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Experts, Teachers and Their Epistemic Roles in Normative and Non-normative Domains

Comments on Dieter Birnbacher and Karen Jones & François
Schroeter

Abstract: Goldman's notions of expert and testimony in epistemological contexts are extended to normative issues. The result is a sketch of a conceptual framework: several types of experts and roles they can serve in informing not specially qualified recipients are distinguished; differences between experts in epistemological and moral contexts are highlighted. This framework then is the point of reference for claims about experts, expertise and moral testimony in Birnbacher's and Jones & Schroeter's contributions to this volume. First, Birnbacher's worries about the legitimacy of moral philosophers sitting as experts on panels, etc. are allayed in one respect and aggravated in another: there are roles and qualifications open to informants about normative issues, but it is doubtful whether moral philosophers per se are up to each of them. Secondly, Jones & Schroeter's objection to Hills's claim that moral testimony cannot orient its recipient properly towards right-making reasons for acting is faulty.

1. Introduction

We routinely rely on experts when it comes to normative and non-normative issues. In fact, many of our beliefs about issues such as nuclear power, climate change, democracy, capitalism, communism and embryo screening are formed on the basis of the word of experts. Whether this is epistemically defensible—in the case of experts about non-normative issues, henceforth *e-experts*—and whether this is morally defensible—in the case of experts in the domain of norms and values, henceforth *n-experts*—is highly controversial. The exact reasons for these assessments are markedly different. In epistemology it is uncontroversial that there are e-experts and that there is a certain respect due to their testimony. Rather, the debate is about what recipients of testimony have to do in order to make their reliance justified and whether they are capable of actually doing it. In moral philosophy, by contrast, it is controversial whether there even are n-experts and whether relying on them in our actions is morally acceptable at all. Perhaps the two debates can profit from each other: I will apply Goldman's take on the e-expert and on (factual) testimony to normative issues and use it as the point of reference for discussing Jones & Schroeter's account of reasons-

transferring moral testimony and Birnbacher's account of ethics experts and ethical expertise.

2. A Goldman-inspired Account of E-experts and E-teachers

Goldman conceives of the concepts of expert and expertise as tightly related—he even tends to slide from talk about the one concept to talk about the other. He begins by acknowledging that there is a notion of “expertise” which refers to skills only while stressing that this is not what he has in mind: cognitive expertise and thus cognitive or intellectual experts are what he is interested in. He develops three characteristics of cognitive experts and their expertise. First, cognitive experts have more true beliefs “and/or” fewer false beliefs in their domain of expertise (Goldman calls this the E-domain) than “the vast majority of people” (Goldman 2001, 91). This comparative requirement is counterbalanced by an absolute one: “Some non-comparative threshold of veritistic attainment must be reached, though there is great vagueness in setting this threshold.” (ibid.) Secondly, expertise includes a set of skills “to deploy or exploit this fund of information to form beliefs in true answers to new questions that may be posed in the domain” (ibid.). Thirdly, the E-domain contains the following two categories. Primary questions within the E-domain are “the principal questions of interest to the researchers or students of the subject-matter” (ibid., 92). By contrast, secondary questions “concern the existing evidence or arguments that bear on the primary questions and the assessments of the evidence made by prominent researchers” (ibid.). What delineates E-domains and how do we distinguish between them? For instance, is medical science a single E-domain or should we separate between the multitude of specialities and subspecialties? This is a moot point with Goldman. I think we should take him to endorse the received divisions and subdivisions.

With the help of the distinction between primary and secondary questions Goldman differentiates between different kinds of experts. *Strong experts* in a given E-domain are those who have expertise in the above sense with regard to both primary and secondary question in the E-domain. *Weak experts* only possess expertise with regard to secondary questions. *Reputational experts* are those who are—correctly or incorrectly—considered to be (weak or strong) experts.¹

2.1 Public and Research E-experts

The function the qualifier ‘principal’ in Goldman's delineation of primary questions is not transparent. Imagine someone is interested in the answer to the question ‘What is the rate with which objects fall on Mars?’. Such a question is not a principal question in science, i.e. one of the *main research questions*.

¹ There is a wealth of further useful information in Goldman's essay, e.g. the distinction between esoteric and exoteric statements or—more importantly—the inquiry into the quality of tools available to assess whether reputational e-experts are genuine e-experts.

However, such commonplace questions might be of burning interest to a learner, layman, novice, . . .—a *principal question of interest to a not specially qualified individual*.

So what does it take for a question to be a principal question? I think it is mistaken to read the qualifier ‘principal’ as being geared at picking out main research questions. Goldman’s reason for adding ‘principal’ is to prevent people who score high on answers to questions in the E-domain that interest people only marginally, but are atrocious when it comes to answers to questions that are of high—principal—interest from being experts. This does not mean that main research questions do not belong to the primary questions. After all, that the interests of researchers are included makes it very likely that main research questions are also included among the primary questions. It is just that questions such as the above which happen to interest not specially qualified individuals strongly are also among the primary questions. This reading is borne out by the following cues: First, the epistemic problem which Goldman proceeds to analyse is the following: “The novice/2-experts problem is whether a layperson can justifiably choose one putative expert as more credible or trustworthy than the other with respect to the question at hand, and what might be the epistemic basis for such a choice.” (Goldman (2001, 92) This problem is not limited to cases where the ‘question at hand’ is a main research question. On the contrary, its most frequent occurrences are when the ‘question at hand’ is a question the novice or layperson are interested in. That these are not limited to main research questions is obvious. Second, the examples of expert statements Goldman provides in the context of this inquiry also suggest that it is not just main research questions that count when it comes to experts: “There will be an eclipse of the sun on April 22, 2130, in Santa Fe, New Mexico” (ibid., 106) is not an answer to a primary research question. Yet statements of this type feature crucially in Goldman’s take on how laypersons can use experts’ track records to assess credibility. Third, there is a precedent in Goldman (1999, 94–96) for allowing degrees of interest and a generous understanding of question of interest.²

While this seems the best interpretation of Goldman’s classification in the light of what he says elsewhere, it results in problems. When differentiating between questions in a given domain and experts in this domain, all sorts of different classifications are *prima facie* acceptable. It all depends on the general project pursued. As just mentioned, Goldman uses his notion of expert in order to analyse communications between experts and laypersons such as the one about the solar eclipse. In such communications it is *prima facie* not necessary for the sender to be able to answer main research questions *per se*. Instead, in order to be reliable, he merely needs to be able to answer the commonplace questions his lay audience is interested in—and secondary questions that bear

² It has to be acknowledged that Goldman’s notion of interest has come under fire, especially by Kitcher 2002, and much of what Kitcher criticises also applies here. First, if I am right in saying that degrees of interest play a role in making someone an e-expert, it is unclear how exactly this should be implemented. Secondly, it is unclear how to aggregate interests. Do the interests of everyone count equally? Thirdly, how do we include the interest a society has in e-experts being able to answer certain questions, and which genesis of societal interests do we endorse? These issues have to be addressed in a full account of e-experts or n-experts!

on these questions. True, the audience may also be interested in main research questions—popular science and science journalism bear witness to this. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the qualifications the sender needs to have are governed by the interests of the lay audience.

To make matters worse, if we take a look at an obvious alternative project—namely an epistemological analysis of research experts—, we get the inverse result: if a person’s abilities as a researcher are under scrutiny, it seems awkward to tie expert status in this respect to the expert’s abilities to answer commonplace questions. What counts and what only counts are his abilities to provide cutting-edge answers to main research questions.

