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# EXPERTISE AND AUTHORITY

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ABSTRACT

Experts use their superior skills and understanding to mediate between evidence in some domain and non-experts. But how should we understand the proper relationship between experts and non-experts? In this paper, I present two ways of conceiving experts' mediating role from the perspective of non-experts: the Authority View and the Advisor View. Jennifer Lackey (2018) has criticized the Authority View and defended the Advisor View. I defend an account of epistemic authority that avoids her criticisms while arguing the Advisor View lacks the advantages she claims. Ultimately, I present a hybrid approach according to which whether we should treat experts as authorities or advisors varies depending upon the presence of certain epistemic and moral concerns.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Due to the complexity of the modern world, we can't help but to rely on expert judgment in many domains. Despite our dependence on experts, it may not be so obvious what makes someone an expert. Perhaps we could ask some experts about the matter. Unfortunately, even experts lack a clear definition of expertise. Volumes such as the *Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance* feature multiple approaches to defining the notion. One approach focuses primarily on the superior performance of experts.[1] This approach seems well-suited to describing practical expertise – expert chess players, tennis players, marksmen, and so on. Another approach focuses on the roles or functions experts play in society and organizations. On this view, the central function of experts is to use their superior skills and understanding to mediate between evidence for belief in some domain and non-experts' opinions.[2] Here, we can make a further distinction based on the sufficiency of merely being relied on by others for this function in order to be an expert or whether some performance standard must be met. That is, a person may be relied on by a group of people to help them sort through a complex body of evidence even though that person does not reliably judge correctly. In one sense of the term, this person still occupies the role of an expert. However, we may be disinclined to call these individuals *genuine* experts where this qualifier indicates that laypeople reliably benefit epistemically from the expert's advice. Clearly there is something wrong with relying on non-genuine experts, as they are poor sources of information. However, it is often hard for the layperson to distinguish between these and genuine

1 See Chi (2006) for examples of this approach.
2 See Rohmberg and Stehr (2007).


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experts. Furthermore, the question of exactly how laypersons ought to rely even on genuine experts is rarely explicitly addressed.

In what follows, the account of expertise I will adopt is that of Alvin Goldman's (2001, 2018) who lists three conditions for being an expert: (i) a comparative condition, (ii) a threshold condition, (iii) a disposition condition. All three parts are put in what he labels "veritistic" or truth-linked terms. First, Goldman states that an expert in a given domain has a higher ratio of true to false beliefs within a domain compared to most others. Second, the expert possesses a substantial body of truths within the target domain. It is not enough to be an expert to have several fewer false beliefs within a domain in which most people have mostly false beliefs. Third, Goldman argues that expertise is not solely a matter of possessing accurate information. What is further needed is a capacity or disposition to deploy the information one possesses to form true beliefs about new questions that may arise within the domain. The skills or abilities required to answer new questions will vary across domains, but possessing such know-how is constitutive of being an expert.

The testimony of such an expert is a valuable resource for the non-expert. In this paper, I first describe two ways such testimony can be treated by the non-expert. These are the Authority View and the Advisor View. Jennifer Lackey (2018) recently has leveled several criticisms against the Authority View and argued for the Advisor View. The account of epistemic authority that Lackey attacks belongs to Linda Zagzebski. While this account may be vulnerable to Lackey's objections, I argue that a slightly different account survives them, though it faces further ones. Furthermore, I argue that Lackey's Advisor View lacks the advantages over the Authority View she claims. Ultimately, I advocate a new, hybrid approach according to which whether we should treat an expert as an authority or advisor varies depending upon the presence of certain epistemic and moral concerns.

## 2. AUTHORITIES AND ADVISORS

For many domains of knowledge, most people lack the time and skill necessary to obtain the required background knowledge for answering its important questions. Fortunately, for many of these domains, some individuals have access to this background knowledge and are positioned to provide their judgment to others. These people are experts. We can learn things through expert testimony that we would be unable to discover ourselves. Jennifer Lackey identifies two different ways of receiving expert testimony.

The first is the Authority View, on which expert testimony is to be treated as authoritative. But authoritative in what way? We can distinguish *deontic* from *epistemic* authority. In the domain of the former are imperatives and directives that call forth or prohibit certain actions. In the domain of the latter are statements that call forth belief. The kind of authority afforded to experts on the Authority View is epistemic authority. The particular conception of epistemic authority Lackey discusses is that described by Linda Zagzebski (2012), who models her own account on Joseph Raz's theory of deontic authority.

