

# **IS MORALITY FOR THE CHOSEN FEW? THE PROBLEM OF MORAL DEFERENCE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

There has always been an asymmetry between the intuitions that we have regarding deference in domains such as physics or history, and in morality. While we do not question the permissibility of the former, the latter strikes us as problematic. In this thesis, I investigate what exactly is wrong with moral deference. By applying arguments from virtue epistemology to morality, I argue that this practice is impermissible because it violates a duty that we have as moral agents, namely to do our own moral reasoning and reach moral decisions by ourselves. I show that the fulfilment of this duty is necessary for virtue and if we defer we forsake the chance to be called good or moral.

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## INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I investigate the problem of moral deference. Moral deference can be roughly defined as the practice of appropriating a moral judgment, such as ‘Breaking this promise is wrong’ or ‘Lying is not permissible in this situation’, from someone we believe to be an authority in this area, i.e. a moral expert. Unlike other domains, such as physics or medicine, where we happily defer to those we see as relevant experts, there is an uneasiness related to moral deference.

Thus, some questions arise: why do we usually avoid moral deference? Why do we think suspiciously of someone who defers when it comes to morality? Is there something wrong with a moral belief or action that is based on deference? In this thesis, I plan to answer these questions and to show what exactly is wrong with moral deference. My work will be both prescriptive and descriptive: I will argue for the impermissibility of moral deference and this will also show why we tend to avoid it. Even if we do not consciously formulate it as I do, I think our practices and intuitions reflect the view that I will put forward.

I will reject moral deference by arguing that it violates a duty that we have as moral agents, namely to do our moral reasoning, deliberation and decisions by ourselves. I call this *the duty to do-it-yourself*. Morality imposes this duty on us because in order to be moral or virtuous we need more than right beliefs and actions: they have to come out of an understanding of their right-making features, which has to be consciously acknowledged so that it can guide our moral performances, and help us form the right intentions, emotions and motivations. Moral deference, I will argue, infringes upon the duty to do-it-yourself and precludes the possibility of obtaining all the elements needed for virtue and, therefore, it is impermissible.

Here is how I will proceed. In the first chapter, I will conduct a conceptual analysis of moral deference. Given that the notion is quite vague and it has not been explained enough in the relevant literature, I believe it is important to clarify it and to be able to outline its extension. I will argue that what other authors have considered the paradigmatic case of moral deference is, in fact, not moral deference. I will also use three criteria to distinguish between the plausible and the implausible cases of moral deference.

In the second chapter, I will show the impermissibility of moral deference by arguing for the plausibility of the existence of the duty to do-it-yourself. I will start by explaining why my research takes place in a virtue ethics framework. After that, I will analyse the difference between moral deference and moral advice in order to show that my account is not absurdly demanding and it does not entail the impermissibility of moral advice or moral dialogue. Subsequently, I will argue for the duty to do-it-yourself by applying a version of virtue epistemology to morality. I will transfer Ernest Sosa's arguments for the value of *reflective knowledge* and *knowing full well* into the moral domain and show how this approach offers important insights on how to understand what it means to be virtuous and morally praiseworthy. From the demonstration of the plausibility of the duty to do-it-yourself, the impermissibility of moral deference will follow clearly. In the last section of this chapter, I will argue that third person moral deference should be rejected as well.

Finally, in the third chapter, I will anticipate two objections that can be brought against my view and give some answers to them.

## CHAPTER ONE: WHAT IS MORAL DEFERENCE? A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I will discuss the concept of moral deference. The notion is vaguer than one would expect because there are some discrepancies between its dictionary definition<sup>1</sup>, how philosophers use it, and how it actually takes place in real life. In the relevant literature there has been no substantial discussion about the extension of the concept (i.e. the kind of cases to which it applies), but I believe that in order to discuss its permissibility we have to know what kind of instances we can encounter. I will show that there are three main criteria that can guide us in making the necessary distinctions between the types of moral deference which are plausible and those which are not, and thus help us establish the extension of the concept. The criteria are: how moral deference occurs, the nature of its content and the subject of its content.

Generally, deference refers to the practice of assuming as one's own a certain judgment on authority. We defer to the physicist about the fact that the Sun's mass is about 330,000 times that of Earth; we defer to the chemist when she tells us that elemental sodium generates flammable hydrogen and caustic sodium hydroxide upon contact with water. We also defer to the doctor when she warns us not to mix medication with alcohol. Many examples can be provided from other domains as well, and the point is that we take on these people's judgments because we believe in their knowledge and we think that they are experts in those fields. We can say we *know* the Sun has that specific mass, and the justification for it lies in the fact that I have been told this by an expert. This means that we do not usually look for the direct justification of that piece of knowledge (its transparent reasons, what makes that proposition true) because the indirect justification (opaque evidence: "evidence for the truth

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, dictionaries only define the term 'deference' and when we apply it to the moral domain we can notice that it does not capture real life cases. See <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/learner/deference>, <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/deference>, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/deference>.

of a proposition that does not disclose that in virtue of which the proposition is true, or its truth-makers”<sup>2</sup>), in this case the expert’s testimony, is enough.

When it comes to morality, deference happens when we appropriate a moral judgment, such as ‘Breaking this promise is wrong’ or ‘Lying is not permissible in this situation’, from someone we believe to be an authority in this area, i.e. a moral expert. I will not discuss the issue of moral expertise in this thesis, as it is a very complex one and deserves a proper analysis on its own, so I will only sketch how the concept is normally used. Roughly, a moral expert can be said to be someone with a greater claim to moral knowledge<sup>3</sup> (than the average person). In the literature, there are two main perspectives on what makes someone a moral expert. The first supports the idea that moral experts are those people who have philosophical and specific moral training, with time to think about moral issues and who are familiar with moral concepts and arguments.<sup>4</sup> The second view conceives of moral experts as people with a greater moral sensitivity, whose experiences have made them more perceptive to certain kinds of moral issues.<sup>5</sup>

### ***1.1. How Moral Deference Occurs***

Returning to the main problem, we have to note that coming to have a moral belief may happen in more than one manner and I think that elucidating this is important in order to see what we can properly call deference.<sup>6</sup> At first sight, and also from how the term is defined in dictionaries (see footnote 1), the concept seems to imply that we are accepting the

<sup>2</sup> David Enoch, “A Defense of Moral Deference”, *The Journal Of Philosophy*, 61:5 (2014): 12-13

<sup>3</sup> Julia Driver, “Autonomy and the Asymmetry Problem for Moral Expertise”, *Philosophical Studies*, 128:3 (2009): 625

<sup>4</sup> A philosopher with such a view is Peter Singer, “Moral Experts”, *Analysis*, 32:4 (1972)

<sup>5</sup> Among the philosophers who hold this view are Julia Driver, *op. cit.*, 625 and Karen Jones, “Second-Hand Moral Knowledge”, *The Journal of Philosophy*, 96:2 (1999): 64-65. Karen Jones and François Schroeter call the first view of moral expertise *the intellectualist model* and the second *the practical wisdom model*, “Moral Expertise”, *Analyse & Kritik*, 34:2 (2012): 218

<sup>6</sup> The distinctions that I am going to draw might apply to other domains as well, but I am only preoccupied with what happens in morality.

judgment without knowing the first order reasons for it, as the most important thing seems to be the courteous regard we hold for the one we are deferring to. The existence of an authority is crucial to the concept because the only justification that we need to defer (and, implicitly, for the belief we are acquiring) is the respect for the authority of the person we are deferring to. This certainly seems plausible in most domains as we do defer to the physicist because we believe in her expertise and we respect and trust her knowledge. Concerning morality, this also seems to happen when we start learning about it, namely when, as children, we defer to our parents or teachers. I will call this type of deference, which involves not knowing the direct reasons for the belief assumed, *strict moral deference*.

However, if this would be the only sense of deference, then this discussion would be pointless because this does not happen among adults, who are the subjects I am interested in. We do not just stop eating meat because we read a newspaper headline which says “Peter Singer says that eating meat is wrong”. Although we know Peter Singer is a philosopher who has worked for many years on ethical issues regarding animals and we think he is an expert<sup>7</sup> in this area, we still do not just defer to his judgment without finding out or at least trying to find out his reasons. Even when someone is deferring to a religious figure or assumes moral laws from sacred books, there is still more than an appeal to authority; for example, one knows that it is wrong to kill because only God has the right to give and take life, not just because the priest has said it or because there is one line in the bible that states that. Morally deferring without having even the smallest amount of direct justification seems truly implausible and I have never heard of such cases.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> According to his own criteria, Singer would be a moral expert. Arguably, due to his personal efforts in the fight for animal rights, he may be considered a moral expert even according to the second model that I have mentioned.

<sup>8</sup> We can obviously create thought experiments where we can stipulate that one is deferring without knowing anything about what makes the moral claim right or wrong due to lack of time or under coercion. However, I am not interested here in how deference could happen, but more in how it actually happens.



Despite being rather improbable, such examples are widely discussed in the literature and they seem to influence the intuitions of philosophers who argue against moral deference. Sarah McGrath presents one such example: “You tell me that eating meat is immoral. Although I believe that, left to my own devices, I would not think this, no matter how long I reflected, I adopt your attitude as my own.”<sup>9</sup> So does Philip Nickel:

Suppose, for example, that someone — I’ll call her “Sandia” — is trying to decide whether to move to Bombay to work on an engineering project there. She fears that her children might not adjust well to living in India, and she does not know whether to take them with her, to leave them behind with a relative, or to remain on her current project at home. Sandia’s close friend Lisa is well acquainted with every detail of Sandia’s situation, and Sandia reasonably trusts Lisa. Lisa reasonably asserts that Sandia should take her children to India with her, suggesting at the same time that Sandia is not considering the matter clearly. Suppose Sandia comes to believe and act on Lisa’s claim, but *without* also having, or being given, some rudimentary justification for the claim.<sup>10</sup>

Alison Hills also provides a similar example: “Eleanor has always enjoyed eating meat but has recently realized that it raises some moral issues. Rather than thinking further about these, however, she talks to a friend, who tells her that eating meat is wrong. Eleanor knows that her friend is normally trustworthy and reliable, so she believes her and accepts that eating meat is wrong.”<sup>11</sup>

I believe that such cases do not happen as there is something incoherent about them: how could we ask others what to do or believe about a moral issue without further asking ‘why’? First of all, we do not ask such questions if we already know what to do, which shows that at least some reflection is implied, i.e. our uncertainty is a product of some kind of reflection on the matter. Not asking the expert about her reasons for her moral claim is very improbable, since we clearly have had the moral inclination of giving the problem some

<sup>9</sup> Sarah McGrath, “The Puzzle of Moral Deference”, *Philosophical Perspectives*, 23:1 (2009): 321. Even though she does not explicitly say that the person has not inquired into the reasons for the belief that eating meat is wrong, one can see that it is implied.

<sup>10</sup> Philip Nickel, “Moral Testimony and Its Authority”, *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 4:3 (2001): 262.

<sup>11</sup> Alison Hills, “Moral Testimony and Moral Epistemology”, *Ethics*, 120:1 (2009): 94

thought and thus showing that we are interested in what justifies the solution. Second, if we ask someone about a certain moral issue this also indicates that we have at least a minimal moral concern and we *want* to solve the problem; otherwise, we would not care or maybe not even consider the problem in the first place, so the further step of asking ‘why’ is naturally made.<sup>12</sup> Thus, although strict moral deference would be the paradigmatic example of deference, it appears to me that such instances do not happen in real life. Then some questions arise: *why* don’t people defer? Why does the dictionary definition of deference not apply to morality? I will return to this issue later.

Also, if strict moral deference does not happen, then what does actually happen? What do we do, how do we react when we ask someone ‘what should I do?’ regarding a moral dilemma? I think an example will help clarify the problem. Jane has gotten pregnant by mistake. On one hand, she is neither in a serious relationship nor does she desire to be, and she definitely does not want a child at this moment in her life. On the other hand, she is still troubled because she is uncertain about the moral facts that surround the issue: is the foetus a person?<sup>13</sup> Is abortion like murdering an adult human being? What are the rights of future people? So, should she have an abortion? She does not know what to do and she asks Miranda, a friend whom she trusts. Miranda tells her abortion is the right thing for her to do. Jane further asks Miranda why she thinks that. Miranda explains that given that Jane does not want to be a mother now, because she thinks the foetus is not a person, and as long as she has an early abortion that prevents any chance of it feeling any pain, it is permissible for her to do it. I think that there are three possibilities in such a situation:

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<sup>12</sup> Even if what is of primary interest is a solution for our moral dilemma and not a complete explanation, given that we are reflecting on it ourselves and we are aware of and disquieted by our uncertainty, I do not think it is implausible to say that we would automatically ask the person offering us the answer what her reasons are.