To sum up: including the interests of both researchers and laypersons in a single notion of expert is an ill-conceived compromise intended to do justice to two very different types of expert which in the context of Goldman’s inquiry should be separated conceptually: *research experts* and *public experts*. Moreover, these two kinds of experts should also be separated given the aims of my essay, since Birnbacher, Jones & Schroeter are all concerned with communications between specially qualified senders and laypersons. One of the key tasks is to determine what special qualifications exactly are needed. Notions of expert which tackle this task are what we are looking for. In what follows, I will hence try to distinguish between research and public experts while sticking to the rest of Goldman’s otherwise very helpful analysis.

2.2 Research E-experts and Types of Public E-experts

Here is my proposal for a modification of Goldman’s account:

- Primary questions are the questions of main interest to not specially qualified recipients in a given E-domain—laypersons.
- Secondary questions are defined as before, i.e. they “concern the existing evidence or arguments that bear on the primary questions, and the assessments of the evidence made by prominent researchers” (Goldman (2001, 92)).
- Main research questions are those questions which mainly interest researchers in the given E-domain.³

With the help of the distinction between these three types of questions, we can differentiate between four types of experts (my formulations parallel Goldman’s wherever no changes are needed):

³ In addition to the overlap between primary and main research questions already mentioned, there is also overlap between secondary and main research questions. For instance, if applications of theories that are a focus of current research are needed to answer a certain primary question, then secondary questions that bear on this primary question will contain main research questions. I do not need to commit myself to the view that primary, secondary and research questions exhaust the E-domain. However, they cover everything of interest in this essay.

1. A *strong public e-expert* has more beliefs (or high degrees of belief) in true answers to primary and secondary questions in a given E-domain and/or fewer beliefs in false answers to such questions than most people do (or better: than the vast majority of people do). In addition, the proportion of his true answers to these questions meets a non-comparative threshold of veritistic attainment. He also has a capacity or disposition to deploy or exploit his fund of answers to these questions in order to form beliefs in true answers to new primary and secondary questions that may be posed in the E-domain.
2. In the case of the *weak public e-expert*, the qualities of the belief system and the capacity (or disposition) mentioned above are limited to answers to secondary questions.
3. In the case of *intermediate public e-experts*, the qualities of the belief system and the capacity (or disposition) mentioned above are limited to answers to primary questions.
4. A *research e-expert* has more beliefs (or high degrees of belief) in true answers to main research questions in a given E-domain and/or fewer beliefs in false answers to main research questions than most people do (or better: than the vast majority of people do). In addition, the proportion of his true answers to these questions meets a non-comparative threshold of veritistic attainment. He also has a capacity or disposition to deploy or exploit his fund of answers to these questions in order to form beliefs in true answers to new main research questions that may be posed in the E-domain.

As before there are also reputational experts. *Reputational public experts* are those who are correctly or wrongly considered to be weak, intermediate or strong public experts; *reputational research experts* are those who are correctly or wrongly considered to be research experts.

Why does it make sense to differentiate between just these types of questions and these types of experts? The first two are just variants of Goldman's proposals and do justice to the intuition that people who can answer many secondary or many primary and secondary correctly, are better at this than the vast majority of people and can answer new secondary or primary question correctly deserve to be called experts. The third does justice to the intuition that people who are merely capable of the above with regard to primary questions are also experts in a sense. But it is not only intuitions that call for this distinction. Its function will become clearer in my application.

Including the latter notion serves to stress a different point: despite the overlap between primary, secondary and research questions, public experts are not necessarily research experts and vice versa. In many cases of communication between expert and laypersons, public experts are just *reporting* scientific results, theories, etc. or *applying* them to issues that interest the laypersons. They are not at the forefront of academic research furthering science and hence need

not be research experts. Consider the case of the late Sir Patrick Moore, host of the BBC's *The Sky at Night*, and similar cases in the media where public experts who are clearly no research experts answer the editorial staff's guesses at what the questions of laypersons are. This being said, it is also true that there are communications between experts and laypersons where the laypersons are interested in answers to questions that are also main research questions or where main research questions are relevant to primary questions and thus secondary questions. If a sufficiently large amount of primary and secondary questions are of this kind, then public experts would also be full-blown research experts. This is very likely to differ from E-domain to E-domain, which makes it futile to put forward general claims about whether public experts are research experts and vice versa. Perhaps public experts are also research experts in some E-domains but not in others, depending on how far apart the interests of laypersons are from the research interests of research experts.

Are research experts in a given E-domain always also qualified as public experts in this domain? Intuitively, it seems that someone who can answer main research questions correctly and can manipulate his body of beliefs concerning the E-domain to answer new research questions can also manipulate his body of beliefs to answer the decidedly more mundane questions of laypersons in this domain. On second thought, there might be too much of a gap between the capacity needed to sift through one's body of beliefs to answer research questions and the capacity to sift through it to answer mundane questions effectively. Take, for instance, the Simonyi Professorship for the Public Understanding of Science at the University of Oxford. It is dedicated to inform laypersons about scientific topics, and the official description of its aim underscores the idea that an expert needs additional qualifications to perform satisfactorily in exchanges between a specially qualified sender and less qualified recipients:

“[T]he appointees to the chair must have a pedagogical range that goes beyond the traditional university setting. They should be able to communicate effectively with audiences of all kinds and in different media. [...] We recognize that persons with these combined qualifications are rare. Therefore, the preferences listed above for particular scientific specialties should be taken secondary to the appointees' pedagogical and communication talents.”⁴

We shall see who actually needs pedagogical qualifications. At any rate, it seems advisable to examine whether research experts are automatically public experts in each E-domain we consider.

We can conclude that public experts are not automatically qualified as research experts and that there are serious doubts over whether research experts are automatically qualified as public experts. At any rate, research experts serve a different epistemic role than public experts in exchanges between specially qualified senders and ordinary recipients. In this context, it is important to see that the role of expert is not the only role senders can assume in such exchanges.

⁴ <http://www.simonyi.ox.ac.uk/aims/charles-simonyi-manifesto> (retrieved: 2012-12-10).

2.3 Informants and Their Epistemic Roles

In his influential Goldman (1999), Goldman distinguishes the two social epistemic sources of testimony and of monological argumentation. In both cases a recipient makes use of the words of others to form beliefs. The crucial difference lies in the nature of these words. In monological argumentation, the “speaker’s utterance might take the form ‘P; and my evidence or reasons for P are R1, . . . , Rn’; or, to invert the order ‘R1, . . . , Rn, therefore (probably) P’” (ibid., 130).⁵ By contrast, in the case of testimony, the sender simply utters ‘P’—without adding his reasons.⁶ Which of these sources will be used by the expert in typical exchanges between him and not specially qualified recipients? Both variants are possible, but the epistemic role assumed in each is different.