The most important feature of commands or authoritative directives, according to Raz, is that they are preemptive. When a political authority issues a directive, the reason provided by that directive is not to be treated as any other reason for action able to be weighed against other reasons a subject may have relevant to performing the action directed by the authority. Rather, the preemptive reason excludes and takes the place of some of those reasons. Adapting this account for epistemic authority, expert testimony provides

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a reason that preempts at least some other reasons for belief available to the non-expert. That is, these reasons are normatively "screened off". When a layperson believes $p$ on the basis of expert testimony that $p$ in the way described here, the layperson allows the expert's reasoning to stand in for her own in the attempt to reach the truth as to whether $p$. The layperson gives up deliberating on the matter herself.

The second view is the Advisor View, according to which the testimony that $p$ of an expert is always to be treated by the non-expert as evidence to be weighed alongside the other evidence regarding $p$. That is, expert testimony is not preemptive. It functions like any other piece of evidence. To illustrate this account, Lackey describes the use of expert testimony in the courtroom:

> Consider the testimony provided by an expert at a trial: no one would tell the jurors that the testimony of a given expert is authoritative or provides preemptive reasons for belief. Indeed, jurors themselves would be superfluous in many ways if experts functioned authoritatively. Instead, competing expert testimony is often presented from both sides – the prosecution and the defense – with jurors needing to evaluate the full body of evidence in reaching a verdict. The experts here are, then, advising the jurors rather than dictating to them what they ought to believe. (Lackey 2018: 238–9)

Lackey argues that our treatment of experts in every domain should follow this model. In other words, she denies that experts should ever be treated as authorities.

Lackey's work on the Authority View and the Advisor View is the most sophisticated and detailed treatment of these issues to date. Therefore, my own account begins with a response to hers. Lackey's argument for the Advisor View primarily takes the form of an argument against the Authority View. According to her, the latter faces a number of problems that the former can overcome. She argues that the Authority View fails for two main reasons, objections I'll name *INDEFEASIBILITY* and *DISAGREEMENT*:

> *INDEFEASIBILITY*
> Treating expert testimony as preemptive is irrational because it renders the resulting belief immune to defeaters.
>
> *DISAGREEMENT*
> Choosing which expert to trust in the face of expert disagreement poses a significant problem when experts are treated as authorities.

I address both in order to show that on the correct view of epistemic authority there need not be anything epistemically inappropriate about treating experts as authorities and preemptively deferring to them.

*INDEFEASIBILITY* and *DISAGREEMENT* are objections to ever treating experts as authorities. In addition to these, I consider further objections against treating experts as advisors in certain domains or situations. These are:

> *UNDERSTANDING*
> Preemption precludes obtaining the important epistemic value of understanding.
>
> *JUSTICE*
> Preemptive trust in experts by juries and judges in the courtroom conflicts with important values the court system is designed to maintain.


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*MORAL DEVELOPMENT*
Preemptively deferring to moral experts is detrimental to one's moral development.

Unlike the first two objections, I argue that these three are sound even on the view of epistemic authority I advocate. They point to genuine conflicts between the prescriptions of the Authority View and certain epistemic and moral values. Importantly, though, they do not demonstrate that preemptive trust in experts is always wrong. Rather, they point to the need for a hybrid treatment of expert testimony according to which it is sometimes treated authoritatively and sometimes as advice.

## 3. PREEMPTION AND INDEFEASIBILITY

Lackey contends that the Authority View fails to provide the resources for rationally rejecting a supposed expert's testimony even when that testimony is obviously false or outrageous (Lackey 2018: 234). For example, suppose I have reason to take some person S as an expert with respect to moral matters. S then testifies that the moral status of those of African heritage is lower than those of European heritage. If S is treated as an authority, then all of my other evidence relevant to the moral status of those of African and European heritage is normatively screened off. The reason provided by S's testimony now stands in its place. This racist testimony is obviously false. Yet, as long as I take S as an authority, it appears to be rational to believe that view despite it being likely that my other evidence overwhelmingly tells against it.

Even worse, it's unclear how S's testimony could even begin to strike me as outrageous or obviously false. Normally, when I hear someone making racist claims about relative moral worth, I can weigh their testimony against all of my background evidence. In such cases, racist testimony strikes me as absurd. However, the Authority View seems to rule out any such weighing, and without this weighing it's unclear why such testimony continues to seem absurd.