<sup>13</sup> One might worry that it is not clear whether this is a moral or a metaphysical question. Although this particular question might be ambiguous in this sense, I think that whether to have an abortion or not is definitely a moral decision and it can qualify as a candidate for a potential case of moral deference.

- a) Jane grasps Miranda's reasons for her belief, reflects on them, she agrees and accepts them as her own.
- b) Jane grasps Miranda's reasons for her belief, but does not agree with her (e.g. she detects some kind of flaw in Miranda's reasoning — not necessarily a logical one — or thinks that those reasons do not ground the belief<sup>14</sup>)
- c) Jane does not grasp Miranda's reasons for her belief (i.e. does not *understand* the claim in Hills's sense, namely she does not see the connection between Miranda's reasons for belief and her belief).

In the first case, I think that moral deference does not happen. What occurs is that Jane is being convinced by Miranda's arguments and takes them as her own not because of her friend's authority, but because she is persuaded by them, their coherence and rationality. I think this is rather a case of moral advice, as Jane only guides herself by what Miranda says.<sup>15</sup> What we have here is an instance of reasonable conversation which ends with someone being convinced of something through rational means and sound arguments. The first scenario does not contain an example of deference.

In the second case, I do not think that Jane would be capable of actually adopting Miranda's belief as her own. When we are not convinced by and, especially, if we do not agree with a certain belief, it seems very implausible to say that we can come to hold that belief, particularly in the moral field. I think that doxastic voluntarism, the view that we can choose what to believe, is not true and thus it is psychologically impossible for Jane to appropriate Miranda's belief. I do not have the space to pursue a full rejection of doxastic voluntarism here, but I do want to discuss a few points in order to provide some support for my claim.

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<sup>14</sup> Another way of explaining this might be by saying that Jane *accepts* Miranda's belief but does not *embrace* (believe) it herself. This means that she sees why Miranda holds the belief but does not agree with her reasons and what her reasons should support.

<sup>15</sup> I discuss the difference between moral advice and moral deference at length in the next chapter.

I think it is psychologically impossible to have voluntary control over the formation of our beliefs because we are always conditioned and guided by the evidence that we have. I admit that we could be swayed by some non-rational elements, such as emotions, hopes or desires, but I believe that their influence is also something that we cannot control; even if we do have some control over such non-rational interferences, this still does not show that belief formation is under voluntary control. What doxastic voluntarism implies is that there could be an intention<sup>16</sup> to believe something and forming the belief is a result of that. It is an act of will and coming to have a belief is thus an action.

I see it differently: I think that when we believe *p* we do it because we have evidence for *p* and consciously ignoring it would not only be irrational, but psychologically impossible. What can happen is that people may let their emotions interfere and thus ignore the evidence or concentrate on specific pieces of evidence. However, it is not clear that this would be a choice or a voluntary action as it does not involve intention; wishes and hopes affect the way we look at the evidence — what we focus on — but not in a conscious way, as a result of a decision. Instead, they unintentionally colour our perception<sup>17</sup> in such a way that we are led involuntarily to one belief rather than the other. The parents who have a son fighting in a war, and hear that his battalion has been attacked and there are several victims, wish that their son is not among those who have died. They have no compelling evidence that he is either dead or alive, but they can come to believe that he is not dead because their desires and hopes are making them focus on particular pieces of evidence, such as the fact that they have not been informed of his death and that he is probably unable to get in touch due to the chaos that the attack has caused there. But this does not imply that they *chose* to follow their emotions or that they formed an intention to believe, decided to believe and thus

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<sup>16</sup> Richard Feldman, “Voluntary Belief and Epistemic Evaluation”, in *Knowledge, Truth, and Duty. Essays on Epistemic Justification, Responsibility and Virtue*, ed. Matthias Steup (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 85-86

<sup>17</sup> Nomy Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 12. She does not discuss doxastic voluntarism, but something similar, namely the problem of intentional self-deception.

believed that their son is not dead. Their emotions simply took over and influenced the way they see the evidence.

Moreover, even if we assume that they do have at least some control over their emotions and that they have chosen to focus on what their emotions lead them to, this still does not entail that their believing that their son is not dead is a voluntary action. This would be a case of merely *causing oneself to form beliefs*, which is not the same as forming a belief or believing.<sup>18</sup> It can be considered, at best, an indirect cause for the formation of the belief because “there will be some basic action, such as contemplating the relevant propositions in a certain positive way that produces the desired state of affairs: believing it. This action will cause belief formation but it is not an act of belief formation. It is not, then, what doxastic voluntarists have wanted.”<sup>19</sup>

This argument also works, I believe, against defences of doxastic voluntarism such as Carl Ginet’s, who thinks that to decide to believe that *p* means to decide to count on its being the case that *p*, where counting on its being the case that *p* means that one does not prepare oneself for the possibility of not-*p*.<sup>20</sup> I think that the step of deciding to count on its being the case that *p* is, in fact, the same as causing oneself to form beliefs; but all this amounts to is the action of directing one’s attention to a specific aspect rather than another, which is not the same as willing and thus bringing about a belief. Robert Audi captures this point very clearly when he says that “we perhaps picture ourselves as agents of belief formation when what we have really done is to create (or enter) circumstances in which it occurs as a nonvoluntary response to a pattern of evidence. We have accepted *p*, but not because we assented to it or performed an act of acceptance. Rather, the pattern of evidence produced the belief; the belief

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<sup>18</sup> Robert Audi, “Doxastic Voluntarism and the Ethics of Belief”, in *Knowledge, Truth, and Duty. Essays on Epistemic Justification, Responsibility and Virtue*, ed. Matthias Steup (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 101

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 104

<sup>20</sup> Carl Ginet, “Deciding to Believe”, in *Knowledge, Truth, and Duty. Essays on Epistemic Justification, Responsibility and Virtue*, ed. Matthias Steup (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 66-67

is more like a response to external grounds than a result of an internal volitive thrust.”<sup>21</sup>

Although this is not an exhaustive discussion of doxastic voluntarism, I hope to have shown that there are strong reasons to doubt it. Thus, I believe that Jane is unable to appropriate Miranda’s belief as her own, especially since she does not agree with her, because it is impossible for her to control her belief formation in such a way. This means that we do not or, more specifically, cannot have a case of moral deference in this situation.

The third scenario — where Jane does not grasp Miranda’s reasons for her belief — might contain a genuine example of deference. In this case, Jane tries to grasp what grounds Miranda’s belief but she does not. Jane does not only want to *know* why Miranda believes that she ought to have an abortion, but to *understand* why. This means that she wants to see the connection between the reasons that she offers and her belief.<sup>22</sup> However, if she fails to do that but still assumes Miranda’s belief as her own she is definitely deferring as her friend’s authority is the only justification for it.<sup>23</sup> Here a great amount of trust in Miranda as a person and friend is needed: in order to defer, Jane has to believe she is morally competent, a good person and friend with good intentions, who wants to help her and would not lie to her. In this case, if Jane were to believe she ought to perform the abortion she would do it because she has deferred to Miranda.

In my view, this is the only plausible possibility of how deference can occur. I think strict moral deference simply does not exist and type b) deference is psychologically

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Audi, *op. cit.*, 98

<sup>22</sup> Alison Hills, *op. cit.*, 100-101

<sup>23</sup> One might wonder why Jane is able to acquire Miranda’s belief in this case but not in the type b) example discussed above. In the latter situation, there is something going against Miranda: maybe her reasoning seems suspicious to Jane, or perhaps Jane does not believe the connections Miranda is putting forward; whatever it may be, the fact that she does not agree with her shows that there is some evidence against Miranda’s claims. By contrast, type c) deference is possible because there is nothing that hints towards the fact that Miranda might be wrong. The only problem is that Jane does not grasp the relation between the claim and its reasons. In the type b) case the second order reasons — the trust Jane has in Miranda’s expertise — cannot override first order reasons, i.e. whatever Jane finds wrong with Miranda’s explanation such that she does not agree with her because, as I have argued, doxastic voluntarism is not plausible. In the type c) case, the second order reasons can prevail because they have nothing to overcome, no evidence or suspicions, and this is why Jane is able to take Miranda’s testimony and the trust she has in her as enough justification.

impossible due to the fact that we cannot decide what to believe. Thus, I want to hold that type c) deference is the only one that seems plausible according to the criterion of how deference happens. Although my arguments will apply to all possible forms of moral deference, the point of the discussion so far has been to show that how deference actually happens is relevant because we do not want our philosophical work to be about something that does not even occur; a conceptual analysis of the notion of moral deference is important because we have to know what exactly we are trying to argue against and thus to prevent becoming the kind of philosophers to whom Wittgenstein referred when he said “a whole cloud of philosophy condenses in a drop of grammar.”<sup>24</sup>

In contrast to my account, the philosophers who have rejected the permissibility of moral deference focus on strict moral deference, which they see as the paradigmatic example of deference, and not so much on what I hold to be the only plausible one, namely type c) deference. They do consider it briefly but, unlike me, they deem it permissible: Alison Hills and Philip Nickel claim that although it is always good to try to understand the reasons for a moral belief, some of us just cannot gain that comprehension, and for them it would be better to defer.<sup>25</sup> Hills talks about the possibility of having a bad moral judgment that does not improve through reflection, of being in a position where you cannot gain moral understanding:

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<sup>24</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, revised 4<sup>th</sup> edition, trans. P.M.S. Hacker, Joachim Schulte (Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 233

<sup>25</sup> Their stance on type c) deference is not very clear because the failure of comprehending the reasons that I discuss may be the result of two different things: an inability to understand or an insufficient effort to gain that understanding. Although Hills and Nickel think that in the first case it would be permissible to defer, I am not certain what they would say about the second scenario. They would probably think that it would be wrong to defer if one did not put enough effort in attaining comprehension. But there are difficult questions that arise in relation to this: when can we say that there has been insufficient effort? When can we say whether one has tried enough? Can we clearly distinguish between inability and insufficient effort? Because of the difficulty of finding an answer to such questions (which Hills recognizes, *op. cit.*, 124-125), I am not certain that they would immediately deem the person in this version of type c) deference as doing something wrong. So, in sum, they reject the kind of deference that I think does not exist, strict moral deference, but do not reject the kind of deference that I regard as impermissible, type c).

Given your situation, morally worthy action and proper orientation are out of reach. But if you are lucky and you have access to reliable people whom you can trust, you might be able to get moral knowledge and, as a result, do the right thing. Since doing the right thing is very important, you should trust moral testimony from trustworthy and reliable sources and defer to moral experts if you cannot gain moral understanding.<sup>26</sup>

Of course, there are further problems with identifying the experts, as Hills notices, but in principle moral deference would not be the wrong thing to do in type c) scenarios. Similarly, Nickel admits that:

having only these sorts of problems, inability to weigh reasons properly and failure to track particular kinds of reasons, is consistent with meeting *the Recognition Requirement* [where the Recognition Requirement states that “morality requires one to act from an understanding of moral claim and therefore to have an understanding of moral claims that are relevant to action”<sup>27</sup>]. One’s actions can be morally good even when one overcomes these problems through moral testimony. It is only when one has a more global inability to grasp relevant reasons, or when one refuses to do so, that one cannot act morally well.<sup>28</sup>

Thus it seems that if type c) deference is the only type of deference that actually happens, even the authors that argue against moral deference would allow it. So, is this it? Is the problem solved? Not quite. I hold that even in those instances, where one does not understand the reasons, one should still not defer. In the second chapter of this thesis, I will argue for the fact that it is impermissible to defer because not doing the moral reasoning for oneself and not understanding why a certain moral claim or action is right makes it such that one cannot be called moral, good or virtuous.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, I think that the debate is not over because there is still the need to explain why we do not usually defer with regard to moral issues. There is still both prescriptive and descriptive work to be done regarding moral deference.

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<sup>26</sup> Alison Hills, *op. cit.*, 123-124

<sup>27</sup> Philip Nickel, *op. cit.*, 257

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 264. For Nickel, the general incapacity to gain moral understanding amounts to a constant failure of being a good person. Hills does not address the problem of the general inability to obtain moral understanding.