Consider the case of testimony and argumentation of limited complexity and length first. The resulting beliefs of the recipient are justified in a way that heavily depends on the authority of the expert sender.⁷ In fact, it is a defining characteristic of the resulting belief that the epistemic buck stops with citing the sender’s testimony or argumentation as a reason for the belief at some early point in a defence of this belief.⁸ If we want to name the interlocutors in this exchange in a manner that does justice to their different epistemic roles, *layman* and *expert* seem the natural choice and the whole communicative situation can be dubbed *expert-laymen exchange*. In epistemic matters, we consult someone as an expert whenever we want or have to forego the efforts necessary to attain true belief, justified true belief or knowledge on our own. Even if the sender is reliable, it seems that only knowledge that p can be attained by the recipient in such an exchange. For the upcoming discussion of Jones & Schroeter, it is important to note that knowledge why p and what Hills calls understanding why p in Hills (2009, 98–106, esp. 101–104) cannot be attained this way.

The roles in more complex argumentations are markedly different. The sender does not simply testify that this or that is so, but he gives reasons for his assessment. Resulting beliefs of recipients are—at least in the long run—justified in a way that no longer depends on the authority of the expert sender at all. The

⁵ There are two further subtypes of the social epistemic source of argumentation: dialogical argumentation and debate. In dialogical argumentation, two or more speakers discourse with one another, taking opposite sides of the issues over the truth of the conclusion. In a debate, “arguers address a separate audience, not just one another” (Goldman 1999, 131).

⁶ In the passage just discussed, Goldman seems to limit the propositions testified to to “simple reports of observations” (ibid., 130). However, this does not fit what he says elsewhere. For instance, one of his examples for testimonies is that a “reporter asserts, for instance, that (he saw) a certain kind of particle pass through a cloud chamber” (ibid., 123)—which is certainly not *simple* observation and possibly not observation at all. Moreover, the different sorts of competence a reliable sender needs in different kinds of testimonies include “inferential skills” and “memory skills” (ibid.). All this counts against understanding ‘observation’ in a restrictive sense. At any rate, if testimony is delineated without any restrictions as to the subject matter of ‘P’, then argumentation and testimony probably exhaust (or nearly so) the epistemically relevant kind of discourse—which is what is needed here.

⁷ For the sake of simplicity, I ignore that justification need not be conceived of as involving reasons.

⁸ Depending on how testimonial justification is conceived, additional reasons geared at establishing the trustworthiness of the sender may be required. Even if such reasons are required, the sender and his testimony still take centre stage.

reason for this is simple: the more complex the argumentation is, i.e. the more information about support-relations, reasons for reasons, etc. it contains, the more the belief system of a diligently learning recipient looks like the sender's belief system in the relevant respect. In any case, the dependence on the authority of the sender is less marked, especially once the senders also clarify the support relations between the conclusion and the reasons for it. When we are, once again, pressed to give a name to the different epistemic roles, *teacher* and *learner* are best, and the whole communicative situation can be dubbed *teacher-learner exchange*. When we as learners consult someone as a teacher, we do not seek to forego efforts; rather, we seek instructions on how to go about in our effort to attain true belief, justified true belief or knowledge. In such an exchange, the recipient can attain knowledge that, knowledge why and understanding why—provided the sender is reliable, the recipient is diligent and the argumentation is suitably complex.

Hence, specially qualified senders—*informants*—can be assigned two different roles: teachers and experts. What are the qualifications they need to fulfil these roles? The notions of strong, intermediate and weak, public e-expert fit in nicely with the qualifications needed to fulfil one's epistemic role as expert. But what are the qualifications that enable someone to fulfil one's role as a teacher? What are (public) *e-teachers*?⁹ Note that the role of the teacher is not just to provide answers to primary and/or secondary questions but to provide additional explanations that are actually understood by the learner: a teacher has to be able to explain—for instance—why this or that secondary question is relevant to the primary question the learner is interested in, why this or that proposition answers the given primary questions. Hence, the expertise necessary for e-teachers would definitely include pedagogical or didactical skills and knowledge. This is an additional qualification of e-teachers compared to e-experts. However, this seems to be the only difference. The other skills and expertise can be defined analogously as in weak, intermediate and strong public e-experts. Hence, the following seems true:

- In order to have the role of expert in expert-learner exchanges, one has to be a reputational public e-expert or reputational e-teacher.
- In order to fulfil one's role as an expert in expert-layman exchanges, one has to be an e-expert or e-teacher—in most cases. Depending on the layman's questions, one may turn out to be also a research e-expert.
- In order to have the role of teacher in teacher-learner exchanges, one has to be a reputational e-teacher.
- In order to fulfil one's role as a teacher in teacher-learner exchanges, one has to be an e-teacher—in most cases. Depending on the learner's questions, one may turn out to be also a research e-expert.

⁹ I won't discuss whether there are research e-teachers. Instead, I only cover public e-teachers and hence drop the qualifier 'public'.

- Public e-experts can have the role of a teacher, but they are not overly well qualified for this role.

These distinctions are important to keep in mind when we examine moral or epistemological questions regarding specially qualified informants about normative issues—*n*-informants. For example, if we are concerned with what warrants *n*-informants sitting on boards or panels, what they should do and what qualifications they need, we should, first, make up our minds which role(s) we want them to serve and, second, identify the qualifications that let them fulfil these role(s).¹⁰

3. Application

The first task when applying Goldman to normative issues is to specify what domain we are talking about. What are the domains *n*-experts are concerned with—*N*-domains? Goldman does not provide a point of reference here. Given what Birnbacher says about increased “specialization and differentiation” (4) in moral philosophy, it is advisable to conceive of the spectrum of normative issues as divided into many different *N*-domains, whose scope is fairly limited. He claims, for instance, that “even an expert concerning physician-patient-relations is not automatically at the same time an expert in organ transplantation or reproductive medicine” (4).

So let us assume that there are several *N*-domains and that experts in one *N*-domain are not always experts in another *N*-domain. This brings us to the next question: what kind of expert are we talking about—public experts or research experts—, and is there much of a difference between them in *N*-domains? The first question has already been answered—I comment on Birnbacher and Jones & Schroeter who focus on communications between specially qualified senders and not specially qualified recipients. The answer to the second depends on how the following: what are main research questions in *N*-domains, what are primary and secondary moral questions, and how many main research questions are among the primary and secondary moral questions?

I take *prototypical primary moral questions* to be concerned with a moral quandary laypersons face or are interested in—questions like *Is abortion wrong?*, *Is it just that CEOs earn so much more than ordinary employees?* or *Is it right to eat meat?*. Experts answer such questions by making public their moral

¹⁰ Two explanations are in order. First, the distinction between testimony and argumentation is not watertight. If the testimonial situation is interactive so that the recipient of testimony can pose questions, he may inquire after reasons: in this case there may be a sequence of testimonies which also provide reasons, reasons for reasons, etc. I would classify the resulting sequence of statements as an argumentation. Second, the sender can perhaps be assigned yet further epistemic roles. E.g., Hills points out that a sender's utterance can be treated as moral advice. In this case, the recipient does not simply rely on the moral judgement expressed in the utterance, but he gains awareness of “another point of view”, “the interests of others”, and he “see[s] more clearly”. So, he uses the sender's words to gain “genuine moral understanding” (Hills 2009, 123). However, I take the epistemic role of advisor to be included in the epistemic role of teacher.

judgement of the matter at hand. Such answers do not have a truth value, since I here adopt Birnbacher's assumption that moral judgements are not truth-apt.¹¹

