Golden Bowl and Literature as Moral Philosophy," *New Literary History* 15, no. 1 (1983): 25–50, https://doi.org/10.2307/468992.

[31] E.g. McGrath, *Moral Knowledge*, 65.

several reasons for this. The person who holds justified non-moral beliefs on a topic, confirms or disproves the beliefs of others. Our own beliefs are justified by those who have justified beliefs, or who possess a greater degree of justification. Therefore, relying on justification to confirm that our moral belief is the correct one, leaves a lot to be desired. As such, the epistemic state that we care about in cases of moral testimony is understanding and not knowledge. The point of contention here is a difference between the epistemic state of knowledge and the one of understanding. Knowledge is knowing *that p*, that a given proposition is true or false, while understanding is knowing *that p* and *why p* is the case. This is perhaps a reason why a number of authors recognize a deep connection between narratives and moral knowledge.[32] We may think that what these authors mean by moral knowledge, is a richer state of understanding.

Additionally, authors have argued that the connection between narrative and moral knowledge has to do with a narrative's ability to express important moments in a character's emotional and moral development Martha C. Nussbaum[33]. Mr. Jones is an FBI operative tasked with observing and reporting on the activities of Mr. Smith, who is suspected of robbing a bank. Accordingly, Mr. Jones is being asked to give a first person account of the life and actions of Mr. Smith. Such accounts would clearly state that the observations being performed, are being done by Mr. Jones. "I, Mr. Jones, have observed the suspect, Mr. Smith, on the morning of …". But assuming that Mr. Smith has been brought in for questioning, the detective on the case, wants more information than that which can be provided by

[32] Martha Craven Nussbaum, *"Finely Aware and Richly Responsible": Literature and the Moral Imagination* (Oxford University Press, 1990); Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering*, 2010.

[33] "Symposium on Amartya Sen's Philosophy: 5 Adaptive Preferences and Women's Options," *Economics and Philosophy* 17, no. 1 (2001): 67–88.

Mr. Jones. If Mr. Smith chooses to be cooperative, then the detective may want to know *why* Mr. Smith robbed a given bank on a given day. While Mr. Jones may be able to give his assessment as to Mr. Smith's motives, he would not be able to do so in the same way as Mr. Smith. Mr. Jones can give a first person account of his observations regarding Mr. Smith actions and the motives he attributes to Mr. Smith's actions, and a third person account, for instance "Mr. Smith told me . . .", "or I obsevered Mr. Smith making pottery", he cannot give a second personal account as a matter of reporting because such accounts are intimately relational. Such accounts would provide Mr. Jones with an awareness of Mr. Smith as a rational or not sort of agent because Mr. Jones would understand Mr. Smith's motivations as a matter of experience rather than reporting and third party observation. Such an account from Mr. Smith would enable reciprocal understanding of the other's moral autonomy.[34]

Narratives can be a source of second personal knowledge where through narratives, we develop close relationships with characters in narratives.[35] We might think this is plausible assuming that a narrative has an ability to represent these important moments contributing to our sense of familiarity with them. Perhaps we then grow along with the individual through the narrative. We experience moments of hardship and joy, and other defining moments which often contribute to our understanding of the world as potentially experienced by that character. It is not immediately clear what this has to do with moral understanding of a given moral proposition. The standard argument is that narratives are a form of moral education. However, this connection spans two separate concerns. First, there is the less controversial

[34] See Stephen Darwall, *Honor, History, and Relationship : Essays in Second-Personal Ethics II*, vol. First edition (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2013), https://ezp.slu.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=656592&site=eds-live.