<sup>29</sup> If one defers one may, *at best*, do the right thing. But one cannot be considered virtuous. I will discuss this more extensively in the next chapter.



## 1.2. The Nature of the Content of Moral Deference

A further distinction that can help to identify what moral deference is regards the nature of the content of the moral testimony one is ready to appropriate, and it has been made by Sarah McGrath. She differentiates between *pure moral deference* and *impure moral deference*. The former refers to cases where we treat the person we defer to as having purely moral information that we lack, while the latter stipulates that we defer to someone because we know they have additional non-moral information.<sup>30</sup> I believe this distinction is important because it shows once more that there is something suspicious about appropriating strictly the moral part of a moral answer; taking on factual information is not as problematic.

However, I am not sure that impure moral deference can be properly called moral deference. Firstly, the deference is about facts, about non-normative information, about the descriptive reality: the conditions of life of animals, in McGrath's example about the morality of eating meat.<sup>31</sup> So why call it *moral* deference and not simple deference? Second, from knowing how animals are being treated to the conclusion that eating meat is wrong there is a step: the step from is to ought. But McGrath is making that step on her own; she is not just following her friend. If she knows that the factual information is relevant to her friend's moral judgment she can make the connection and understand why those facts affect her moral belief. This seems to be done through comprehension and agreement, so it seems to be more like a case of moral advice and rational persuasion than deference. Thus it appears that only pure moral deference is relevant to the debate.

Nevertheless, this distinction points to another complication regarding deference, namely the thin line between moral and non-moral deference; more specifically, the difficulty of separating the moral and the non-moral part (which is just as relevant and important) of

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<sup>30</sup> Sarah McGrath, *op. cit.*, 322

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 321

moral problems. We can see how closely they are related in many cases: the problem of abortion hangs on the question whether the foetus is a person or not, which depends on what makes someone a person, which has been related to consciousness and other factors that may or may not be physical, thus factual (moreover, we can ask if this issue is not actually a metaphysical one); the problem of eating meat has gained force with the discovering of the animals' conditions of life. Also, the discussion about animal rights is related to the notion of intrinsic worth (by authors such as Tom Regan), which depends on their being *subjects of a life* (i.e. having beliefs, desires, memory, feelings, self-consciousness), which is, after all, an empirical matter. Numerous complicated moral issues seem to have this mix of moral and factual aspects that are closely connected, and this probably is one of the reasons why they are so challenging in the first place.

But the problem becomes even more difficult when we talk about deference: will we always be able to separate moral from non-moral deference? Are all instances of moral deference just pure moral deference? What if facts and values, moral and non-moral aspects cannot be truly separated? In my view, they actually cannot: sometimes we just cannot know which feature of a problem is moral and which non-moral; this becomes more evident when we think about how many factors must be considered when we deal with a moral dilemma. It is not only the moral aspect, but we must think about the circumstances of the situation, the personal characteristics of the people involved, counterfactuals and other possible scenarios.

For example, think of the case of someone who is offered a promotion at work that involves relocating to another country. Should the person take the job? Her decision involves moral and non-moral aspects that are very difficult to separate. The person has to take into account the rights and interests of her family and her duties to them, which are not just abstract moral concepts, but relate to empirical matters such as what it would mean for the children to change schools and be separated from friends, for the partner to change their job

or how the adaptation to a whole new life would go for everyone. Questions of right and wrong, of happiness and well-being, and of empirical possibilities, all have to be considered and it would probably be impossible to specify which information is moral and which non-moral.

There might be cases of pure moral deference, but we encounter them less often than what I think should be called *mixed moral deference*, where the factual and the moral information are mixed and impossible to separate, like in the example described above.<sup>32</sup> But then a further question arises: given that mixed moral deference is partly about facts (permissible to defer) and partly about moral aspects (impermissible to defer), is it permissible or not? I think it is still impermissible because as long as one cannot separate the two, due to the importance of the duty to do-it-yourself for which I will argue in chapter two, mixed moral deference would not allow for the person who defers to be moral or virtuous.

### ***1.3 The Subject of the Content of Moral Deference***

The last distinction that I want to draw regarding the concept of moral deference concerns the subject of its content. According to this criterion, it seems that we can distinguish between what I call *first person moral deference* and *third person moral deference*.<sup>33</sup> By first-person moral deference I mean the practice of deference from the first person perspective, i.e. I am deferring to Miranda regarding what I should do. Third person moral deference refers to the practice of deference about other people, i.e. I am deferring to Miranda about what Jane should do.

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<sup>32</sup> This is different than McGrath's impure moral deference because in that case one is able to distinguish which aspects are moral and which are not: the person in her example is ready to defer because the expert has relevant non-moral information.

<sup>33</sup> This distinction has been brought to my attention by Simon Rippon.

At first sight, it might seem peculiar to even consider third person moral deference. The worries about moral deference have been related to autonomy, justification and acting out of moral understanding; but all these aspects seem to have no application when it comes to our beliefs about someone else's moral life, and not our own. Still, as I will argue in the last section of chapter two, the moral beliefs that we hold about a third person do have relevance to our own moral paths and thus they have to be given the same importance that we give to the moral beliefs that concern ourselves. After I offer my arguments for the impermissibility of first person moral deference I will proceed to see if they apply to third person moral deference as well.

In this section, I offered a conceptual analysis of the notion of moral deference. I believe that the philosophers who work on this topic have unjustly ignored the importance of explaining what exactly we mean when we talk about moral deference because seeing how it actually occurs helps to focus the debate and to make the arguments more relevant. I have put forward the concept of *strict moral deference* to describe the kind of cases that have been commonly called moral deference, but which I have argued that do not exist. I also have shown that according to three different criteria, the most likely scenarios of moral deference are: *moral deference with the failed attempt of understanding the reasons for the moral claim* (the type c) moral deference), *mixed moral deference*, *first person moral deference* and *third person moral deference*. In what follows, I will present my arguments for the impermissibility of moral deference.

## CHAPTER TWO: WHY MORALITY IS NOT ONLY FOR SOME CHOSEN FEW. THE IMPERMISSIBILITY OF MORAL DEFERENCE

In this chapter, I will show why I think moral deference is problematic. More exactly, I will argue that it is *impermissible* because it violates a duty that we have regarding our moral lives, namely a duty to do our moral reasoning and deliberation by ourselves or to be our own pilots, as Anscombe puts it;<sup>34</sup> morality requires this from us because in order to be moral or virtuous we have to form moral beliefs and perform moral actions out of an understanding of their right-making features. I call this *the duty to do-it-yourself*.

In the first section I will explain why I adopt virtue ethics as my framework for developing the discussion regarding this duty and moral deference. In the second section I will explore the difference between moral advice and moral deference in order to show that the duty to do-it-yourself does not preclude the possibility of moral dialogue between agents. In the third section I will demonstrate the plausibility of the existence of the duty to do-it-yourself by applying a version of virtue epistemology to morality. Finally, in the last section I will investigate whether this duty applies to third person moral deference as well.

### 2.1. The Framework: Why Virtue Ethics

My arguments against moral deference will consist of showing the plausibility of the existence of the moral duty to do-it-yourself. I believe that this duty relates to what it means for one to be good and virtuous. The best way of exploring these aspects seems to me to be through virtue ethics, which focuses on the moral agent in this precise manner. I also think that virtue ethics, in general, captures better than other ethical theories some aspects of

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<sup>34</sup> G. E. M. Anscombe, *Ethics, Religion and Politics*, vol. III, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), 48

morality which are strikingly plausible and which explain many of our intuitions. I do not have space to lay out a defence of virtue ethics here, but I do want to briefly explain why I think this is the most appropriate framework and why I have chosen it. I am not committed to any particular version of virtue ethics as I am discussing its general form, following Rosalind Hursthouse's defence.<sup>35</sup>

Firstly, virtue ethics relates the success of our moral life to the concept of *eudaimonia*. Being a good person contributes to our flourishing, to our well-being.<sup>36</sup> This seems to me particularly important and relevant because one might object to my view by asking what is so valuable about being moral, about being a good person who does not defer. The answer comes from this aspect that virtue ethics nicely explains: being virtuous is part of what makes us flourish and our well-being would suffer if we would lack this feature. It is also very intuitive to think that morality is an important factor which contributes to making our lives fulfilling because whenever we are confronted with a moral decision what guides us is the thought of our well-being and the well-being of others, which in return contributes to ours. This aspect also accommodates the intuition that sometimes well-being is different than happiness, in a more subjective and hedonistic sense, and this is why some moral decisions are hard and doing the right thing may demand some sacrifices, may make us go against our immediate desires. For example, even if I would truly want a certain job that requires me to move outside the country, if I know it would hurt my child's development, I would not take it. In this way, I am causing myself some temporary unhappiness, but that decision has to be made for my child's and, thus, my own well-being. Being moral is not always easy and its connection to *eudaimonia* may explain why.

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<sup>35</sup> Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999)

<sup>36</sup> As Hursthouse points out, the concept can be also translated as 'happiness', but then it might be considered too subjective. *Eudaimonia* is more than that and translating it as 'well-being' accommodates the idea that one might be mistaken about what one's own flourishing consists of, *op. cit.*, 10.

Secondly, virtue ethics is able to explain our thoughts about the importance of intention, motivation, concern and character for the moral evaluation of a person. One of the crucial intuitions that I make use of in the arguments against moral deference is that morality is not only about doing the right thing. Outcomes and consequences matter, of course, but they are only one part of the story. When we evaluate someone morally, we do not look solely at her actions. We also think about her reasons, intentions, moral concern, motivation and character. A Nazi soldier who helps a weak old person carry their luggage cannot be called a good person; his action is obviously right, even his intention and motivation regarding this particular situation may be good, but his character is not because we know he is a firm believer in the Nazi doctrine. A person who does good by accident cannot be called a virtuous person either and is not praiseworthy because of her action. Her *action* is praiseworthy in itself, but I do not think *she* is, as she did not want or intend to do that.<sup>37</sup>

Let me illustrate this with a couple of examples. John is standing in the bus station by himself. A man approaches, takes out a gun and aims at John. John sees him only as the man pulls the trigger and does not have time to move. However, in that exact moment, James, who is not paying attention to what is happening, walks right in front of John. The man shoots but he hits James's backpack, where he has a metal box which, in fact, stops the bullet. The man runs away, but John is happy he is alive and grateful to James for saving his life. James has indeed saved John's life, but is he praiseworthy for that? I would say that he is not, because he did not want or intend to save John's life; what he did was a good thing, he did save a person's life, but in the absence of the relevant motivation and intention, he cannot be called virtuous because of that.

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<sup>37</sup> This point is illustrated by Thomas Nagel in his discussion of moral luck: "Without being able to explain exactly why, we feel that the appropriateness of moral assessment is easily undermined by the discovery that the act or attribute, no matter how good or bad, is not under the person's control. While other evaluations remain, this one seems to lose its footing. So a clear absence of control, produced by involuntary movement, physical force or ignorance of the circumstances, excuses what is done from moral judgment", "Moral Luck", in *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 25. However, I think we *are* able to explain why we feel this way: it is because we also value intentions, motivations, character, and not only consequences.

Or consider another situation: Jane lives in a neighbourhood where there are many homeless people. She does not care too much for them and she does not do anything to help them. Her friend, Miranda, is very moved by their situation and every time she visits Jane she helps them by giving them food or money. Jane notices her friend's preoccupation and, to impress her, she starts bringing food to the poor whenever Miranda comes by. Can we say that Jane is a virtuous person? Even though her action is obviously right and the people genuinely benefit from what she is doing, she cannot be praised and she cannot be called moral. Her motivation and intention are not the right ones and she is not acting out of an understanding of the right-making features.

James and Jane cannot be considered good or moral and do not deserve praise even though what they did was right. They are just happy 'victims' of *resultant luck*,<sup>38</sup> namely the kind of luck related to the consequences and results of one's actions and decisions. By contrast, the virtuous person's good action is not the result of luck: her deeply entrenched dispositions that constitute her character give her a reliable, self-conscious way of acting rightly. Additionally, being moral requires more than just right actions. And a correct evaluation of a person takes into account the connection between these right actions and the 'interior' aspects, namely intentions and so on. I believe that morality is an intersection of exterior and interior aspects, of the right actions and the right motivational constellation. Virtue ethics can explain this kind of intuition and why we abstain from praising the people from the examples given above.