If—as is plausible—we conceive of evidence in truth-linked terms,¹² it does not make sense to speak of evidence that bears on primary moral questions. To an extent, this interferes with Goldman's notion of secondary questions which “concern the existing evidence and the arguments that bear on the primary questions” (Goldman 2001, 92). However, it is unproblematic to say that secondary moral questions concern the arguments that bear on the primary questions. *Prototypical secondary moral questions* are hence questions such as *What are Singer's arguments against eating meat?* or *What would theory X or philosopher Y have to say about the dilemma at hand?* Here, n-experts do not voice their moral judgement about ethical matters; rather, they inform laypersons what others have had to say about them—they answer exegetic questions. In addition, they also answer factual questions, since such answers are also relevant, as Singer points out:

“I may, for instance, be wondering whether it is right to eat meat. I would have a better chance of reaching the right decision, or at least, a soundly based decision, if I knew a number of facts about the capacities of animals for suffering, and about the methods of rearing and slaughtering animals now being used.” (Singer 2006, 188)

By contrast, *prototypical main research questions* deal with meta-ethical issues or questions about foundations. Hence, main research questions include, for instance, *What shape should a consequentialist ethical theory take?*, *Should one adopt a consequentialist or deontological ethical theory?*, *Are slippery slope arguments good arguments?*, or *Are moral judgements truth-apt?*

Once we leave the prototypical cases, we note that the boundaries between main research questions and primary and secondary moral questions are not clear-cut. As an illustration, let us assume that an expert bases his moral judgement answering the question whether abortion is wrong on a slippery slope argument. In this case, the research question *Are slippery slope arguments good arguments?* would also be a secondary moral question, since an answer to this question bears on the expert's answer to the primary moral question. His answer might also hinge on the particular moral theory he endorses so that questions about that theory or normative theories in general—e.g. *Should one adopt a consequentialist or deontological ethical theory?*—turn out to be secondary moral questions. Additionally, a lay audience may have one or the other main research questions as one of their main questions of interest or become interested in the

¹¹ Why is Birnbacher's assumption adopted if this results in difficulties? Given that I use my application as a point of reference for assessing his essay, it would not be advisable to drop crucial assumptions. Hence, a defence of this controversial claim is uncalled for (though I have to admit I agree with it). Moreover, if moral judgements turn out to be truth-apt after all, the account of n-experts and their expertise I develop by applying Goldman will be strengthened anyway.

¹² E.g. Achinstein 1978. Mind you, if it were possible to speak of evidence in cases where the hypothesis supported is not truth-apt, this would be even better for the application. However, it does not rest on this being possible.

exegesis of this or that philosophical text. These are all intricacies that have already been pointed out with the analogous distinctions in E-domains and which make it hard to put forward general claims about whether public experts are research experts and vice versa. It would be futile to try and solve this issue here. Instead, I will only point out the following: in general, just as with e-experts, it is not automatically the case that research n-experts are public n-experts (and vice versa). That the knowledge and skills of research n-experts are such that they automatically make them public n-experts needs argumentative support—presumably in each N-domain. However, in the N-domains under the heading of applied ethics the main research questions seem to be virtually co-extensive with primary moral questions. Someone who is a research n-expert here is also a public expert (and vice versa).

3.1 Are There N-experts?

In the above stages of the applications I have largely set aside a major complication for extrapolating what makes for an e-expert to n-experts: Goldman's definition of e-experts is truth-linked, but moral propositions are not truth-apt. It is obvious that this is dangerous for the requirements concerning the absolute and comparative amounts of true and false beliefs. However, the skills element is also in danger, since skills have been defined in truth-linked terms.¹³ So is there such a thing as an n-expert? Let us first examine how far a veritistic conception of n-experts can take us and then briefly point out problems of a natural modification.

The prospect for a veritistic conception of n-experts depends on whether there are answers to primary or secondary moral questions that are truth-apt.¹⁴ For prototypical primary moral questions, the outlook is bleak: answers to such questions are moral propositions which are not truth-apt. The case of prototypical secondary questions brightens things up considerably, however. Propositions about, for instance, rearing and slaughtering animals are of course truth-apt and their truth-value is accessible to n-experts. The same applies to propositions that answer exegetic questions: this is a question of correct or incorrect interpretation.¹⁵ The case of main research questions is difficult to decide. Some main research questions have moral judgements as answers—especially in the N-domains of applied ethics—and hence are not truth-apt. Others are exegetic, which are clearly truth-apt, and the truth value is accessible. Yet others are not that easy to classify. Recall, for instance, the questions *Are slippery slope arguments good arguments?*, *What shape should a consequentialist ethical theory take?* and *Should one adopt a consequentialist or deontological ethical theory?* Standards for good arguments are controversial, and so are the standards which can be used to compare the merits of different ethical theories (or to evaluate the

¹³ The concept of belief might also be understood in truth-linked terms. I disregard this further complication in what follows.

¹⁴ In what follows, I focus on the three types of public n-experts and disregard research n-experts.

¹⁵ I disregard that there are positions in literary theory which hamper identifying the conditions for correct interpretation.

merits of a single theory). This does not imply that an answer to such questions does not have a truth value, but at any rate it seems that it is not accessible to experts.

So it seems that answers to prototypical primary moral questions are not-truth apt, while answers to prototypical secondary moral questions are. Main research questions turn out to be a mixed bag. Once we distance ourselves from the prototypical cases, the picture changes: primary moral questions remain largely not truth-apt, the occasional exegetic or factual questions notwithstanding. The case of secondary moral questions depends on the extent to which they are swamped by meta-ethical questions or the questions about foundations among the main research questions. It appears that this is a controversial issue. Birnbacher reports that

“[q]uite a number of philosophical ethical advisors make an attempt to solve practical problems in a pragmatic spirit, leaving aside the age-old debates about foundations and starting not from controversial basic principles but from axiomata media on a medium level of generality for which consensus is easier to achieve”. (Birnbacher, 243)

The answers such theorists give to primary moral questions do not carry much ballast in terms of secondary moral questions that bear on them. However, Birnbacher is opposed to their approach. I do not want to delve into this issue, but only highlight the options available. If secondary moral questions turn out to consist in the prototypical cases mentioned above, then answers to such questions are truth-apt and there are weak n-experts. If secondary moral questions turn out to comprise also meta-ethical main research questions or main research questions about foundations, there are two options: if answers to these main research questions are truth-apt after all and n-experts can assess their truth value, there still are weak n-experts. If answers to these questions turn out not to be truth-apt or n-experts cannot assess their truth value, weak n-experts seem endangered. However, if the prototypical secondary moral questions continue to comprise a healthy portion of secondary moral questions, it might still make sense to speak of weak n-experts.

To sum up: there are no strong and intermediate n-experts if moral judgments are not truth-apt, but there is a chance that there are weak n-experts. Moreover, there is a precedent for evaluating reliance on their answers to prototypical secondary moral questions: since their answers are truth-apt despite bearing on normative issues, they are similar to factual testimony. It is, therefore, tempting to extend the analysis of reliance on (factual) testimony in epistemology to testimony about secondary moral questions. Almost all epistemologists agree that a certain respect is due to testimony;¹⁶ the main debate is instead about what the recipient has to do in order to render his testimonial belief justified or turn it into knowledge. So epistemically the question is not whether people should sit on panels as weak n-experts and whether the fellow

¹⁶ There are exceptions, e.g. Barnes 1980. However, these are exotic positions (it is not true that Locke is a full-blown sceptic with regard to testimony (cf. Shieber 2009)).

panellists should rely on their testimony but what the latter have to do in order to justifiably believe it.