It's not simply racist or otherwise outrageous testimony that poses a problem for the view of authority under discussion, though. The upshot of *INDEFEASIBILITY* is that all beliefs that are grounded in preemptive reasons are irrational and lack justification. According to Lackey, all rational beliefs are subject to defeat. This is simply part of what it is to be rational. Yet, beliefs formed on the basis of preemptive reasons seem to be immune to defeat. Lackey states that defeat is fundamentally a matter of evidential relations. However, on the view of authority articulated by Zagzebski and built into the Authority View, the reason provided by an authority's testimony *that p* not only swamps all the evidentially grounded reasons I have relevant to *p*, it prevents those reasons from ever being able to interact with the testimony. Authority-based beliefs appear to be quarantined from any evidence that might defeat them and so look to be indefeasible. *INDEFEASIBILITY* is true.

Zagzebski's account is vulnerable to *INDEFEASIBILITY* because of the kinds of reasons she takes to be in place in testimonial exchanges. She makes a distinction between theoretical and deliberative reasons. Theoretical reasons are facts about the world and relevant to anyone's point of view. On the other hand, deliberative reasons are irreducibly first-personal (Zagzebski 2012: 56). Zagzebski uses the kinds of reasons provided by an experience to make this clearer. The fact that I have an experience is a theoretical reason for believing a variety of propositions. If I tell you about my experience, we can both use

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the fact that it occurred as a reason to believe something. However, the experience itself is something had by me alone. It is a deliberative reason available only to me. According to Zagzebski, other kinds of deliberative reasons include emotions and intuitions.

Zagzebski argues that evidence falls into the category of theoretical reasons. Furthermore, she argues that theoretical and deliberative reasons do not aggregate (Zagzebski 2012:57). Therefore, deliberative reasons appear to be immune from evidential defeat. This has bad consequences for the rationality of believing on authority because Zagzebski argues the trust I have in a putative authority is a deliberative reason for believing her. Therefore, it is incapable of interacting with theoretical reasons concerning the authority's reliability. She states, "So if you tell me that p, my belief that you have been right 90 percent of the time in a domain pertaining to p is not a reason to believe p that is added to my deliberative trust in you in the relevant domain" (Zagzebski 2012: 114). In light of this claim, Lackey is correct to argue that authority-based beliefs on Zagzebski's model appear irrational. However, this result fails to hold on a better understanding of epistemic authority.

To understand authority-based beliefs, we need first to understand the point of preemption. Zagzebski follows Raz in finding preemptiveness to be the defining feature of authoritative statements. In contrast, Arnon Keren (2014a, b) takes a broader view of preemption. He argues that in addition to authority-based beliefs, trust-based beliefs in general feature preemptive reasons for belief. Keren states that when we trust someone, we have reason against taking certain precautions due to the trustworthiness of that person. So, when we trust another person to tell us the truth, we have reason not to take the precaution of weighing all the available evidence ourselves. On this account, both being trustworthy and possessing epistemic authority involve the ability to generate preemptive reasons for belief. Keren argues that the essential difference between the two is that not only does an epistemic authority generate a preemptive reason for belief, they generate a duty to believe preemptively, as well.

When it comes to how preemptive reasons are generated by authorities, Keren makes a distinction between practical and epistemic authorities. Both kinds of authorities examine the reasons for action that already apply to their subjects and deliver directives based on them; however, practical authorities can issue commands to perform some action that, in the absence of the command, there would be no reason to perform. For example, for reasons of public safety all drivers may have reason to abide to a standard set of traffic rules; however, a practical authority can generate a specific duty to drive only on the left-hand side of the road when there would be no such duty absent this command.

Keren argues that epistemic authorities cannot generate reasons in the strong sense described above. Rather, he states that an authority can give the hearer a good reason for belief if there are already good reasons to believe *p* all along. Thus, he states,

> It might therefore be more accurate to say that epistemic authority consists in the power to preemptively *transfer* to others good reasons for belief. Or better: to provide others with preemptive reasons for belief that allow the authority's good reasons for believing something to support others' belief in the same thing. (Keren 2014b)

The second formulation is indeed the better one, especially when it comes to discussing the authoritative testimony of experts. An expert doesn't simply package up a set of reasons relevant for believing *p* for the layperson. Absent the expert's interpretation, the layperson


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is unlikely to recognize these reasons *as* reasons for believing *p* or understand their force. The expert plays a mediating role between the evidence and the layperson.