Thirdly and, due to space limitation, finally, virtue ethics has the advantage of underlining the importance of emotions in morality.<sup>39</sup> Other moral theories have the vice of

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<sup>38</sup> This kind of moral luck has been described by Thomas Nagel as "luck in the way one's actions and projects turn out", *op. cit.*, 28, but its name comes from Michael Zimmerman, "Luck and Moral Responsibility", *Ethics*, 97:2 (1987): 376

<sup>39</sup> I follow Hursthouse's interpretation and explanation of the account of emotions in virtue ethics. See *op. cit.*, chapter 5, "Virtue and the Emotions".



considering emotions as being either too rational or too irrational.<sup>40</sup> Virtue ethics, especially in its Aristotelian form, based on his view on the partition of the soul, can account for emotions in a way that avoids falling into one of the two extremes. Due to the desiderative part of the soul (where emotions dwell), which can be seen as both rational and non-rational, emotions themselves can also have both these characteristics; this helps to explain why humans have some emotions that other non-rational animals have as well and also some that non-rational animals lack and, more importantly, how “reason can radically transform an emotion that human beings certainly share with animals, such as fear.”<sup>41</sup>

More relevantly, however, the Aristotelian account of emotions allows them to play a role in full virtue and shows them as having moral significance. Hursthouse puts the argument in this way: 1. The virtues (and vices) are morally significant; 2. The virtues (and vices) are all dispositions not only to act, but to feel emotions as *reactions* as well as impulses to action; 3. In the person with the virtues, these emotions will be felt on the *right* occasions, towards the *right* people or objects, for the *right* reasons, where ‘right’ means ‘correct’.<sup>42</sup> If many have been put off by Kant’s claim that the moral action made out of inclination does not have the same moral worth as the one made out of duty, this problem disappears in virtue ethics: emotions and inclinations are part of virtue and it is not only permissible to have the adequate emotions, but it is actually required; which stands in perfect agreement with our intuitions and practices.

There is, of course, much more to be said about virtue ethics, but the purpose of this section has been to provide a brief explanation of why I have chosen it as a framework for my arguments.

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<sup>40</sup> As Hursthouse points out, the stoics support the former, while Hume and Kant the latter, *op. cit.*, 109-110.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 111

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 108

## 2.2. *Moral Advice and Moral Deference*

Even though we feel that there is something suspicious about moral deference, our intuitions about moral advice and moral dialogue<sup>43</sup> are much more positive. Not only do we not see them as problematic, but we also believe they can be important and helpful tools in our process of moral reasoning. They can assist those who have less experience with moral dilemmas and they can offer a different perspective to those who find themselves uncertain or entrapped in their own subjective viewpoint. We thus see moral advice as something that is sometimes even required. This points to a great difference between moral advice and moral deference. In this section, I will explore this difference in order to show that the duty to do-it-yourself, for which I will argue next, is not an absurdly demanding one that would preclude the possibility of moral advice. In the light of this distinction, we will be able to see that engaging in moral dialogue does not entail that we violate the duty to do-it-ourselves and that, therefore, moral advice is permissible on the account that I will develop.

A *prima facie* distinction between moral advice and moral testimony can be found in their linguistic form.<sup>44</sup> Moral advice is usually offered in the following manner: ‘I think that you should...’, ‘If I were you, I would...’ or ‘According to how I see it, you could...’. The adviser recognizes herself as simply an adviser and does not pretend that her judgment is the correct one or that the advisee *ought* to take it as such. She is only presenting her own standpoint on the matter, but does not assume an expert’s position who is giving moral solution or truths. Her claim applies solely to this particular case and it does not have to be seen as more than a considered opinion. In contrast, moral testimony may take a more

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<sup>43</sup> By moral dialogue I mean an exchange of views and perspectives on a certain moral issue between two or more people, which amounts to an exploration of arguments and counter-arguments, with the purpose of finding the best answer to the problem discussed. Moral advice can be part of a moral dialogue.

<sup>44</sup> The examples I provide are, of course, not exhaustive and I do not want to say that neither moral advice nor moral testimony can *only* come in these forms (they can also come in identical linguistic expressions). My point is that usually the choice of the linguistic expression does represent an indication of what one is trying to offer and how conclusive one thinks one’s judgment is.

imposing and imperative tone and the claims can be thought of as being more general: ‘Abortion is permissible’ or ‘Lying is wrong’. While advice clearly applies to a specific situation, testimony may be more extensive in its application as it may appear more like a verdict which goes beyond particular cases. However, because my discussion concerns moral deference, what I find important is the perspective of the deferrer and not of the one who offers the testimony or the advice. To see if we have a case of deference or of advice, I believe it is essential to investigate the attitude of the agent towards the moral judgments she is being provided with. In my view, how she uses them is what actually marks the distinction between advice and testimony or advice and deference.

Thus, what I consider to be the crucial difference between moral advice and moral deference lies not in how the moral judgments are offered, but in the way they are received and used. As shown in the previous chapter, moral deference occurs only when one tries but fails to understand the right-making reasons for the judgment being appropriated. What makes it a case of deference is that one assumes that claim as one’s own anyway, despite the failure of comprehension. Moral advice, by contrast, is not taken in that manner: one reflects on it, critically evaluates it and does not accept it unconditionally. Rather, one uses it only to guide oneself in the process of moral reasoning. Deference puts an end to moral deliberation, while advice does not; instead, it may only change, more or less significantly, its direction. Even if the new considerations brought about by the advice influence the agent’s process of moral reflection, the important thing is that she herself weighs the reasons, reflects, understands the connection between the right action and its right-making features and that she makes the final decision in virtue of that.

Deference also makes one consider the expert’s testimony the correct perspective. By contrast, advice offers one a different viewpoint, but without having this authoritative aspect to it: it is not the *right* angle, but just one *possible* angle. It is not supposed to be simply taken

at face value, but to be scrutinized, filtered through one's own worldview; it is advanced with the purpose of offering a fresh outlook, and of helping in the identification of the right-making features. Or, how Benjamin de Mesel puts it, moral advice helps "clarifying a moral perspective' or 'showing a moral world'"<sup>45</sup> and the adviser "puts the advisee's moral world, his moral self-image, into another perspective."<sup>46</sup> Moral advice has more of a role in the stimulation of moral creativity and in the animation of new ideas that are very much needed when one is in a state of normative uncertainty.

Alison Hills seems to regard moral advice in a similar manner when she writes:

You may treat the testimony as moral advice, which you subject to critical scrutiny, and you decide whether or not to accept, on its own merits. You take into account what others have said to you as a guide to your own reflections. (...) Advice from others, who can put forward another point of view, make salient the interests of others, and try to help you to see more clearly, is often essential to your gaining genuine moral understanding.<sup>47</sup>

However, what she distinguishes moral advice from is strict moral deference,<sup>48</sup> which I have shown in the previous chapter to be, although conceptually possible, practically implausible. Because of that, I do not think that her distinction truly addresses the question that needs to be addressed; nevertheless, her description of moral advice does manage to capture what I take to be its fundamental nature.

Thus, from what has been said above, I believe it is clear that the difference in the linguistic form of moral advice and moral testimony points only to the attitude of the person who offers her moral judgments, but that does not indicate if we have a case of advice or deference. That can be established by examining what the agent does with the judgments she

<sup>45</sup> Benjamin de Mesel, "Moral Modesty, Moral Judgment and Moral Advice. A Wittgensteinian Approach", *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology*, 75:1 (2014): 29

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 30

<sup>47</sup> Alison Hills, *op. cit.*, 123

<sup>48</sup> "You may trust or defer to moral testimony, where you simply believe what is said to you. You make no attempt to gather the reasons why *p* and draw conclusions yourself or to devise explanations for moral propositions that you have accepted. You simply believe what you are told", *ibid.*, 122

is being presented with. In the light of this distinction, we can see that moral advice and moral dialogue do not violate the duty to do-it-yourself. Because the advisee uses the advice only to guide herself in her moral reasoning she is still able to fulfil her moral duty of doing it herself, namely morally deliberating and figuring out the moral answer on her own. Thus she is still capable of forming beliefs or acting out of an understanding of their right-making features. Moreover, not only does moral advice not preclude the possibility of moral understanding, like deference does, but it can actually contribute to its enhancement because, as de Mesel claims, its biggest advantage is that “in the mirror of another’s moral thinking, the adviser can see his own moral thinking anew, from a distance *which makes a fuller understanding possible*.”<sup>49</sup> Therefore, taking moral advice is compatible with the duty to do-it-yourself and, thus, with being virtuous.

In this section, I have shown that there is a difference between moral advice and moral deference and that the former, unlike the latter, does not violate the duty to do-it-yourself. In the next part of this thesis, I will develop my view against the permissibility of moral deference by arguing for the existence of the moral duty to do-it yourself.

### ***2.3. A Moral Duty to Do-It-Yourself: What It Means to Be a Moral Agent***

The accounts that have been put forward so far in the moral deference debate have not had, in my view, the necessary force to show that moral deference is impermissible. Some philosophers have argued against the permissibility of moral deference by focusing on practical matters, such as the difficulty of identifying moral experts;<sup>50</sup> others have insisted on the goodness of moral understanding but not on its necessity,<sup>51</sup> and some have introduced

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<sup>49</sup> Alison Hills, *op. cit.*, 122

<sup>50</sup> Julia Driver, *op. cit.*; Sarah McGrath, *op.cit.* For a plausible rejection of such arguments, see Karen Jones and François Schroeter, *op. cit.*

<sup>51</sup> Alison Hills, *op. cit.*

such a requirement but failed to explain its nature and origin.<sup>52</sup> Although these are all plausible views, they still do not manage to explain why we *ought* not to defer. At best, they show that it is difficult to find someone to defer to, or that if we do defer, we are just not as good as we could be. However, I think that this is not enough to elucidate why moral deference is so problematic and to show that I will develop my own account.

My claim is that it is morally impermissible for an adult moral agent to defer to another person regarding moral matters. Why? Because I think we have *a moral duty to do-it-ourselves*,<sup>53</sup> namely to figure out our moral dilemmas on our own and to reach moral conclusions by ourselves. In other words, we are required to do our own moral reasoning and to reach the end of moral deliberation by ourselves. Why? I believe that the do-it-yourself attitude is part of what it means to be moral, to be a good person, because it helps us acquire moral beliefs and act based on the right reasons. To be virtuous entails more than having correct moral knowledge or doing the right thing: these have to be believed or done out of an understanding of what makes them right, by connecting the right-making features with the relevant belief or action. When we defer, we lack this understanding and its guidance, and even though that does not mean that our beliefs are not correct or that we should not have done that action, it means that we are not being moral, virtuous. One might still call our *action* right, but one cannot call *us* good persons.

As I have explained in the first section of this chapter, within a virtue ethics framework, being moral is more than merely doing what is right. We must have the right intentions, concern, emotions and motivation, which entails that we have to believe or act

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<sup>52</sup> Robert Hopkins, "What Is Wrong with Moral Testimony?", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 74:3 (2007); Philip Nickel, *op. cit.*

<sup>53</sup> Robert Hopkins and Philip Nickels discuss something similar: the former thinks that morality has *The Requirement* for one to grasp the moral reasons for a moral belief (see *op. cit.*, 630), while the latter argues for the *Recognition Requirement*, which states that one has to act from a recognition of the morally salient features of a situation, to understand them as relevant to action and to be motivated by them (see *op. cit.*, 256-257). However, neither of them explains why they think we have this requirement and what grounds it. My account, however, aims exactly at that.

because of an understanding of the right-making features. But then a further question arises, one that has not been answered by other authors: why should we think that morality requires us to act from an understanding and recognition of the right-making reasons? Virtue epistemology offers a way of explaining the value of reflective knowledge (or *knowing full well*) and I think that the argument can be transferred to morality. With the help of Ernest Sosa's version of virtue epistemology I will show how, when transferred to morality, this account of knowledge translates into the duty to do-it-yourself.