Still, it is not a welcome result that there are no strong and intermediate n-experts and that weak n-experts are an endangered species. What can we do about it? There are at least three obvious solutions: First, one might question the claim that moral judgements are not truth-apt. While we are at it, we might also contend that answers to meta-ethical questions and questions about foundations are also truth-apt, thus also securing that there are strong n-experts and allaying the lingering doubts about weak n-experts. Secondly, we might heroically bite the bullet and say that there are no strong and no intermediate n-experts. *Prima facie*, the most attractive solution is to modify the truth-linked elements of Goldman's definitions of expertise and expert—the conditions about the expert's belief system and his skills.

3.2 Perspectives of a Non-*veritistic* Account

A straightforward replacement would be the following: the n-expert's belief system with respect to the given N-domain(s) is distinguished by the greater amount of soundly supported beliefs and by reaching a non-comparative threshold of justificatory attainment. His special capacity or disposition consists in his being able to deploy or exploit his fund of aforesaid beliefs to form soundly supported beliefs in answers to new questions that may be posed in N-domains. Both formulations parallel Goldman's *veritistic* proposals and can be adapted to the different types of n-experts. Intuitive as this candidate is, three obstacles not faced by a *veritistic* conception must be overcome.

First, it must be specified what it takes for a moral belief to be soundly supported in non-*veritistic* terms. There is no consensus among the various moral theorists as to what makes a moral judgement soundly supported. I would not wish to be 'refereeing' a discussion on that matter between, for instance, J. L. Mackie, a hard-nosed deontologist and a religious leader who advocates a theistic ethics on the basis on whatever religious tract he adheres to. An advocate of the idea that n-experts are marked by the sound support of their beliefs in the N-domains has to take up and defend a position in this debate. It might be objected that there are different 'schools' in the sciences, which seems to create a disagreement about e-experts similar to that about sound support. However, it is doubtful that such debates between scientific schools have much impact on who counts as e-expert in a *veritistic* conception of it. Recall that a lot of the primary questions public e-experts answer are distinctly mundane. Do the debates between the schools really extend to such questions? Take, for instance, Goldman's example about the solar eclipse in Santa Fé. It is implausible that the big debates in the scientific schools impact on such answers. By contrast, debates between the different schools in ethics impact right at the heart of primary moral questions. The previously mentioned examples illustrate this point: different schools—e.g. consequentialist and religious (and moral) leaders—answer the questions of whether abortion is wrong or eating meat is defensible differently, and they support their answers in fundamentally

different ways! This is an obstacle to the sound-support conception of n-experts not faced by veritistic conceptions of e-experts.¹⁷

Secondly, the value of soundly supported belief as opposed to plain belief must be clarified if the n-experts beliefs are superior to those of laypersons on the grounds of their being soundly supported. The problem is that we cannot fall back on truth in order to argue for the value of soundly supported beliefs. In epistemology, there is an age-old debate whether having a justification for one's beliefs is merely instrumentally valuable as a means to attain the real goal—true beliefs.¹⁸ Prominent epistemologists have denied that justification has any value other than that.¹⁹ If this position were extended to the case of the sound support for beliefs in N-domains, the n-experts beliefs would no longer be superior. Why should this be unacceptable? Of course, it is possible to argue that sound support is of value for some reason other than that it is instrumental to attaining truth. But this means that we have to position ourselves in a complicated debate yet again. In the case of a veritistic definition of experts, there is no need to do so: all that is needed to argue that the experts' beliefs are superior and should be relied on is the uncontroversial value of truth.

So far the obstacles faced by a defender of the non-veritistic version of n-experts consisted in his having to position himself in age-old debates. Defending a suitable position of what sound support consists in and defending a suitable position of what makes it valuable seem difficult—but possible. The third and final obstacle is a different kettle of fish. It must be clarified in how far laymen profits from relying on an n-expert if they engage in an expert-layman exchange. Take the best possible scenario: all reputational experts are genuine experts; e-experts only voice beliefs that are true, and n-experts only voice beliefs that are soundly-supported. Given such speaker practices, the best acceptance practice would be blind trust. This way, recipients of e-experts' testimonies would end up with true beliefs. What is the case with recipients of n-experts' testimonies? If the n-expert voices soundly supported beliefs, the layman ends up with what exactly? Does the support the n-expert has spill over to the laypersons? In epistemology, two kinds of justification for beliefs based on testimony are most prominent: justification via default assumptions or empirically justified beliefs about the sender and his testimony. The former does not breed forceful justifications. Burge, for instance, assesses his variant of a default assumption as follows:

¹⁷ This being said, there is an immense *philosophical* controversy about the concept of truth. So is the criterion of truth in a veritistic account of experts in the same boat as the criterion of sound support in a non-veritistic account after all? There are several different projects behind theories of truth and thus many different conceptions of the concept (cf. Kirkham 1995, 1–40, esp. 20f., for an excellent overview). I cannot provide a detailed assessment of their potential impact on what experts are according to a truth-linked conception here. However, provided we limit ourselves to the most plausible (i.e. non-relativist, non-veriphobic) contenders, I doubt that controversies about the concept of truth impact on the concept of experts in the same way as controversies about the concept of sound support.

¹⁸ Cf., e.g., Plato's remarks on finding the road to Larissa in Platon 1994, 97a–98c.

¹⁹ Cf., e.g., Goldman 1998 and—for an opposing view—Siegel 2005.

“The *a priori* entitlement described by the Acceptance Principle is, of course, no guarantee of truth. It is a much weaker sign of truth, from the point of view of certainty, than empirically justified beliefs about the interlocutor. The lines of reasoning I have proposed justify a *prima facie* rational presumption, a position of non-neutrality—not some source of certainty.” (Burge 1993, 476)

Such initial justifiedness can be bolstered by the empirically justified beliefs Burge mentions, and this can result in testimonial beliefs which have outstandingly sound support. However, providing such support is extra tricky in expert-layman exchanges. Consider Goldman’s assessment at the end of his discussion of several potential means to assess e-experts: “There is no denying [...] that the epistemic situations facing novices are often daunting.” (Goldman 2001, 108) I do not see that this is any different with respect to n-experts. Hence, it is doubtful that the laypersons’ testimonial beliefs formed in response to n-experts’ testimonies are soundly supported. While this is also the case with e-experts, recall that laypersons at least end up with true beliefs in the favourable scenario just sketched. There is no such ‘consolation prize’ in the case of n-experts.²⁰

These exceedingly tough tasks notwithstanding, there may very well be convincing solutions—and such solutions would definitely be in the interests of my modification. For instance, it seems possible for n-informants to attenuate the third obstacle by primarily engaging in teacher-learner exchanges in which they (provided they are qualified as n-teachers) may be able to transfer their reasons to learners. The solutions presented in Birnbacher’s and Jones & Schroeter’s essay, however, do not work. While the discussion of Jones & Schroeter’s attempt to solve the last obstacle will take place in the final section of my essay, Birnbacher’s solution can be dealt with here. He claims that conceiving of the n-expert’s qualifications as a skill helps to make a good case for the possibility of such qualifications. The context of this claim implies that a skill-account of these qualifications is superior to a knowledge-account of them in this respect. Birnbacher provides scarce information about what distinguishes these two accounts, but the basic idea is obvious anyway: in a knowledge-account of the n-expert’s qualifications these qualifications consist in a certain amount of knowledge (Goldman’s veritistic account is actually a weak version of such an account; he only calls for true beliefs and lack of wrong beliefs). By contrast, what