Since an epistemic authority does the job of mediation and delivers new higher-order reasons, the subject does not have to consider the first-order reasons again for herself. In fact, returning to these reasons and interpreting them for oneself in light of the authority's directive will result in a worse track-record at performing the actions one has most reason to perform than if one preemptively submits to the judgment of the authority. This conclusion follows from Joseph Raz's Track Record Argument (Raz 1986: 68–9) which asks us to consider some domain or range of questions where we are wrong more than some putative authority. I can choose to utilize the testimony of the authority in the following way. First, I make up my own mind concerning the answer without consulting the expert. Then, should I find out my judgment differs from hers, I add a certain weight to the solution favored by her, given her expertise. In some cases, this extra weight will result in a doxastic shift to the expert's judgment. In other cases, I will still find myself at odds with her, though less strongly. How does such a strategy affect my track record at getting at the truth? In those cases in which I switch to the judgment of the expert, I end up being wrong fewer times than I otherwise would be. In those cases in which I continue to contradict the expert, my rate of mistakes remains greater than her own. Only through preemption do I bring my rate of success in line with that of the expert.[3]

Lackey responds by arguing that even if Raz's argument shows that one always ought to follow the advice of authority, it does not prove that one should do so *preemptively* (2018: 238). She argues that our track record would be the same if we simply regarded the reasons provided by authoritative testimony as so epistemically powerful that they always outweigh the other reasons available to us. Our own first-order reasons would not be suspended or replaced as they are on the account favored by Raz and Zagzebski; they simply would lose in a test of strength. However, such a weighing would involve a double counting of the reasons involved. The authority's directive is not merely an additional reason. It represents the reasons a subject has (or would have if she were better epistemically positioned) and so displaces her other reasons. More formally: Consider that reasons r1, r2, and r3 point to a subject's performing φ. Reasons r4 and r5 point to not performing φ. Both the authority and the subject are aware of these

3 Keren rejects the use of Raz's Track Record Argument as an argument for the preemptive force of epistemic testimony. In Raz's formulation, the case involves consulting a financial expert on the question of whether to sell or not certain shares. Keren points out that in this case, there are two options (Sell and Don't Sell) and two possible states of the world (one in which selling is the best option and one in which not selling is the best option). When it comes to belief, there are three options (believe, disbelieve, and withhold judgment.) If my epistemic goal is to both believe the truth while avoiding falsehood, I can better achieve this goal by choosing to withhold judgment in a proportion of hard cases in which I independently disagree with the expert and in which the expert is only somewhat likely to have hit upon the truth. By not always allowing the expert's judgment to preempt my own, I may make it less likely that I choose the best option (believing truly) in every case, but I increase my chances of avoiding the worst option (believing falsely). However, Zagzebski (2014) responds that the third option with respect to belief is available to the expert. The expert can testify that the evidence is inconclusive. Cognizant of this fact, when an expert chooses not to withhold judgment and takes a stand, we must then reweigh whether our chance at not believing falsely really outweighs our chance at getting at the truth. This discussion points to the larger question of what our epistemic goals really are and how the pursuit of truth is to be balanced against the avoidance of falsehood and whether there is some more appropriate goal such as having beliefs that fit the available evidence.

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reasons. When an authority demands φ-ing, it is not simply r6 for the subject. It is an assessment of r1–r5 based on the judgment that, on balance, φ-ing is supported, and for this reason, r4 and r5 and inappropriate to act upon. The proper weighting of r1–r5 is built into the reason provided by the authority and thus they are not to be weighed again against the reason provided by the authoritative directive. Similarly, as an expert's testimony is a superior weighting of the relevant first-order reasons, it is not useful or necessary to weigh it again against those reasons.[4,5]

While preemptive reasons take the place of first-order reasons for the subject, these preemptive reasons are defeasible. Raz writes, "Even where an authoritative decision is meant finally to settle what is to be done it may be open to challenge on certain grounds, e.g. if an emergency occurs, or if the directive violates fundamental human rights, or if the authority acted arbitrarily" (Raz 1986: 46). Thus, new reasons relevant to the performance of φ, or evidence that an authority's directive "φ" is not based on the first-order reasons relevant to φ-ing, can defeat the reason provided by that directive. So, borrowing an example from David Enoch, when you tell your young son to go to his room, the reason for action you provide him with excludes his deciding to refrain from going to his room for the reason that his favorite show is on TV. However, he may with reason stay in the living room for the reason that his room is flooded, unbeknownst to you (Enoch 2014). Also, a citizen finding out an authority has set the tax rate by drawing a number from a hat rather than considering what fairness demands would defeat the reason that citizen has to pay the tax rate provided by the authority. There may still be reason for her to pay taxes, and there even may be reason to pay the rate the authority demands, but it will not be because it is so demanded.