### 2.3.1. Explaining Virtue Epistemology

Sosa claims that there are two types of knowledge: animal and reflective. Animal knowledge is the kind which “does not require that the knower have an epistemic perspective on his belief, from which he endorses the source of belief as reliably truth conducive.”<sup>54</sup> By contrast, reflective knowledge entails such a perspective. The latter is of a higher level, is more valuable, Sosa thinks. This is because it renders understanding (which is an epistemic value) of how one knows: “a belief constitutive of reflective knowledge is a higher epistemic accomplishment if it coheres properly with the believer's understanding of why it is true (and, for that matter, apt, or true because competent) and of how the way in which it is sustained is reliably truth-conducive.”<sup>55</sup> That is not to say that animal knowledge is not good for anything; quite the contrary, this is “how we know some of the things we know best.”<sup>56</sup> However, what makes reflective knowledge superior to animal knowledge is the fact that “reflective acquisition of knowledge is, again, like attaining a prized objective guided by one's own intelligence, information and deliberation; unreflective knowledge is like lucking

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<sup>54</sup> Ernest Sosa, *Reflective Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009), 135

<sup>55</sup> Ernest Sosa, *op. cit.*, 138

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*

into some benefit in the dark.”<sup>57</sup> The former is more admirable and it enhances our epistemic virtues; moreover, it also contributes to the attainment of a comprehensive coherence which, via Descartes, it is considered to be of high epistemic worth, according to Sosa.

Yet the more interesting and relevant (for my purposes) part of Sosa’s theory is his idea of the AAA structure of performances.<sup>58</sup> He argues that any performance with an aim can be assessed in terms of *accuracy* (reaching the aim), *adroitness* (manifesting skill or competence) and *aptness* (reaching the aim through the adroitness manifest). For example, the performance of a basketball player who aims to score can be evaluated in these terms: it is accurate if she makes the shot; it is adroit if she makes it and she manifests basketball related skills; it is apt if she has made the shot because she is a competent player.

Beliefs can be considered performances<sup>59</sup> and thus they fall under the AAA structure as well: accurate as in true, adroit as in manifesting epistemic virtue or competence and apt as in being true because competent. Consider Smith, one of Gettier’s epistemic agents,<sup>60</sup> and his belief. Smith and Jones have interviewed for the same job and the former has strong evidence (the president of the company has told him) that the latter is the one who will be selected. He has also counted the coins in Jones’s pocket and has formed the following belief: ‘The man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket.’ Unknown to Smith, he himself will get the job and he also has ten coins in his pocket. We can evaluate his belief according to the AAA structure: it is accurate because the man who will be hired has indeed ten coins in his pocket (it would not be accurate if that were not true, if Smith would not have ten coins); it is adroit because it reflects Smith’s epistemic competence, namely that he has considered the available evidence and made the inferences validly (it would not be adroit if he would have been

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<sup>57</sup> Ernest Sosa, *op. cit.*, 142

<sup>58</sup> Performances are “doings aimed at certain objectives”, Ernest Sosa, *A Better Virtue Epistemology* (BVE) (unpublished), 2.

<sup>59</sup> “Beliefs are a special case of such performances. They are cognitive performances that can be aimed at truth”, Ernest Sosa, *Knowing Full Well* (KFW), (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 44

<sup>60</sup> Edmund Gettier, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?”, *Analysis*, 23:6 (1963): 122



epistemically negligent, for example by not taking into account the evidence that showed that Jones would get the job or by making an invalid inference). However, the belief is not apt because its accuracy is not the result of Smith's adroitness, rather it is a matter of epistemic luck (it would be apt if Smith would believe that because he had made the right inference from the right evidence).

Sosa claims that "animal knowledge is essentially apt belief",<sup>61</sup> while reflective knowledge is "animal belief aptly endorsed by the subject."<sup>62</sup> In his later works, he actually says that the deeper distinction is between animal knowledge and *knowing full well*. Knowing full well entails that the agent has meta-aptness, namely an ability to competently assess (and choose the appropriate) the risks related to a performance before issuing it.<sup>63</sup> In other words, meta-aptness is "meta-knowledge that his first-order performance is likely enough to succeed and be apt."<sup>64</sup> Thus,

We can now see that knowing something full well requires that one have animal and reflective knowledge of it, but also that one know it with full aptness. (...) One's first order belief falls short if it is not appropriately guided by one's relevant meta-competence. This meta-competence governs whether or not one should form a belief at all on the question at issue, or should rather withhold belief altogether. It is only if this meta-competence is operative in one's forming a belief at all on that subject matter that one's belief can reach the epistemic heights.<sup>65</sup>

It is necessary to quote Sosa at length on this issue because it is easy to get lost among the many levels that he discusses. So, as I understand it, knowing full well, the highest epistemic achievement one can reach, is to know why (or how) you know what you know you know. In other words: you know X (animal knowledge) and you know that you know X (reflective knowledge: having a stance on the reliability of the source), but you also have to

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<sup>61</sup> Ernest Sosa, *A Virtue Epistemology* (VE), (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 24

<sup>62</sup> Ernest Sosa, *KFW*, 11

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 8

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 9

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12

know why (or how) you know X (full aptness: you have assessed the risks, you know that the belief will be apt exactly because this second-order knowledge is what leads it and secures its aptness).<sup>66</sup> Meta-aptness or full aptness thus becomes the most important guide to knowledge in his version of virtue epistemology.

I believe that Sosa's arguments can be transferred to morality. The analogy will not fit perfectly, but I think his approach can be very illuminating, and show us why the moral duty to do-it-yourself is not at all implausible.

### 2.3.2. Virtue Epistemology in Morality: The Duty to Do-It-Yourself

In this section I will first discuss how the AAA structure and the notion of meta-aptness translate into the moral domain. I will then show how meta-aptness becomes moral meta-aptness which, in fact, amounts to the duty to do-it-yourself. Finally, I will explain why it is necessary to have this moral meta-aptness and what I think grounds the duty to do-it-yourself, by relating them to what it means to be moral. When the plausibility of the duty to do-it-yourself will be proven, we will see clearly why moral deference is impermissible.

When we apply Sosa's virtue epistemology to morality we obtain the following results: both forming a moral belief and doing a moral action are performances, so they can be assessed in terms of the AAA structure, namely according to their accuracy, adroitness and aptness. A moral performance<sup>67</sup> that fulfils this structure is a higher moral achievement and it has more moral worth; in addition, the agent is on the path<sup>68</sup> to being considered a good and moral agent, manifesting virtue, exactly because her performances are marked by adroitness

<sup>66</sup> "A performance is *fully* apt only if its first-order aptness derives sufficiently from the agent's assessment, albeit implicit, of his chances of success (and, correlatively, of the risk of failure)", Ernest Sosa, *KFW*, 11

<sup>67</sup> By 'moral performance' I mean acquiring a moral belief or doing a moral action.

<sup>68</sup> I say "*on the path* to being considered good" because I will argue that adroitness and aptness are not enough, and that meta-aptness is also necessary in order to call someone virtuous.

and aptness. We can see that she not only has done an accurate moral performance, but that this performance has the other features as well. This is important because, as I have shown, morality is more than merely doing the right thing; it is also about the right kind of motivation, namely one that comes from the right-making features of the right action or belief. So, besides the arguments from virtue ethics, common sense intuitions and our practices, epistemology also supports this thought: adroitness and aptness matter because they tell us something about the agent and it contributes to her worth and the worth of the performance.

Let's take a closer look at how exactly to apply these concepts to morality. We know that for an epistemic agent to be adroit means to manifest epistemic virtue and competence. For the moral agent, adroitness represents something slightly different; it is not that the moral agent is doing a moral performance in an epistemically virtuous way, namely that she considers the evidence, weighs the reasons and has a reflective stance on their reliability. That is just her being an epistemic agent; and it is not controversial to say that the moral agent is, simultaneously, an epistemic agent. But I think adroitness in morality can give us a different and more illuminating insight about how the moral agent should be qua moral, rather than epistemic, agent. A moral agent is adroit if she manifests *moral* virtue and competence. Moral competence can be seen as encompassing the right kind of emotions, (we have seen how Hursthouse discusses the moral significance of emotions by introducing them as part of virtue), motivation and sensitivity; in other words, having the right kind of disposition.<sup>69</sup>

An adroit moral agent would be someone who would be inclined to do what is right out of good intentions and motivation; someone who would have an ability to respond morally appropriately in any kind of situation: her dispositions would ensure, as Sosa claims,

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<sup>69</sup> Sosa defines competence as a disposition "with a basis resident in the competent agent, one that would in appropriately normal conditions ensure (or make highly likely) the success of any relevant performance issued by it", *VE*, 29

that she reacts in a morally adequate manner. However, this would not be the result of her choice, but more a matter of *constitutive moral luck*, namely the kind of luck that has to do with the sort of person one is, her temperament and inclinations,<sup>70</sup> which may or may not have been in her control in different degrees. Moral adroitness may ensure that the agent does the right thing in a situation, out of good intention and motivation, but it cannot confirm that her action is a response to the right making features. The agent may act like that because she grew up in a virtuous family and she unreflectively copied them; or, her dispositions may be the result of some conditioned learning (for example, she was taught what to do in each situation but not told why, or she was rewarded and punished according to her actions' consequences). This is why adroitness is not enough for the moral agent.

When it comes to aptness, the ability to reach the aim through the adroitness manifest, we can see that this relates more to the practice of moral deference as the notion is closely related to the agent deserving credit. One of Sosa's examples might clarify this. A skilful archer is shooting a target. The shot would have hit the bull's eye had a gust of wind not slightly diverted the arrow. However, a second gust of wind interfered and guided the arrow back to the bull's eye. Sosa claims that such a shot is both accurate and adroit, but it is not apt because its outcome is not the result of the archer's competence as the wind intervened. Thus, the archer does not deserve credit for the success of her shot.<sup>71</sup>

When transferred to morality we can see that aptness points to a connection between moral competence and the result of the moral performance. I think that when it comes to adroitness we have a conjunction between skill and outcome (reaching the aim): the archer hits the bull's eye *and* she has archery competence, which may or may not be manifested in her shot; Miranda feeds the poor people from Jane's neighbourhood *and* she has moral competence, namely a general disposition to help. Aptness, by contrast, involves a relation of

<sup>70</sup> Thomas Nagel, *op. cit.*, 28; Bernard Williams is the first to discuss this notion in "Moral Luck", in *Moral Luck. Philosophical Papers 1973-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 20

<sup>71</sup> Ernest Sosa, *VE*, 22

causal explanation between outcome and skill: the outcome is determined by the skill. The archer's successful shot is explained and determined by her archery competence as she hits the bull's eye *because* she is competent. Similarly, Miranda feeds the poor *because* of her moral disposition to help people. In both cases then, only the apt agent deserves a positive evaluation. Moreover, what aptness seems to do in addition to adroitness is to eliminate the resultant moral luck, as it creates a connection between the skill and the result and thus generates more reliability.

However, the notion of meta-aptness or full aptness is even more relevant both to Sosa's view and to my account because it shows in a clearer way why moral deference is impermissible. As explained, meta-aptness means to have second-order knowledge about one's first-order knowledge, which gives one more epistemic certainty. Moreover, it not only evaluates the accuracy of the first-order knowledge, but also how one came about it, one's competence, skill and virtue. Consider the archer again. Her shot is accurate and adroit if she hits the target while manifesting skill. Her shot is apt if she made it because of her skill. Her shot is meta-apt or fully apt "if and only if it corresponds to a second-order judgment that the shot would be apt",<sup>72</sup> meaning that she knows whether she will make the shot or not. If she would underestimate her competence (she thinks she cannot make the shot, but does) or overestimate it (she thinks she can make the shot, but does not), then the shot would fail to be meta-apt.