²⁰ I have not discussed the option of going external with regard to the support for a moral judgement. This is easy in the favourable scenario just sketched: blind trust would be a reliable mechanism for forming moral beliefs. However, once less favourable reporting practices are admitted at least as relevant alternatives, a reliable mechanism would have to be sufficiently discriminatory. It is doubtful that any actually used mechanism satisfies this condition, which casts doubt on going external to argue that testimonial moral beliefs actually have sound support. Note that the situation is different in the case of less favourable reporting practices of e-experts. True, if even the best mechanism available in this case is not sufficiently discriminatory between trustworthy and untrustworthy reputational e-experts, then the beliefs laymen end up with are not soundly supported either, and many of them will be false. Still, as long as this mechanism will generate less false and more true beliefs in answers to primary and secondary questions than the layman’s trying for himself, there will be a (very weak) case for using this mechanism. The layman profits from relying on the expert insofar as he is slightly better off than if he relied on his own devices. Such a scenario is quite plausible.

makes for these qualifications in a skill-account are skills. Now, Birnbacher's skill-account suffers from the above problems just as much as the non-veritistic account of n-experts just presented. In both cases it is argued that what makes strong n-experts' answers to primary and secondary moral questions that are not truth-apt valuable is the sound argumentative support they possess for these answers, and it is this very notion of sound support and the idea that it is valuable that have run into problems. If Birnbacher's account has advantages over the account just presented, it must be for other reasons.

4. Birnbacher on Ethics Experts

Birnbacher answers the question of how experts in normative issues can be delineated by differentiating between ethics experts and moral experts and their respective kinds of expertise—ethical expertise and moral expertise. Since the categories of moral experts and moral expertise are empty according to him, I will only focus on ethics experts and ethical expertise.²¹ The first step is to collate what can be found in Birnbacher (2012). He characterises *ethics experts* in terms of the reasoning that leads to their moral judgements, the qualities of which are down to the expert's ethical expertise and professional experience. In addition, he characterises their qualifications in terms of what is expected of moral philosophers.

He first describes *ethical expertise* as a skill—the ability to provide “coherent justification” (242) for one's ethical judgement.²² Since he also claims that the skill behind arguments for one's judgements and hence behind one's ability to put forward a coherent justification is “clear thinking” (241), it seems warranted to take him to claim that the expert's expertise is *using* the capacity to think clearly—and not just *having* the capacity, since he seems to attribute it to “any reasonably intelligent person” (241).²³ Second, he has it that “ethical expertise concerns the correctness of which judgements follow from what premises” (242).

Birnbacher accounts of *professional experience* in terms of the effect it and ethical expertise have on the ethics expert's judgements and arguments: her judgements are based on arguments; these arguments are “more explicit and elaborated”, and they profit from the expert's having a “more differentiated and nuanced view of complex cases” (241). He includes information as to the nature of practitioners' experience, but stays silent on the ethics expert's professional experience.

In addition, Birnbacher also claims that the following is expected from moral philosophers:

²¹ A moral expert “knows which norms and values are the correct ones, in a sense of ‘correct’ by which correctness is understood as something more ambitious than simple conformity with widely accepted standards” (240). Birnbacher argues that it is doubtful that there is such a sense of ‘correct’ with regard to norms and judgements; hence, this category is empty. Probably this is also the reason why he does not say what moral expertise would consist in if it existed.

²² Birnbacher quotes Yoder approvingly here.

²³ He quotes Singer approvingly here.

1. Ethics experts are expected to possess a sizeable amount of knowledge “about ethical theories, systems of moral norms and professional moral codes” (240).
2. They are expected to possess teaching skills.
3. They are expected to be able to apply their knowledge and to have experience of typical moral conflicts in given decision-making situations.
4. They are expected to distance themselves from their own values and to have understanding for and empathy with the viewpoint of others.

At first glance, these expectations need not have anything to do with ethics experts. After all, Birnbacher *explains* the role of ethical expertise in defining the concept of ethics expert in a way that suggests that having ethical expertise alone is necessary and sufficient. On the other hand, when it comes to *actually sketching* the qualifications of ethics experts, having ethical expertise seems to be one of several conditions someone has to satisfy in order to be an ethics expert. Moreover, the sentences immediately preceding and following these expectations strongly suggest that there is a connection to the qualifications of ethics experts (240).

Birnbacher’s account of ethical and moral experts and their expertise could have been developed with two distinct aims in mind. On the one hand, it could be read as a rough and ready sketch of abilities, skills, knowledge, etc. people sitting on panels as n-experts should have. As such it might be unproblematic. On the other hand, it could be read as an analysis of n-experts and their expertise. As such it is not unproblematic at all. There is evidence for both readings in the text.

What are the problems with reading the account as an analysis of n-experts and their expertise? The main reason is that the Goldman-inspired analysis is better suited to answering questions such as whether there can be expertise and experts in normative domains or whether there is warrant for people serving as n-informants on panels, etc.—the very questions Birnbacher addresses. Why is this? The Goldman-inspired account helps us be precise about which general kinds of n-experts we are concerned with—public or research n-experts—and about which kinds of questions we expect them to answer—secondary and/or primary. Moreover, it helps us be precise about which epistemic roles we want to assign to n-informants on panels—experts or teachers—and, consequently, pinpoint how they need to be qualified to fulfil these roles. It is evident that all this is helpful for answering the above questions. How does Birnbacher’s own account fare in these respects? What are the questions ethical and moral experts address? What are the qualifications of ethics and moral experts? What are the epistemic roles n-informants sitting on panels can have? The first question is probably answered: Birnbacher seems to focus on primary moral questions. The third question is not answered. What about the second question? Birnbacher provides answers here, but at times the reader is not completely sure what to make of them. The crucial kind of expert in Birnbacher’s account is the ethics

expert; the essay includes three potentially relevant qualifications: professional experience, ethical expertise and the qualifications included in what is expected of moral philosophers. My misgivings mainly concern the latter two.²⁴ Ethical expertise can be dealt with briefly. First, if expertise is just using a skill and if this skill is present in almost everybody, then there seems to be real danger of succumbing to the charge that anybody who relies on n-experts is just too intellectually lazy to think for himself: all the material necessary for doing so is available to him. Secondly, Birnbacher writes that ethical expertise is concerned with the “correctness of which judgements follow from what premises” (242). This suggests that ethical expertise cannot consist in a skill only, but includes knowledge about the inference rules in the calculus in which moral judgements are deduced from certain premises. How do we reconcile these conflicting pieces of information about ethical expertise? And how are the inference rules just mentioned specified when evaluative sentences are not truth-apt (Jorgensen’s dilemma)?