These considerations help us answer Lackey's concerns that beliefs based on preemptive deference to expert testimony would be indefeasible. As long as one takes the source of testimony to be an expert, the belief based on that testimony is protected from defeat by first-order counter-evidence. However, evidence that calls into question the expertise of the source removes this protection. So long as one has reason to believe the source of some testimony is an expert with respect to its content and thus a superior judge of its truthfulness and one is concerned with believing truly, one should not allow one's less sophisticated judgment to potentially lead one astray. But one's reasons for taking another person to be an expert can be defeated. And the kind of defeaters, here, will be just like that discussed above: the appearance of new relevant first-order evidence that the expert is unfamiliar with or has ignored and/or reason for the non-expert to believe the expert has engaged in arbitrary or biased reasoning.

The mediating role of an expert is similar to that of a deontic authority. Evidence that a deontic authority has overlooked important relevant reasons or is acting arbitrarily is

4 A similar "double counting" argument appears in Keren's (2007) "Epistemic Authority, Testimony, and the Transmission of Knowledge."

5 Lackey has another objection to the Track Record argument in which she suggests following other strategies than always preempting may lead to more true beliefs. However, it's unclear how these strategies would work in practice. For example, she gives the strategy of always following the advice of an authority except when one knows the authority is wrong. However, it's unclear how one could know an expert is wrong while still having reason to think that person is an expert. If one disagrees with an expert, one has a defeater for one's belief and lacks knowledge. On the other hand, if one does in fact know *p* and an expert asserts *not p*, this would call into question not one's belief but the authority of the supposed expert. And the Authority View does not recommend following false authorities.


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evidence that the authority is no longer fulfilling her proper role. In such circumstances, the authority lacks legitimacy and her directives are no longer binding. Evidence that an expert has overlooked or ignored important evidence or is reasoning arbitrarily or in a biased way is evidence that the expert is no longer fulfilling her proper role and is not a genuine expert. In such cases, her testimony ought not to be treated preemptively. However, as long as one has good reason to believe a purported expert is in fact properly mediating the evidence, one has good reason to believe she is a genuine expert, and it is rational to allow her judgment to stand in for one's own. Such a decision is not irreversible. Authority-based beliefs are not indefeasible, so *INDEFEASIBILITY* fails to provide a reason for never preemptively deferring to experts.

Lackey began her objection to the perceived indefeasibility of authority-based beliefs with the example of the racist supposed expert. However, it is likely that a recipient of such testimony will have ample reason to suspect this expert is failing to fulfill his proper role. The racist is unlikely to have engaged with any science of race, which one would need to do in order to contend that racial differences are indicative of further intrinsic differences between persons. In addition, such a racist is likely to have had little interaction with persons of other races, which again is the kind of evidence one would need to examine before making pronouncements on the relative worth of members of different races.

Some racists, however, attempt to cloak their racism with a veneer of scientific respectability. Many of these even possess professional scientific credentials. Amos Morris-Reich (2016) is among the scholars who have recently catalogued the ways scientists in many fields have used experiments and fieldwork to support their views on racial differences. These scientific racists will have much more of a grasp on the relevant evidence concerning race. However, their motivations often will be transparent. Given that they begin with racist beliefs and seek confirmation rather than truth, they should be discounted as appropriate mediators to trust. Furthermore, there are a number of competing voices that claim authority and that call into question such racist thinking. Testimony from a competing supposed expert will be a common source of evidence that an expert has ignored some important evidence or allowed bias to direct her thinking.[6] This brings us to *DISAGREEMENT*, the objection that choosing which expert to trust in the face of expert disagreement poses a significant problem when experts are treated as authorities.[7]

## 4. DISAGREEMENT AND THE AUTHORITY VIEW

Lackey points out that choosing the right expert is of paramount importance when one treats that expert as an authority given the extreme reliance one has on that expert once one has screened off her own evidence. However, the problem of expert disagreement

6 Admittedly, there may be cases where the racist supposed expert's motivation is non-transparent and where there are no observable competing experts. In such cases, the correct epistemic attitude may be to defer to the expert. It is possible to have justified beliefs that are both false and repugnant. Hopefully such cases will be few and far between. However, a non-expert's assessment of another as an expert is not meant to be a static judgment. Evidence of the kind I discuss in the following section may arise to help the non-expert eventually reject the racist as a fraud.

7 For an argument that one may not be culpable for racist beliefs derived from testimony see Begby (2013).

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appears to make the choice of the right expert quite difficult. Lackey argues that privileging one instance of expert testimony over another would seem to involve the weighing of evidence, at least if one is rightly concerned with arriving at the most evidentially supported position. However, she points out that "if the testimony of each authority provides preemptive reasons, then presumably they cannot be weighed against one another or with any of one's other background evidence" (Lackey 2018: 236). The proponent of the Authority View seems to be left without a good option in the face of expert disagreement.