When applied to morality, the requirement for meta-aptness becomes the requirement for moral meta-aptness. As I see it, two elements are necessary for an agent to be morally meta-apt: moral understanding and a conscious awareness of it. Moral understanding is important because it ensures that one's moral performance is non-accidentally right and that one's character traits and dispositions are not the result of some mechanical learning; to

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<sup>72</sup> Ernest Sosa, *BVE*, 2

understand why a claim or action is right means to grasp the relation between the claim and the reasons that make it right.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, as Alison Hills points out, with moral understanding the agent acquires a set of abilities that make her such that she can “(i) follow an explanation of why *p* given by someone else; (ii) explain why *p* in your own words; (iii) draw the conclusion that *p* from the information that *q*; (iv) draw the conclusion that *p*’ from the information that *q*’ (where *p*’ and *q*’ are similar but not identical to *p* and *q*); (v) given the information that *p*, give the right explanation, *q*.”<sup>74</sup>

However, I do not think that moral understanding is enough for moral meta-aptness. The moral agent has to also be *aware* of it and she has to be *guided* by it, in the sense that it has to determine her choices, motivation, concern and intention. The crucial point is that, similarly to the archer who has to assess the risks to be able to avoid under- or overestimating her shot, Miranda has to deliberate in order to see what the right action or belief is and why and, consciously guided by this, to be motivated, intend, choose and perform. She has to know that feeding the poor is right because she understands that they need help and that her action improves their well-being and she is motivated and intends to do it because of that. It is crucial that her decision to perform that action is the result of *and* is directed by her understanding of that. A morally meta-apt agent is one who understands why her moral performance is right and is guided by this understanding. Yet she is able to act in such a way only if she does not defer, as deference precludes the possibility of moral understanding and its guidance. So, in order to acquire moral meta-aptness the moral agent has to fulfil the duty to do-it-herself: that is the only way she can gain and be directed by moral understanding. Doing one’s own moral deliberation and reaching the right conclusion on one’s own means

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<sup>73</sup> Alison Hills, *op. cit.*, 101

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 102-103. Although her account of moral understanding is generally very persuasive, I think her view fails to address the core of the problem of moral deference. She only refers to strict moral deference which, as I have argued, is implausible. But the kind of deference we should be arguing against, the only possible one with respect to the criterion of how it can occur, namely moral deference with the failed attempt of understanding, is actually permissible in her view, *ibid.*, 123-123.

that one gains the necessary moral understanding and can be aware, and thus guided, by it. Deference precludes the possibility of moral understanding and thus the acquiring of meta-aptness.

In this way, we can see why moral deference is impermissible: because of the requirement for moral meta-aptness, which translates into the duty to do-it-yourself. Only when one figures out on one's own what the right moral performance is one acquires the necessary meta-aptness: she has understood the 'why'; why she knows what she knows she knows. I have quoted Sosa on this above as well, but it is worth mentioning again in this context: "This meta-competence governs whether or not one should form a belief at all on the question at issue, or should rather withhold belief altogether."<sup>75</sup> When applied to morality, this meta-competence, the duty to do-it-yourself, becomes just as important: it is decisive in whether you should do your moral performance whether you are guided by this meta-aptness or not. It is impermissible to do it otherwise because this is what it means to be a moral agent: a combination of the right action and the right motivational constellation.

However, the analogy only goes so far. I claim that moral meta-aptness is part of what makes one a moral person, while Sosa is not so radical: one can have just animal knowledge and not know full well; one can be content with having aptness and not full aptness, although the latter of each pair is more desirable, epistemically praiseworthy and it embodies a more virtuous agent who has gained higher epistemic achievements. Performances suffer if they fall short of full aptness and the epistemic agents are not as good as they could be, but no duty is violated and there is nothing wrong with settling for the second best. In contrast, my claim is that there is something wrong with that.

Sosa's account even admits for deference and testimony: knowledge obtained through testimony and deference is animal knowledge, but the believer gets only partial credit. The

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<sup>75</sup> Ernest Sosa, *KFW*, 12

aptness and the correctness of the belief is not attributable just to her (it is only insofar as she is a wise truster, namely expressing competence to trust testimony) because it involves a group (think about how many people and their competence have contributed to establishing the correctness of a belief in the historical domain).<sup>76</sup> Thus, it is true that the believer is not as virtuous, epistemically speaking, as she could be, and that she deserves less credit, but that is not something bad, in Sosa's view. It is the second best and, sometimes, that is all we can do.

As I have said, here is where the analogy stops. I believe that in morality second best is not enough. My first argument is that, as I have tried to show in this chapter so far, with the help of virtue ethics and virtue epistemology, morality is not only about doing the right thing. It is not too controversial that not only consequences are important, but that motivation and intentions also are; it is, perhaps, a little more controversial that moral concern and understanding count as well. However, it is even more contentious to say that one needs an awareness of that in order to be virtuous.<sup>77</sup> But this is what I want to claim and this means that moral meta-aptness is necessary for virtue. I think it is important to reflectively have this moral understanding because it is the only way one can know one is responsive and motivated by the right reasons: when Jane acquires a moral belief or performs a moral action she has to do it guided by her moral understanding. She has to be aware of it and her intentions, motivations and choices must come from it.

If an agent is not conscious of her moral understanding, her moral performances may be victims of 'moral gusts of wind' too easily. If she acts act rightly in a certain situation by accident, without knowing that she is doing the right thing or without understanding why, one may call *her action* moral, but one cannot call *her* moral or virtuous. The agent is not a moral person if she does not intend to be moral, if she does not care about the action, if she does not

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<sup>76</sup> "Testimonial knowledge can therefore take the form of a belief whose correctness is attributable to a complex social competence only partially seated in that individual believer", Ernest Sosa, *VE*, 97

<sup>77</sup> This is where I come apart from Alison Hills as well: while she takes moral understanding to be part of what makes someone virtuous (*op. cit.*, 99), she does not think that one has to be aware of it, as one can have more or less moral understanding than one thinks.



understand it and if its right-making features do not motivate and direct her. It is simply incoherent to talk about Jane as a moral person if these considerations do not enter the evaluation.<sup>78</sup> Thus, I think that to be virtuous entails that one acts out of an understanding of the right-making features, which is also connected to having the right emotions, intentions and motivation. All this can be obtained only by a morally meta-apt agent; and one can be a morally meta-apt agent only if one fulfils the duty to do-it-yourself. And moral deference excludes the possibility of its fulfilment.

The second argument draws on some intuitions that we have about what we are, what we want to be and what we call ourselves. This is relevant in many other domains, not just morality: it seems that a philosopher who wants to call herself a philosopher or an athlete who wants to be an athlete need this meta-aptness. So it appears that evaluation truly depends on what we want to be and be evaluated as. For example, if Jane is or wants to be a physicist, it matters that she comprehends ‘the why’, not only that she knows ‘the what’. This means that it is important for her to have an understanding of the reasons that ground her knowledge and not only the knowledge, and that her meta-aptness guides her in her physics business. It would be incoherent for one to be considered a physicist if one would not truly understand the claims one is using. A part of that person’s life is determined by her status as a physicist — so a full aptness is needed for that role to be assumed as such. One does not deserve and cannot be given a status that one wants if one does not fulfil all the necessary criteria for its possession. Being a physicist entails that one not only knows, but *understands* (which comes, even in the non-moral domain, with the set of abilities Hills mentions) physics. By contrast, if Jane is a student and just needs to pass the physics test, she only needs to know ‘the what’, so

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<sup>78</sup> Consider this analogy: I am looking at a painting that I know everyone considers beautiful. I cannot see it as beautiful, no matter how hard I try. I ask an art critic if that painting is beautiful and she says yes. I ask why and she lists a number of features such as the combination of colours, the creative use of different shapes, the sharp technique, the originality, the content and others. I still do not see the beauty. But if I defer and take the critic’s testimony, can I truly say that I believe/understand that the painting is beautiful? Isn’t it simply incoherent to attribute that to me?

there seems to be nothing wrong with deferring to her professor — Jane does not desire to be or be called a physicist in this case. But if she would want praise for her knowledge of physics or she wants to become a physicist then, again, the understanding of ‘the why’ matters. The situation is similar if someone wants to be (and be seen as) a philosopher or a basketball player. And, of course, similarly in morality.

However, there is a difference between morality and the other domains: not all of us want to be physicists or philosophers. But we all are, for better or worse, as long as we live in society, moral agents. And so, while not having meta-aptness with respect to knowledge of philosophy is not something bad for most people, those who do not want to be philosophers, it is bad for everyone not to have meta-aptness with respect to moral knowledge because we are all moral agents and we have to be. To put it briefly, in order to be a philosopher, I have to know the reasons and what makes my philosophical knowledge right, and in order to be a virtuous person I have to know the reasons and what makes my belief or action right, its right-making features. This is why we have a moral duty to do-it-ourselves and to reach moral decisions on our own; if we defer we cannot gain that understanding and we cannot be guided by it in our moral performances. And if our moral performances do not have all these features, then we are not moral, good or virtuous.<sup>79</sup>

#### ***2.4. Third Person Moral Deference. Just As Wrong?***

In the previous section, I have argued for the impermissibility of moral deference by claiming that it violates the duty to do-it-yourself. However, the notion of moral deference I have been discussing so far was a specific one, as it referred to those instances when someone

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<sup>79</sup> As said above, one might attack these arguments by asking what is so good about being moral, why not just defer even if that means we would not be called virtuous. I lack the space here to defend the existence and the goodness of morality in general, but I think it is enough to invoke the argument that I have given when discussing virtue ethics, namely the connection between morality and *eudaimonia*. Morality contributes to our flourishing and well-being, so it is and should be important to us.

is deferring to another person about what they themselves should believe or do. But there are some other cases that we can think of, such as when someone is deferring to another about what a third person should believe or do. The distinction I am referring to is the one between *first person moral deference* and *third person moral deference*, which I introduced in the first chapter. As mentioned, in the last section I have argued that first person moral deference is impermissible because it violates the duty to do-it-yourself. Even if we accept that, we might still be wondering if it is the same when it comes to other people; for example, I want to know if Jane is doing the right thing in having an abortion. If Miranda tells me that it is right, can I defer to Miranda's testimony and believe that what she does is right, or is it just as problematic as if I would believe that *I* ought to have an abortion just because Miranda told me so? Do I still have a duty to do-it-myself even if the situation does not involve a dilemma that I have and it does not affect my life, strictly speaking?

Of all the philosophers who have engaged in the moral deference debate I know of none who has discussed this issue.<sup>80</sup> However, I think that the intuitions we have in the first person moral deference case do not disappear when we talk about third person moral deference. Claiming that 'I think that Jane ought to have an abortion because Miranda told me so' is just as dubious as saying that 'I ought to have an abortion because Miranda told me so' (where this can mean, of course, that I have reflected on the matter but either not enough or that I simply do not grasp the reasons behind it). In what follows, I will argue that it is impermissible to form moral beliefs about other people based on deference just as it is with respect to oneself. The duty to do-it-yourself does not disappear even when we are talking about third person moral deference.

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<sup>80</sup> However, if we would transfer the arguments they put forward against first person moral deference to third person moral deference, I think we would see that they reject the latter as well. Hills would be against it if it fails to render moral understanding; Hopkins and Nickel would deem it impermissible because it violates *The Requirement* and *the recognition requirement*, namely the idea that morality requires us to act in response to the morally salient features of a situation for the morally appropriate reasons.

Basically, I think third person moral deference is impermissible for the same reasons first person moral deference is. The duty to do-it-yourself applies even when we are talking about moral knowledge regarding other people. In a way, this may seem strange because it is not our moral performances that are the focus of attention, but those of someone else. This points to an important *prima facie* distinction between first and third person deference, namely that the stakes for me, as a moral agent, are less high when it comes to deferring about other people's moral lives. I am not the one to bear the consequences of a possible wrong action and it will not cause any major changes in my life; the moral belief about another person may remain only that: a belief that will never affect my course of action. However, it is sensible to say that if I form a moral belief about others on the basis of testimony, I would embrace and include it in my system of moral beliefs and that will have a concrete effect on my life because I may employ it in my own decisions someday. Thus, it would still be like I have deferred to Miranda's testimony about my own decisions, but indirectly. So, if the arguments against first person deference hold, then they should also apply to third person deference.

Yet one might object by saying that this intuition conflates two different questions: 'What should Jane do?' and 'What is the right thing to do?'. The first seems to ask for a specific answer, shaped after the person and her circumstances, while the second requires a more general response; usually, it appears that we ask for the former. Therefore, it would be implausible to say that I could use the answer to guide myself.

Although I believe that the distinction is correct, I do not think that it cancels the relevance of that answer to my own moral life. What I learn about other people's moral lives does have an impact on my moral system. Even if I ask Miranda about Jane's abortion, her response still implies some further claims that penetrate my thinking and connect themselves to my web of moral beliefs. Abortion entails discussions about personhood, rights, pain and

future people. Whichever judgment Miranda forms, if I defer to her, those adjacent views will get attached to my other convictions and will manifest themselves in other situations even if I will never have to handle a decision about abortion myself.