[35] Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 78.

worry about moral testimony as a source for moral knowledge.[36] However, this can lead to questions about the perceived relationship between art and ethics, an issue that is more contentious.[37]

While Stump suggests that we can understand narratives as a source of moral knowledge, the psychological implications, the processes involved, are not immediately clear. For such an account to develop beyond folk psychology, it will be helpful to distinguish between several psychological accounts of moral development. On another similar account regarding second-personal testimonies, Nussbaum[38] has defended an interpretation of Greek tragedy wherein the project of Greek tragedy is that it enables us to get a sense for just how fragile a good human life is. Ultimately, Nussbaum concludes that the most important feature of a good human life are our relationships with other persons. According to Nussbaum, tragedy as a form of narrative is important for its ability to communicate this intrinsic feature of a good human life. For instance, in Pindar's version of Aeschylus's Agamemnon, when Agamemnon sacrifices his daughter to meet his obligations to Zeus, he does so without any sense of the emotions we would expect one to have in a similar situation. As such, Agamemnon fails to recognize the moral conflict Zeus' demands have placed on him, the moral conflict undergirding his

[36] Hills, "Moral Testimony and Moral Epistemology"; Robert Hopkins, "What Is Wrong With Moral Testimony?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 74, no. 3 (2007): 611–34, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1933-1592.2007.00042.x; Philip Nickel, "Moral Testimony and Its Authority," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, September 1, 2001, 253–66, https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1011843723057; David Enoch, "A Defense of Moral Deference," *The Journal of Philosophy* 111, no. 5 (May 1, 2014): 229–58, https://doi.org/10.5840/jphil2014111520.

[37] Jonathan Gilmore, *Apt Imaginings: Feelings for Fictions and Other Creatures of the Mind*, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190096342.001.0001.

[38] "Symposium on Amartya Sen's Philosophy."

competing obligations to Zeus and Artimus. While narratives are often thought to communicate the emotions experienced by a character second-personally, in this telling of Agamemnon, narratives express what it would feel like when important emotions are vacant.

What is attractive about narrative is that it gives us insight into what communities plausibly care about, thereby helping us to understand what we may care about. Oftentimes, when we think about psychological disorders, one trait that many of them have in common is that they undermine the sense of connection that we may experience with other members of a close community of people. For instance, individuals with various mental health differences, may often lack recognizable expressions of empathy, and as a result, experience social isolation, or fail to show markers of human connection, such as eye contact. The point here is that our ability to share the perceptions of others may make up an intrinsic part of who we are as a species, the relationships that we cultivate with one another.

For instance, works geared towards pleasure as Gilmore[39] argues, are not intended for moral knowledge and therefore it is a matter of controversy whether they are unable to undermine moral knowledge. If the work is particularly morally problematic, then perhaps the author or audience is culpable, i.e., Birth of a Nation, but not the work. Importantly here however, there are many ways in which culpability of the audience can be absolved. Perhaps a certain segment of the audience is only interested in the historical facts surrounding Birth of a Nation, or the aesthetic qualities of the film, perhaps another segment of the audience is interested in the technology which led to the creation of the film. But the worry here is that on some level, there is a market value for such films which justifies their place in the market.

[39] *Apt Imaginings.*

To fix this, I suggest that narratives be defined as any work which represents human emotion in the context of human other relationships. In the context of human relationships, justice is often prioritized as the framework that best organizes such joint activities. However, given the above concerns surrounding moral testimony, we might think that an ethics of care will provide the best framework for understanding the importance of narratives for moral knowledge. On an ethics of care account, a systematic way to recognize moral frameworks in narratives would modeled on a sentimentalist ethic. Such an ethic could enable us to recognize moral testimony as a source of moral knowledge in a way other ethical theories are incapable of. Such accounts of moral testimony necessarily include narratives and therefore on an ethics of care account of moral testimony, narrative is an important source of moral knowledge not recognized in the literature as a kind of moral testimony.

Future directions of this work then could highlight the asymmetry of moral testimony in its ability or inability to confer morally worthy affective states. Critically analyzing literary examples might show the importance of affective states in moral reasoning and how without appropriate affect, something is missing in moral action. For instance, we might consider the ability of some given love song to stir our emotions in the way a love affair ought to. Because of the importance of affective states in moral reasoning, and how narratives are supremely important for showing this relation, future work would look at relationships between narratives and morally worthy action,

starting by looking at specific conversations between those who think that our emotions towards fictions are governed by the same criteria as our emotions towards situations in the real world, and those who disagree.[40]

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[40] See Gilmore, ibid; Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*; Nussbaum, "Symposium on Amartya Sen's Philosophy"; Nussbaum, "Aeschylus and Practical Conflict."

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