In contrast, Lackey argues that the Advisor View gives us far more resources for identifying experts, even when purported experts disagree. As a reminder, on this model expert testimony is always to be treated as evidence that one is to weigh against all of one's other relevant evidence. When we adopt such a model, Lackey states, "We can evaluate the arguments proffered on behalf of a particular view, we can assess how able the expert in question is at enhancing our understanding of the matter, we can determine how effective the expert is at explaining matters in clear and accessible ways, and so on" (Lackey 2018: 239). However, these additional resources will often be unhelpful, as I argue below. First, though, I will argue that the Authority View provides a number of resources for distinguishing between two purported experts.

Lackey believes that evaluating the arguments of competing experts is one route to making a justified choice between their testimony. However, laypersons are ill-equipped to directly judge the merits of experts' arguments. In order to evaluate the arguments of competing experts in a domain, one would need to be able to identify the evidence relevant to that domain and assess the strength of support relations between the evidence cited by the experts. But if one could do this, it's not clear why one would need an expert in the first place. On the account of epistemic authority above, experts only have authority when they play their mediating role, that is, when their testimony would bring the hearer's belief more in line with the truth than if the hearer were to evaluate the evidence for herself. But if the non-expert is just as capable of evaluating the evidence as is the expert, then there is no relation of authority. Assuming the hearer is not as capable as the experts, though, she will have difficulty assessing the experts' arguments.[8] Since the novice will be unable to properly assess the arguments offered by the experts, she will be unable to justifiably choose one instance of testimony over another on this basis. Furthermore, confirmation bias, that is, the tendency to interpret new evidence in light of one's existing beliefs will further diminish a layperson's ability to evaluate the arguments of competing experts when one's testimony confirms her prior held beliefs.[9]

In response to arguments similar to those above, Lackey states,

> [M]y lacking evidence for believing something beyond what is offered by the testimony of an expert does not at all call into question whether believing on the basis of expertise involves the weighing of evidence. I might have lots of evidence on behalf of the reliability of the expert herself,

8 As Alvin Goldman points out, "Not only are novices commonly unable to assess the truth-values of the esoteric propositions, but they also are ill-placed to assess the support relations between the cited evidence and the proffered conclusion. Of course, the proponent expert will claim that the support relation is strong between her evidence and the conclusion she defends; but her opponent will commonly dispute this. The novice will be ill-placed to assess which expert is in the right" (Goldman 2001: 94).

9 Confirmation bias is the tendency to favor information that confirms one's preexisting beliefs and discount disconfirming information. For a short summary of relevant experiments, see Plous (1993: 233–4).


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for instance, even if I have none whatsoever regarding the content of what she reports. (Lackey 2018: 243)

However, there is no reason a proponent of the Authority View could not make this claim as well. On this view, while first-order evidence – that is, the reasons the expert uses to come to the belief she testifies, are preempted, the evidence concerning the expert's mediating abilities is not. Such evidence is available for the layperson to make use of in deciding which expert to trust. The availability of this evidence demonstrates *DISAGREEMENT* to be false.

Just what sort of evidence is available for a layperson to judge the mediating abilities of rival experts? Giving a full answer to this question requires much more room than is available here, but what follows is a very brief overview of some possible sources of evidence. First, there is experience in the domain of their expertise. Practice in one's field makes it more likely that one has collected a significant amount of evidence within the field and been able to examine the support relations between this evidence in order to be able to make well-supported judgments. The physicist Werner Heisenberg once said that an expert "is someone who knows some of the worst mistakes that can be made in a subject and how to avoid them." Even more pessimistically, Niels Bohr's quipped, "An expert is someone who has made all the mistakes which can be made in a very narrow field."[10] Of course, by making mistakes, one can learn to avoid them in the future, so the two didn't directly disagree. The point is that knowing that an expert has been in practice for a long time gives us reason to believe she has honed her mediating abilities.

Second, credentials from accredited bodies and having a high reputation among other purported experts in the field can indicate one's judgment is to be trusted. Experts are protective of their own reputation and that of their field and set barriers to entry and develop mechanisms that protect against interlopers and encourage the maintenance of high epistemic standards. One barrier is the credentialing process necessary to practice and be taken seriously in many fields. Academic credentials indicate that other experts have found the expert in question to be knowledgeable in their domain and a competent inquirer. Another mechanism used by experts to "police" their domains is peer review. Peer review helps make sure an expert's work doesn't ignore important developments or viewpoints in her field. Thus, having a number of publications in peer-reviewed forums is evidence an expert has a good grasp on her domain.