As Philip Nickel points out, even if certain moral beliefs do not become actions themselves, they are closely related to other beliefs which will be translated into actions. We only rarely (if ever) hold such abstract moral claims that will not be connected to others that will be relevant to action in one way or another.<sup>81</sup> Even particular moral beliefs usually involve taking a stand on general issues that can and will be applied to other judgments that will have practical relevance and will be transformed into actions: as mentioned, abortion brings forward the issue of personhood etc., capital punishment emphasizes issues regarding the importance of human life, desert and retribution etc. Thus, I think that given the many connections that hold between our moral beliefs, it is plausible to say that judgments about other people's moral lives do affect our own moral lives. Because of that, it seems that there is no reason to think of third person moral deference as less harmful than first person moral deference. Moreover, I think it can be harmful in two ways: firstly, it can have some terrible consequences; secondly, it can lead to us not being virtuous.

Consider Jane's case again. I ask Miranda about Jane's decision to have an abortion and she tells me it is right. Later in life, I find myself in the same situation and I remember Miranda's testimony about how Jane's abortion was the right thing to do. Can I make use of the result of my moral deference now? Should I believe I ought to have an abortion because Jane's abortion was the right action? I think I should not apply Miranda's judgment about Jane to my situation because I lack moral understanding<sup>82</sup> and that could have some

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<sup>81</sup> Philip Nickel, *op. cit.*, 260-261

<sup>82</sup> As I have argued in the first chapter, I believe that only deference with the failed attempt to grasp the reasons for the claim being appropriated is plausible. This holds for third person deference as well, so I would not gain moral understanding if I would defer to Miranda. However, regarding third person moral deference, one might wonder if I would truly want to know Miranda's justification for her claim about Jane as it is not as pressing, important or relevant to me and my current state. I believe that, usually, one would question Miranda about her

disastrous consequences. As Alison Hills emphasizes, moral understanding of a moral claim would give me a set of abilities among which the capacity to draw moral conclusions in similar circumstances.<sup>83</sup> Due to that comprehension, I would be able to pick out and focus on the morally salient features which would lead me to making the right decision for the right reasons. Without moral understanding, I would not be able to judge similar cases and I would not be able to see if the same reasons apply. And if I would just blindly transfer the moral judgment about Jane to my case, I could make the wrong choice because of the wrong reasons. I could end up having an abortion even though I actually wanted to be a mother, but I was scared, insecure and only needed some support. This is one reason moral understanding appears to be equally important even when we are considering moral judgments about a third person: because of the effect it can have on our own moral lives; and, for the same reason, third person moral deference is impermissible.

The second reason for rejecting third person moral deference is that, just as first person moral deference, it prevents the agent from being virtuous. The web of moral beliefs is part of what is being evaluated when we are trying to determine whether someone is a good person or not. Not fulfilling the duty to do-it-yourself and thus forming such beliefs without meta-aptness shows a deficiency that the agent has. It is irrelevant who the subject of these moral beliefs is: it may be me myself (e.g. I believe I ought not to lie), a third person (e.g. I believe Jane ought not to lie) or it may express a more general claim (e.g. Lying is wrong). They all have to be formed out of and guided by moral understanding because they count towards the ascription of virtue. Moreover because, as I have shown, the moral beliefs that

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reasons just because given that one has asked her what she thinks Jane should do means one is preoccupied with the problem to a certain extent. The fact that one has stopped to reflect on Jane's situation and has also asked someone else about her shows some concern and asking for the reasons might come as a natural further reaction. Still, I am less certain than in the first person case and that is why I have to admit that strict moral deference *might* occur when it comes to third person moral deference (although I still find it improbable). But, related to the point I want to make above, strict moral deference would also preclude my possibility of gaining moral understanding. Thus, either way, third person moral deference entails lack of moral understanding.

<sup>83</sup> Alison Hills, *op. cit.*, 102

someone has are interconnected, any of them might become or influence another one which might become action at some point. So the focus is not only on the abstract level of beliefs; they will determine our actions, in one way or another, and then the effects of the lack of meta-aptness will be even more conspicuous.

In order to be called good one has to not only acquire a correct belief or act rightly, but to do that because of a grasp of the morally relevant reasons. Doing-it-ourselves, morally reasoning and choosing on our own gives us the opportunity to gain moral understanding which, in turn, creates the occasion to form the right intentions, emotions and motivation and thus ensures that one acts in a virtuous manner non-accidentally. Even if some moral beliefs are about others, they still have to be guided by the understanding of the right-making reasons, which we lose if we defer. We are aiming for the equivalent of knowing full well in morality, namely to have all the features that are necessary in order to be called good or virtuous: moral understanding of the right-making features, appropriate moral emotions, good motivation and intention and, of course, an accurate moral belief or action. An agent's moral performance still has to be adroit, namely to manifest her moral virtue and competence; in addition, it has to be apt, meaning that she reaches the right outcome because of her moral competence. Even more, there has to be meta-aptness. The agent has to form her moral belief out of moral understanding and has to be guided by it, which can happen only if one figures it out on her own, by fulfilling the duty to do-it-yourself. Without meta-aptness, the agent cannot be called virtuous. Third person moral deference precludes the acquiring of meta-aptness and thus I think it is just as impermissible as first person moral deference.

In this chapter, I have argued for the impermissibility of moral deference. By applying virtue epistemology to morality, I have shown that morality requires from us that we do our own moral reasoning and that we decide by ourselves what to believe and do.

## CHAPTER THREE: OBJECTIONS

In the previous chapter, I argued for the existence of a duty to do-it-ourselves which consists in the requirement to do our moral reasoning and decisions on our own. I have grounded this duty in the idea that, in order to be virtuous, we have to form moral beliefs and perform moral actions out of and guided by an understanding of their right-making features. However, some objections which challenge my view can be formulated. I will consider and reply to two of them.

### *3.1. Being Virtuous Without Knowing It*

An immediate response to my arguments would be that people can be virtuous even though they do not have a conscious awareness of what grounds their moral beliefs and actions. Intuitively, moral meta-aptness does not seem to be necessary for virtue. People's moral performances could in fact be right as they could be motivated by their right-making features; it is just that they do not always acknowledge that. Think of people who are naturally and unreflectively virtuous: they do the right thing with good intentions and motivations, without thinking about it. In the terms I used in the last chapter, they would be morally apt, but not meta-apt. One such example is Konstantin Levin, one of the characters from Tolstoy's novel, *Anna Karenina*. Although he has philosophical inclinations and a reflective nature, when it comes to the relationships he has with other people, Levin seems to be naturally disposed to be good: he supports his friend, Oblonsky, whenever he needs, and he does everything for the happiness of the woman he loves, Kitty. He helps Oblonsky's wife, Dolly, and he takes care of his elder brother, despite the rejection he encounters from him. Generally, he helps others unconditionally and unreflectively.



Beside this type of character, we can also conceive of people who are confused regarding what is right, despite the fact that they are motivated by the right-making aspects and act accordingly. For example, Huckleberry Finn, the main character of Mark Twain's eponymous novel, fits into this category. As Huck fakes his own death to escape from his violent father, he encounters Jim, a slave, and they run away together. Huck has his first moral dilemma then, as he thinks that what he does is both illegal and immoral: Jim is the 'property' of someone, and helping him leave would mean that he is a thief. Nevertheless, he helps him. The second time he finds himself in doubt is when the two encounter a group of men who are looking for escaped slaves. Huck is convinced, again, that what he does is wrong, but still does not turn Jim in. He has a bad moral conviction and he is confused about what is right and wrong and, without knowing, he actually responds to the right-making features of the situation and does the right thing<sup>84</sup>. Huck could be seen here as the representation of what Hills meant when she claimed that one can have more moral understanding than one knows<sup>85</sup>. Intuitively, we would call people such as Levin or Huck virtuous and we would praise them. My account, however, would not allow us to do that.

Nomy Arpaly and Julia Markovits hold views like those described above. They both think that for an action to have moral worth it has to be performed because of its right-making features. Markovits promotes the *Coincident Reasons Thesis*, which states that "an action is morally worthy if and only if – and to the degree that – the noninstrumental reasons motivating the action coincide with the noninstrumental reasons that morally justify its performance."<sup>86</sup> Arpaly puts forward a similar view, the *Praiseworthiness as Responsiveness to Moral Reasons* claim: "For an agent to be morally praiseworthy for doing the right thing is

<sup>84</sup> Nomy Arpaly claims that Finn possess 'inadvertent virtue' and that he acts from what she and Timothy Schroeder, in their paper "Praise, Blame and the Whole Self" (1999), have called 'inverse akrasia', which refers to "cases of doing the right thing against one's best judgment", *op. cit.*, 9

<sup>85</sup> Alison Hills, *op. cit.*, 99

<sup>86</sup> Julia Markovits, "Saints, Heroes, Sages and Villains", *Philosophical Studies*, 158:289 (2012): 290. She is a subjectivist about right-making reasons, so she thinks that we are required to do only what we have sufficient epistemic reason to think that it would be best to do (not what actually is best to do).

for her to have done the right thing for the relevant moral reasons – that is, the reasons for which she acts are identical to reasons for which the action is right.”<sup>87</sup> Although the two disagree on some points, they do agree on what is relevant to my account, namely that in order to be morally praiseworthy a person has to perform an action because of its morally justifying reasons, whether the person knows them or not. They also think Huck is virtuous and that he deserves praise.

I think there is a difference between the moral evaluation of actions and of people. We can praise actions even when we know nothing about their author or the reasons and intentions which motivated them. For example, we can call donating a huge amount of money to a charity a good action, although the person who has done it might have been coerced into doing that or might have just wanted to get recognition as a philanthropist and be praised. But the account that I have put forward is agent-centred and not action-centred and thus I am more interested in when we can call people, rather than actions, good. So, in contrast to praising actions, when we evaluate people we take into account many other aspects: actions, beliefs, intentions, motivation and moral understanding. For someone to be called good or virtuous we need a harmony between these elements and the absence of one affects the whole evaluation.

For example, we would not call the person who donated the money to the charity virtuous if they indeed did it for the recognition. Even if this is more contentious, I would also not praise her if she did not know that this was the right thing to do or why it was the right thing to do. I would still praise the action, in itself, but not the person. I hold that the web of moral beliefs and the moral convictions one has are important as well. Although I do not believe that one has to know moral concepts and theories or have sophisticated moral

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<sup>87</sup> Nomy Arpaly, *op. cit.*, 70

views, I still think that one has to be aware of what the right action is and why, and be motivated by that. In what follows I will explain what grounds these intuitions.

Firstly, doing the right thing without having a belief that this is the right action and without knowing why leaves too much room for ‘moral gusts of wind’. The danger of acting rightly by accident is too big. To me, such people seem very similar to Gettier’s epistemic agents. If they cannot be epistemically praised and we would not say they have knowledge, why would we morally praise Huck, why would we ascribe him virtue? He did the right thing but he did not know why or even that it was the right thing. Moreover, he actually thought it was wrong. I would say he is on the path of becoming virtuous, if he adjusts his moral convictions, but until then it seems that he did the right thing accidentally — he did not choose it and he did not intend it. Again, the action in itself is praiseworthy, but the agent is not because the coherence belief-action is important and I think it plays a role in someone’s evaluation.

Secondly, saying that someone is moral without knowing it seems to refer to people who have some natural moral dispositions or are unconsciously driven by a sort of unarticulated goodness. But then it is natural to wonder, like Hursthouse, “what sort of fairly ordinary adult, one who has learnt to use language and engages in the practice of explaining and justifying their actions in response to questions, could conceivably desire to help others but have ‘no conception of goodness’?”<sup>88</sup>. Hursthouse asks this in a slightly different context,<sup>89</sup> but her point is valid and relevant to my argument also: when Huck acts as he does, he goes against his conception of goodness, which is a wrong one, and not knowing what makes his action right makes him, I would say, not virtuous.

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<sup>88</sup> Rosalind Hursthouse, *op. cit.*, 106

<sup>89</sup> She raises this point in a discussion about how Aristotle’s and Kant’s views are more similar than they have been taken to be. Her point is that acting from inclination (in a very literal sense, like animals and children do) is not what the Aristotelian agent would do because it is absurd to say that she would not have any conception of the goodness and that she could not explain why she acted as she did.