4.1 Research N-experts versus Public N-experts versus N-teachers

Now consider the qualifications included in what is expected of moral philosophers. Birnbacher claims that there is consensus among philosophers that “moral philosophers in general possess certain distinguishing capacities” (240). Still, it is doubtful that the consensus extends to all the properties included in his expectations. The problem is that he does not separate research and public n-experts. The result is that, on the one hand, the properties mentioned oscillate between the one and the other kind of expert—with a bias towards public n-experts because this is the kind of expert relevant to Birnbacher’s focus on the experts’ role as a panellist, committee member, etc. On the other hand, when talking about moral philosophers he is ostensibly dealing with research n-experts, as he himself acknowledges when he reports the typical question moral philosophers ask colleagues who specialise in applied ethics: “The typical question specialist philosophers ask an applied moral philosopher is thus ‘Do you do any real philosophy apart from this?’” (247)

The third item on the above list is a case in point: why are moral philosophers expected to have experience of typical moral conflicts in given decision-making

²⁴ Further misgivings concern Birnbacher’s take on moral peer disagreement. He claims that two experts with the same ethical expertise can disagree while two experts with the same moral expertise could not—if it existed. We should add: the moral and the ethics experts possess the same information about the case, the same knowledge about ethical systems and have perhaps even shared and discussed their stocks of information. This way the structure of the case becomes analogous to what epistemologists discuss under the heading of peer disagreement. Still, Birnbacher’s claim remains controversial: there are many epistemologists who claim that epistemic peers can have reasonable disagreement, i.e. the peers can be justified in different assessments of the same phenomenon given the same evidence and cognitive abilities (e.g.: Kelly 2011 or Rosen 2001). Hence, it is not remarkable that two ethics experts can disagree. Moreover, the few things Birnbacher says about moral experts suggest that moral expertise would belong to the same category of expertise as the one pertinent to the epistemologists’ debate about peer disagreement: expertise in domains about which there are truth-apt propositions. Hence, it is not obvious that moral experts could not have peer disagreements.

situations? Imagine that a moral philosopher specialises on research questions such as *Should one adopt a consequentialist or deontological ethical theory?* or *Are moral judgements truth-apt?* Is this moral philosopher who is a research n-expert in such N-domains really expected to have experience of typical moral conflicts in given decision-making situations? This expectation is more plausible for public n-experts.

Of course, it is possible that in many N-domains research experts are also public experts. I merely want to point out the following. First, this claim needs argumentative support and cannot be simply built into properties of what are clearly (predominantly) research n-experts. Second, intuitively, it is not particularly likely that research n-experts are always also public n-experts: primary moral questions are just not questions about the epistemic status of moral judgements, about whether to adhere to a consequentialist or deontological model of normative theory, etc. As has already been pointed out, the only N-domains in which it is likely that research n-experts are also public n-experts are those under the heading of applied ethics.

There is a further problem with Birnbacher's list of expectations, which becomes apparent in the fourth expectation mentioned above: why is empathy with other viewpoints required and why is distancing oneself from one's own moral position? After all, the public n-expert can provide all the information required even if he is not empathetic and still thinks that his position is best; surely, research n-experts do not count empathy and distancing among their distinguishing capacities. Is this expected from moral philosophers? Insisting on teaching capacities is also problematic. To be sure, it is helpful to have someone sitting on a panel who is capable of lecturing on the moral intricacies of e.g. choice options the panel is currently discussing. Still, as the discussion above has shown this is required of an n-teacher and not of an n-expert. Is the former what Birnbacher actually has in mind? The problem is that Birnbacher does not differentiate between n-experts and n-teachers, on the one hand, and the epistemic roles of experts and teachers, on the other. If the ethics expert is chiefly concerned with testifying, then he assumes the role of expert; and in order to fulfil his role, he should be an n-expert (of the weak, intermediate or strong kind, depending on which kind of moral question his testimony answers). It is doubtful that empathy and distancing are required. However, if the ethics expert takes up the role of a teacher—e.g. he aids people in evaluating their own moral considerations on their own—, then in order to fulfil it, he should be an n-teacher. Empathy and distancing are more plausible as qualifications for n-teachers than for n-experts (though this is not entirely convincing either). Birnbacher does not squarely make up his mind about, and then keep his eye on, the different kinds of epistemic roles n-informants can have and the different qualifications they have to possess to fulfil these roles.

5. Jones & Schroeter on Reasons-transferring Moral Testimony

Probably the most damaging among the aforementioned obstacles to centring the notion of n-experts on the concept of sound support is the following: even in an expert-layman exchange where the reputational n-expert is a genuine expert and sincere, it is not the case that a layman profits from relying on him. Jones & Schroeter discuss a particular variant of this objection—Hills’s argument to the conclusion that agents who Φ on the basis of moral testimony are not Φ -ing for the right reasons.²⁵ Their discussion is illuminating for both testimonial justification and moral testimony.

Jones & Schroeter’s (2012) attack on Hills’s argument has three key steps. The first is the claim that there is reasons-transferring moral testimony. This type of testimony generally takes the form *It is F to Φ because p*.²⁶ The general form may be expanded (e.g. to include further reasons, information that something does not count as a reason or information about the support relation between the evaluation and the reason). The second step is to claim that such testimony is capable of orienting the potential agent properly towards the right-making reasons for Φ -ing, i.e. so as to enable them to Φ for the right reasons. While such testimony does not provide independent orientation towards these reasons, it provides all the material a recipient who is concerned to do the right thing needs to be oriented towards these reasons in such a way that he Φ -s for the right reasons (provided the reasons transferred are indeed right-making).²⁷ The third step is the claim that a lot of moral testimony is reasons-transferring.

5.1 What Is Moral Testimony?

It is hard to get a grip on what is meant by the concept of testimony in epistemology. It seems justified to concur with Kusch: “There is no widespread agreement among epistemologists on how best to delimit the category of testimony.” (Kusch 2002, 14) Can anything be said about reasons-transferring testimony then? Epistemologists can definitely agree on one thing: none of them discuss cases in which the testimony that p also contains reason for p. The multitude of divergent notions notwithstanding, this is a consideration that counts against Jones & Schroeter’s idea. Moreover, it is pointless to simply object that statements of the above general form should or should not be classified as testimony.

²⁵ ‘ Φ ’ is a placeholder for a verb, phrasal verb, etc.

²⁶ ‘F’ is a placeholder for an adjective that expresses a moral evaluation of Φ -ing, e.g. ‘morally right’, ‘just’; and ‘p’ expresses (the sender’s attempt at) a reason why Φ -ing is F. Two explanations are in order. First, there are complications for the general scheme. E.g., ‘F’ is also a placeholder for evaluative adjectives such as *wrong* and *forbidden*, which causes problems when I speak of reasons *for* Φ -ing. However, accounting for such issues would merely render the scheme cumbersome. Second, reasons-giving testimony might take different forms, e.g.: *P, therefore it is F to Φ -ing*. I take such differences to be unimportant, and I take Jones & Schroeter’s notion to include such alternative forms.

²⁷ Much can go wrong in, first, receiving, secondly, deriving beliefs about the moral quality of Φ -ing and the reasons for this from it and, thirdly, Φ -ing on the basis of these beliefs. I will disregard such complications.

Given certain aims, all sorts of definitions might be advisable. Therefore, the general aims pursued have to be taken into account when evaluating a particular notion of testimony. Two things can be garnered from this. First, Jones & Schroeter's objection that Hills should have taken reasons-transferring testimony into account does not work: there is no universally-accepted notion of testimony Hills has failed to adhere to. Secondly, a good case can be made that given the aims of Hills and Jones & Schroeter, it is not advisable to define the concept in such a way that reasons-giving utterances count as testimony. Why is that?