Third, we can look to evidence of conflicts of interest. In discussing this source of evidence of expertise, Alvin Goldman cites research that indicates oncology drug trials sponsored by pharmaceutical companies were much more likely to have favorable conclusions concerning the drug tested than those trials funded by non-profit organizations (Goldman 2001: 105). If we have reason to suspect that an expert's judgment is tainted by bias, this is reason to suspect their judgment fails to give proper weighting to all the relevant evidence.

Fourth, we can look to the track-record of purported experts. Has one of two competing experts been significantly more successful in past forecasts? Of course, this information may not always be available. Furthermore, the dispute may be in a domain where forecasts are not made. The other three sources of evidence of expertise have their own problems, as well. An expert who has practiced in a field for a long time may fail to

10 Both quotes appear in Nichols (2017: 36).

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keep up with recent developments and lose touch with the field. Pseudo-experts may craft fake credentials and fool non-experts. Detecting biases can be incredibly difficult. Each of these problems deserves further attention. My point here, though, is that all of this evidence is just as available to one following the Authority View as it is to the one following the Advisor View.

Lackey's objection to the Authority View is not just that it appears to lack resources for distinguishing between two purported experts, an objection I've now answered. In addition, she argues there are important resources for this task simply unavailable to the proponent of the Authority View that proponents of the Advisor View can take advantage of. However, given that these resources are likely to be unhelpful to the novice for the purpose of identifying genuine expertise, it is unclear how access to them should count as an advantage.

Again, three of the resources listed by Lackey are the ability to evaluate the arguments proffered on behalf of a particular view, the ability to assess how able the expert in question is at enhancing our understanding of the matter, and the ability to determine how effective the expert is at explaining matters in clear and accessible ways. I have already argued against the utility of the first resource. The other two seem connected. If an expert is effective at explaining matters in clear and accessible ways, then she should be able to increase my understanding of the matter. However, it's not the case that an expert who is reliable in inquiry and testifying will necessarily manifest the skills to make accessible some matter in a complicated domain. Clarity and accessibility do not always indicate accuracy. And, feelings of understanding may be illusory. Therefore, neither of these sources is very helpful to the novice in recognizing expertise and neither is likely to place the novice in any better of a position to justifiably choose between two experts than those resources I have argued are already available to the Authority View.

Lackey argues that the framework for evaluating experts provided by the Advisor View is far richer than that provided by the Authority View as the former focuses not only on the testimony and beliefs of experts, but also on their broader character traits. She distinguishes between two kinds of ethics consultants helping a family through a difficult medical decision. One is dogmatic and close-minded; though she may offer lots of true statements, she may do so in a way that fails to move a patient and her family. If the family feels ignored or bullied, the expert's testimony will fail to gain traction with them and they will be worse off with respect to believing the truth. Another ethics consultant might "listen attentively and receptively to the concerns and values of those around her" and "answer questions in a thoughtful and constructive way" (Lackey 2018: 239). This consultant may find a more receptive audience. Lackey argues that the moral as well as the intellectual virtues are relevant here, as we might be concerned not only with the experts who help us reach the truth but with *how* they help us reach the truth.

As I'll argue below, I think that the domain of morality calls for a hybrid approach and so the prescriptions of the Advisor View may be correct in this particular circumstance. However, we can easily create an example similar to Lackey's in a different domain where authority should be granted and testimony treated preemptively. A climate scientist may strike a layperson as arrogant and feel bullied by her testimony that humans are a major driver of global climate change. A more attentive scientist who is willing to listen to the concerns of the layperson and thoughtfully answer his questions may be more successful in encouraging the layperson to believe truthfully. However, regardless of what domain we consider it is unclear what the relevance of Lackey's concerns are to the question of whether it is inappropriate for laypeople to treat experts as epistemic authorities.


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Lackey states:

> [B]eing able to identify experts in the face of widespread disagreement is not hopeless when they are assessed as advisors rather than as authorities. For even if I cannot tell who is more reliable in a given domain, I surely can tell who is better at effectively clarifying the terrain, or at being a sensitive listener, or at being open-minded to the issues that are of concern to me. (Lackey 2018: 240)

Again though, it's not clear what the connection between being a sensitive listener or being open-minded is with being reliable in inquiry and testimony. And when we go to experts, what we want is someone who reliably believes and asserts the truth. When we are confronted by two disagreeing experts, we want to know which is more reliable. Thus, we need to look at markers that allow for principled epistemic distinctions among competing experts as well as discover reasons for thinking which markers in which situations are reliable indicators of greater expertise.