Howard J. Curzer's interpretation of Aristotle's ethics<sup>90</sup> draws attention to a similar thing: in order to have *proper virtue*, one has to have *practical wisdom* (and not merely natural virtue, understood in a classical interpretation of Aristotle as natural disposition) which, according to him, is this kind of understanding of the *because*, knowledge of why an act is in accordance with virtue.<sup>91</sup> In fact, Aristotle himself claims that "if one gets insight to accompany natural virtues then it makes a difference in one's actions"<sup>92</sup> and that "it is not possible to be good in the proper sense without wisdom."<sup>93</sup> He goes on to say:

we say that some people are not yet just, although they perform just actions; for example, there are people who do what is prescribed by the laws either involuntarily or in ignorance or for some other reason, but not for its own sake; nonetheless they do what they should and what the virtuous person must do. In the same way, it seems, it is possible to do things while in a certain condition so that one really is good. I mean, for example doing things through decision and doing so precisely for the sake of what one is doing.<sup>94</sup>

The point of Aristotle and his interpreters seems to be that it is almost incoherent to speak about a person without practical wisdom, about someone who does not know why their actions are right, as a good person, as someone who is moral and virtuous. However, in these accounts we have a scale of moral development,<sup>95</sup> which means that not having practical wisdom is equivalent to saying that one is not as good as one *could* be, but maybe not that one is not as good as one *should* be. But if we think about Aristotle's function argument and his concept of *eudaimonia*, and if the happy life includes the virtuous life, then the idea that

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<sup>90</sup> His reading of Aristotle is an innovative one and goes against some classical interpretations. See Cathal Woods's review of the book, <http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2013/2013-04-29.html>

<sup>91</sup> Howard J. Curzer, *Aristotle and the Virtues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 293

<sup>92</sup> Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, Brad Inwood, Raphael Woolf (trans.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1144b12-13

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 1144b31-31. What has been translated here as 'wisdom', it has usually been translated as 'practical wisdom'. Curzer puts this point in a way that resembles Sosa, in fact: "People with mere natural virtue have a knack for doing the right thing, but they do not reliably know which acts are in accordance with virtue", *op. cit.*, 297

<sup>94</sup> Aristotle, *op. cit.*, 1144a14-20

<sup>95</sup> Howard J. Curzer, *op. cit.*, 351-352

one *ought* to have proper virtue is not so implausible, because that is the only way to achieve that kind of life (which is to fulfil one's function). In Curzer's interpretation:

In NE [Nicomachean Ethics] I Aristotle seems to say that he is working out what the happy life is. But in NE X.6–8 he says that there are two happy lives. All commentators (myself included) agree that the secondarily happy life is the ethical life which aims at morally virtuous activity, but neglects contemplation to a significant degree. However, there is considerable dispute about the supremely happy life. Aristotle says that it is the contemplative life.<sup>96</sup>

Curzer takes the contemplative life to involve the acquiring of proper virtue, but its value is only instrumental to achieving contemplation: "So morally virtuous activity is desirable solely for its own sake by people seeking to lead the ethical life, and as a means by people seeking to lead the contemplative life."<sup>97</sup> But no matter which one we take to be the supremely happy life, being virtuous is still of importance. Moreover, in both cases, we need proper virtue, namely virtue and practical wisdom, which requires the understanding of the why, which is acquired by fulfilling one's duty to do-it-oneself. Thus, being moral without knowing it is not enough for one to be and be called virtuous.

### **3.2. The Risk of Wronging Others**

Another important objection that can be raised against my account is that, sometimes, we might risk wronging others if we choose not to defer. When in a situation of moral uncertainty that also has high stakes, deferring might be a better option if one can find someone more reliable. David Enoch's defence of moral deference is based exactly on this kind of argument: moral deference is permissible, even required at times, because it is the only solution when one does not know what to do, but finds someone who does. Enoch

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<sup>96</sup> Howard J. Curzer, *op. cit.*, 389-390

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 408

develops his argument around an example:<sup>98</sup> a new conflict breaks out in the Middle East and he wants to form an opinion about its justification. In the past, when other such situations occurred he tended to see the wars as justified but he would end up modifying his view days or weeks later. In the present case, he has to not only form an opinion, but also to act on it, by voting whether the war should be funded or not. After familiarizing himself with the facts, Enoch comes to believe that the war is justified and that he should vote to financially support it. However, his colleague, Alon, tells him he is wrong and that the war is unjust. In the past, Alon has always been on the side that Enoch would come to be in the end, after the initial confusion. Alon seems to get it right every time and now, again, his view is opposite to Enoch's. But in this case, the stakes are higher, as Enoch's belief has to become an action which will have a direct effect on many people.

So what should he believe and how should he vote? Enoch argues that he should defer to Alon, believe what he believes and, accordingly, to vote against funding the war. The reason is that by deferring he would minimize the risk of wrongdoing:

By refusing to defer to Alon I will be in effect accepting a higher risk of forming a false moral judgment. More to the point, though: I will be accepting a higher risk of *acting* wrongly, of (for instance) voting to fund an unjust war. But if I have a way available to me of minimizing the risk of my wronging people, and if there are no other relevant costs, why on earth wouldn't I minimize this risk?<sup>99</sup>

This minimizing the risk of wrong doing clause is, however, included in an other-things-being-equal clause<sup>100</sup> because, as Enoch notes, if that would not be the case maybe other ways of dealing with moral uncertainty could be applied.

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<sup>98</sup> David Enoch, *op. cit.*, 2

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 18

<sup>100</sup> "(...) these other things that have to be equal include the seriousness of the purported wrong – surely, we don't want to go for a somewhat smaller risk of committing a much more serious wrong than for a somewhat higher risk of committing a much less serious wrong. So the seriousness of the two purported wrongs (one if Alon is right, one if he is not) has to be roughly equal.", *ibid.*, 22

Although I think that minimizing the risk of wrongdoing is a legitimate concern, I think that in order to be virtuous and be evaluated as such, one should still not defer. Because Enoch's example does not have all the necessary details (we do not know whether he knew Alon's reasons for his past and current judgment), let's consider the most difficult scenario that could be developed: in the case of the previous wars, Enoch discussed with Alon his reasons and did not grasp them or did not agree with him. In time, however, after more reflection, he came to see why Alon held those judgments and agreed with him. Regarding the current war, Enoch talks to Alon again and tries to grasp his justification, but does not. He knows that in the past he was wrong, while Alon was right, and now he has two options: to act on the belief he has formed, that the war is justified and he should vote for its funding, or to defer to Alon because his track-record recommends him as an expert<sup>101</sup> on warfare. Deference seems to be the way to minimize the risk of wrongdoing due to Alon's previous good choices.

I think that if Enoch would defer he would give up the possibility of being virtuous. I think that to be called a good person, one has to act out of and guided by an understanding of the morally relevant reasons. If Enoch were to vote against funding the war and it would turn out that this was the right decision, then his *action* could be called good, but *he* could not be evaluated as such. He did not respond to what he was supposed to respond, namely the morally salient features. So that precludes the possibility of him being virtuous. Still, his action was the right action because, as mentioned, the evaluation of an action is different than that of an agent.

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<sup>101</sup> There are some other ways of objecting to Enoch by challenging the possibility of identifying moral experts: Sarah McGrath (*op. cit.*) argues that we cannot establish who is a moral expert because we do not and cannot have a clear track record of their reliable moral judgments as we cannot check them due to the lack of an independent access to moral facts. Julia Driver (*op. cit.*) claims that it is very hard to enter into reliable trust with respect to a putative moral expert because it is very difficult for someone to show she has met the necessary markers (rationality, reliability, impartiality, track record) in order to be called an expert. However, as mentioned, this kind of worries does not seem insurmountable (Karen Jones, François Schroeter, *op. cit.*)

However, this reply does not shut down the objection. Even if Enoch cannot be called virtuous if he defers, it still does not mean that he should not defer. This is because he has to weigh the badness of losing his virtue against the badness of risking wronging others. If I would claim that Enoch should not defer because it is the only way to try to maintain his virtue, while consciously knowing that he is increasing the risk of wrongdoing, his action would be self-defeating — he would definitely not be a virtuous person as long as he is willing to risk wronging others in order to not lose his virtue.<sup>102</sup> So the risk of wronging others seems to be a perfectly good reason to defer here.

However, there might be a way to lessen the strength of the objection. There is one aspect in this scenario that can be questioned: is Enoch truly minimizing the risk of wrongdoing by deferring? On one hand, he has his belief and his reasons for it and he has reflected on them; on the other, he has Alon's justification, which he cannot grasp, and his good track-record. But is this evidence enough for him to *know* that he is wrong again and Alon is right? Enoch has a belief about which he has thought carefully and he disagrees with Alon (one holds that the war is justified, the other does not).<sup>103</sup> The only reason for thinking that he has the wrong belief is that he was wrong before, while Alon was right. However, that does not necessarily imply that he is wrong this time. Moreover, the fact that he has already formed a belief changes the epistemic situation. He would go against what he has reasoned to be true based only on the guess that he might be wrong this time as well. I am not sure that this is justifiable. In addition, Enoch's sensibilities are not very far from Alon's; after all, he has always come to see why Alon was right and this means that he is not a completely terrible

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<sup>102</sup> My take is that even if deference would turn out to be the right thing to do (if Alon would be right), that would still not make Enoch virtuous. I think acting out of and guided by moral understanding is necessary for virtue and deference precludes that. However, given the situation, deference might be better from a consequentialist perspective.

<sup>103</sup> Because of this disagreement I do not believe that Enoch could take on Alon's belief, as I do not believe in doxastic voluntarism (see chapter 1). However, even if he would not believe Alon's judgment, he could still act on it, if his expertise would convince him. But then the lack of coherence between his beliefs and actions might cause some concern.



judge when it comes to warfare. He always ends up agreeing with Alon, so he does not have enough reasons to doubt himself now because, perhaps, he has learnt from his colleague in the meantime. Thus I think he is not justified in believing he is in the wrong again and he does not have enough evidence to think that deference will minimize the risk of wrongdoing. And if minimizing the risk of wrongdoing is out of the discussion, then deference is too, because by deferring he would gain nothing; he would only lose his chance of being virtuous.

To conclude this discussion, I have to say that I admit that minimizing the risk of wrongdoing might be more important than gaining or maintaining virtue. However, serious epistemic matters seem to interfere in evaluating the possibility of that occurring and I cannot imagine a scenario where one could *know* that one is increasing that risk if one does not defer.

In this chapter, I have considered two of the most powerful objections that can be brought against my account, argued that they are not insurmountable, and thus shown that moral deference is never the solution. Do-it-yourself morality is the only way to a virtuous life.

## CONCLUSION

Morality is not only for some chosen few. It is not just for those with good upbringing or those who had virtuous exemplars to follow; it is not only for those who know moral theories or those with philosophical training. Even if such experts would exist, and we would be able to identify them, we should still not defer. I have shown that it would be wrong to do such a thing. Inescapably, we are moral agents and as such we can be called virtuous or not. I think that this evaluation depends on the exterior and the interior aspects of our moral lives, namely our actions and beliefs, and our motivational constellation. In order to achieve this unity in the right way, we have to decline to defer. We have to respect the duty to do-it-ourselves because its aim is to make us virtuous people and that may help us lead a *eudaimonic* life; which is, after all, what most of us are looking for. We have to be moral and to know how to be and why we are when we are. I have shown that moral deference precludes all this. It does not allow us to be virtuous and this is why I think it is impermissible.

The view I have argued for in this thesis is, I believe, both prescriptive and descriptive. In my argumentation for the duty to do-it-yourself I have not only shown why moral agents should not defer, but also why they do not usually defer. Even if this duty is not something that every person is conscious of, our practices and intuitions definitely mirror it: we are suspicious of moral deference and we avoid doing it. So I think my account is also an articulation of our thoughts related to why we think people should be autonomous when it comes to morality and why we praise only those who are.

Because I reject moral deference I claim instead that morality is for everyone. However, my account shapes a very specific way of looking at what it means to be a virtuous agent. I argue for a harmony between the right actions and the right moral emotions,

intentions, motivations, understanding and meta-aptness. But bringing together all these elements can be difficult. So, can everyone succeed? Is morality for everyone after all?

I admit that my view expects a lot from the virtuous agent. And yes, it is difficult to become one. But why would we think that it should be easy? Morality is prescriptive and it is about how people are supposed to be and act; it is not about what people usually do, how much they care about virtue right now or how much effort they are willing to invest in attaining it. I do not think that we should make morality fit humanity's current preoccupations. 'Ought implies can', indeed, but what I propose is certainly doable. It might be difficult. One might succeed some times and fail other times. But I do not see any problem with that: some of us will have to work harder than others to be virtuous. Our willingness to do that depends, in the end, on how much morality means for each of us — and that is a question that has to be answered privately.

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