Recall Goldman's distinction between testimony and monological argumentation. Once we apply it, Jones & Schroeter's reasons-giving testimonies are no longer testimony. Taken on its own, this discrepancy is not disadvantageous to Jones & Schroeter's argument. However, there are considerations that favour treating messages with reasons and messages without reasons separately. For one, lumping them together in the category of testimony makes it difficult to put forward claims as to whether testimony transfers reasons. Since this is likely to have effects on the justification the recipient has for his resulting belief, it would be helpful if these were separated. Of course, this is only the case if the general project is to say something about the justification recipients have for beliefs on the basis of the word of others. Since Jones & Schroeter extensively discuss the most prominent accounts of testimonial justification and knowledge, antireductionism and reductionism, with regard to moral testimony, they had better separate these two phenomena conceptually. Hills's overarching aims suggest the same: she differentiates between knowledge that, knowledge why and understanding why, and the differences between these propositional attitudes are central to her argument. I have already pointed out that argumentation is capable of generating knowledge why, knowledge that and understanding why, whereas testimony can only generate knowledge that.

Moreover, since there is at least a weak case against including reasons-giving testimonies among the general category of testimony, given the general project of Hills, Jones & Schroeter, one should not equivocate: if Hills's notion of testimony does not comprise reasons-transferring testimony, then objections to her shouldn't do so either: pinpointing what she means by "moral testimony" is hampered by her explicit refusal to define the concept, but she provides a brief characterisation in terms of illustrative examples, none of which contain a judgement plus reasons.²⁸

5.2 The Recipient's Justification in the Case of (Monological) Argumentation

So by using an utterance of the type Φ -ing is F because p to form a belief, the recipient is not making use of the epistemic source of testimony but of monological argumentation. The kind of justification the recipient can gain by using this latter source is worth examining. In this respect, Jones & Schroeter's

²⁸ There is only one example in which reasons feature at all: "I have moral reason not to lie." (Hills 2009, 94, fn. 1) It is obvious that this is not an instance of reasons-transferring testimony.

claim that the sender somehow transfers his reasons to the recipient so that the recipient is oriented towards them in a way that he is Φ -ing for the right-making reasons. In effect, the recipient is thus raised to the same ‘level’ with regard to Φ -ing as the sender who has come up with the evaluation and the reasons for it himself. If this is correct, Jones & Schroeter come to an important result: while the sender cannot enable the recipient to Φ for right-making reasons by *testifying* that Φ -ing is F, he can do so by *arguing* that Φ -ing is F because p.

The predicament is that there is one robust intuition suggesting that Jones & Schroeter’s claim is correct and another equally robust intuition suggesting it is not. On the one hand, the recipient of a monological argumentation *Φ -ing is F because p* passes one test for being properly oriented towards the reasons why Φ -ing is F. Whenever he is asked to provide a reason, he can readily provide it: p. On the other hand, he does not pass two different tests: whenever he is asked either why p or why p supports *Φ -ing is F*, he can only refer the interlocutor to the sender. However, these are simple questions about p and the support relation between p and the moral judgement that Φ -ing is F. Can someone who has to refer to the sender in such cases be credited with being properly oriented towards p, let alone with Φ -ing for the right-making reasons? Jones & Schroeter agree with Hills that simply answering the question why Φ -ing is F by informing the interlocutor that one has been told so is not enough—otherwise, they could have attacked Hills without having to take recourse to reasons-transferring testimony. Why should such an answer suddenly be acceptable?

Jones & Schroeter could argue that a modified variant of this particular piece of argumentation does the job: *Φ -ing is F because of p and p supports Φ -ing is F because of q.*²⁹ But this response only pushes the problem back one level. In this case, the recipient is dumbfounded by the question why q supports the claim that p supports *Φ -ing is F*. Still, it is doubtful whether each further expansion of the argumentation can be countered in this way. While the above considerations make it clear that the basic case does not do the job, somewhere down the line of additions to the original argumentation it becomes plausible that the recipient is properly oriented towards the reasons for the judgement that Φ -ing is F—provided the sender is himself properly oriented towards them. Why is this? Recall that if the argumentation is suitably complex and the recipient is diligently learning, the recipient’s belief system becomes similar to that of the sender. If this is right, then, at some stage, the recipient no longer needs to refer to the sender as the reason for his moral judgement that Φ -ing is F, and this is what is needed to safeguard the claim that the recipient can be enabled to Φ for right-making reasons by a sender’s argumentation against objections of the above kind.

What precisely have Jones & Schroeter shown? Recall what has been said earlier about n-experts, n-teachers and the epistemic roles of expert and teachers: It seems to me that the sender in this exchange has successfully served as a teacher. He has taught the reasons of why Φ -ing is F, the reasons why these are reasons, the reasons why these reasons are reasons, . . . and thus succeeded in

²⁹ For the sake of simplicity I focus on one of the two different questions the recipient fails to answer.

properly orienting his learners towards right-making reasons for Φ -ing. Given that such exchanges have to be fairly complex to achieve proper orientation, it seems necessary that the sender also possesses pedagogical and didactical skills and knowledge. Thus, he is an n-teacher and has the role of a teacher. Jones & Schroeter have hence not succeeded in proving that n-experts in their role as experts can orient laymen properly towards right-making reasons for Φ -ing. Instead, they have merely succeeded in showing that n-teachers in their role as teachers can properly orient their learners towards right-making reasons for Φ -ing. Epistemically, this result is unremarkable.³⁰

6. Concluding Remarks

Identifying the qualifications needed for n-informants to not specially qualified recipients and clarifying their role has turned out to be an extraordinarily complicated task. We have to decide, first, whether we wish them to have the epistemic role of expert or teacher and, secondly, what qualifications they need to have. If we want them to have the role of experts, we have to decide whether they need to be only public experts or if they have to be research experts as well to fulfil their role. This depends on whether we want them to be able to answer primary or secondary moral questions and on the amount of main research questions among them. Hence, it may be the case that n-informants qualified as weak, intermediate or strong n-experts (or the analogous types of n-teachers) are sufficient. However, if there are a lot of main research questions among the primary or secondary moral questions, n-informants are research n-experts as well (even if they have the role of a teacher). Luckily, solving these issues was not my aim, but rather to sketch a framework that helps us pose them. Birnbacher's, Jones & Schroeter's and Goldman's essays were invaluable here.

There are even silver linings for some of the obstacles concerning n-informants and especially n-experts. There is a real chance that there are weak n-experts and n-teachers— even if they are conceived of veritistically—(and corresponding epistemic roles) at least with regard to the truth-apt secondary moral questions. What is more, weak n-experts in the epistemic role of experts can generate justified testimonial belief and testimonial knowledge. N-teachers, in their role of teachers, can even make use of the epistemic source of argumentation to transfer the sound support they may have for their answers to primary moral questions dealing with moral judgements to their learners so that these learners could act for right-making reasons. This ability of n-teachers may attenuate the problem of how not specially qualified recipients can profit from n-informants if the difference between them only consists in the sound support they have for their beliefs. However, there are obstacles with regard to the meaning of sound support and its value. Hence, the transfer of right-making reasons and the very

³⁰ Additionally, the causal history of the relevant beliefs in the sender and his learner is different (if the teacher has not been taught in turn). Hence, if it is not the case that all that matters for being properly oriented towards right-making reasons are the internal states of the agent, then the difference between teacher and learner persists.

existence of strong and intermediate n-teachers (and n-experts for that matter) remain precarious—but the obstacles do not seem insurmountable.

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