There is another problem in the neighborhood of Lackey's objection. One might think that experts should not be treated as authorities because in a world where laypersons treat experts as such and authorities view themselves as playing the role of an authority, laypersons will not ask questions of experts in order to increase their grasp of complex matters, and experts will not feel compelled to offer explanations for their pronouncements to laypersons. Both of these practices may lead to the result that fewer true beliefs are possessed by laypersons than there would be otherwise if experts were treated as and acted like advisors. This seems quite different from the idea that the Authority View leaves the layperson without the resources to choose among competing instances of expert testimony, but it is an interesting objection in its own right. However, it's not clear that laypersons would in fact have more true beliefs in a world where experts are taught to be clearer and more sympathetic communicators than in a world where laypersons are taught to be more epistemically humble and better discriminators of those who possess genuine expertise.

In response to all of my arguments in this section, Lackey can still maintain that the problem of identifying experts is less of a problem for the proponent of the Advisor View than it is for that of the Authority View and this itself is a sufficient reason to adopt the former. On the Advisor View, the layperson does not have to choose between the testimony of two disagreeing experts and "go all-in" with one. Rather, she can consider the arguments offered by both and come to her own position. However, as a layperson, she is unlikely to weigh both sides appropriately. Luckily, as I have argued, there are resources available on the Authority View for choosing between these experts and obtaining a justified belief through preemptive deference.

## 5. PREEMPTION AND UNDERSTANDING

The two objections discussed above, *INDEFEASIBILITY* and *DISAGREEMENT*, are objections against ever treating an expert as an authority. They have been answered satisfactorily. In contrast, rather than answer the next three objections to be discussed, I accept them as sound. However, instead of necessitating the rejection of the Authority View, these objections point to the need for a hybrid approach to expert testimony.

The objection *UNDERSTANDING* holds that preemptive belief precludes understanding. While I argue this is true, it does not establish that we should never treat experts as authorities. Rather, the objection only shows there will be certain times and certain

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domains where such treatment is inappropriate. This leads to the idea that a hybrid view rather than the Authority or Advisor View is the correct stance for the non-expert to take towards expert testimony.

The main motivation behind the Authority View is that, by following it, a layperson increases her chances at believing what all the available evidence supports, compared to the case where she evaluates the evidence for herself. But there are other epistemic values, and it is possible that a layperson will miss out on these by treating experts as authorities. In particular, it appears that as long as one allows an expert's judgment to preempt one's own concerning some matter, one will not be able to gain *understanding* of that matter.

What does it take to understand? In the past decade, the literature on understanding has ballooned. However, there are some common themes present in many extant accounts including that understanding is something more complex than mere knowledge and its possession either entails or even consists in possessing some characteristic cognitive abilities. Jonathan Kvanvig states, "Understanding requires the grasping of explanatory and other coherence-making relationships in a large and comprehensive body of information" (Kvanvig 2009: 192). Stephen Grimm (2014) connects understanding with the ability to answer "What if . . .?" questions. He argues that understanding is constituted by the ability to see how changes to one aspect or part of the object of understanding will lead to changes in other aspects or parts, and such an ability will allow one to answer reliably this kind of question.

I believe humans are a major driver of climate change; however, I recognize that I lack the abilities necessary to adequately gather and evaluate all the evidence relevant to this claim. Instead, I trust the experts on this matter. I contend I have a justified belief that humans are a major driver of climate change, and if the belief is true, I have knowledge. Furthermore, I have some knowledge of how humans contribute to climate change, namely through industrial activity and the release of greenhouse gases. But I don't *understand* how this works. By accepting these propositions on the authority of the experts, I have precluded my gaining the requisite grasp for understanding.

Christoph Jäger is also concerned with the tension between understanding and preemptive deference:

> Suppose I believe, with a certain degree of confidence, that the last dinosaurs became extinct some 66 million years ago and that this happened primarily because of massive volcanic eruptions and their ensuing effects. Then I consult an expert geologist and paleontologist whom I conscientiously believe to be an authority on the question and learn that he believes that the main factor accounting for the extinction is that a large asteroid hit the earth. Suppose he is right. Then, if I switch to the authority's belief, I improve my track record of believing truths. But merely switching beliefs will not give me much additional understanding. (Jäger 2016: 180)

Note that Jäger seeks to establish something slightly weaker than *UNDERSTANDING* with the case, as he believes that a minimal amount of understanding may be obtained through preemptively accepting expert testimony though any significant understanding remains elusive. In the dinosaur case, the subject can provide an answer to the "What if" question of what would likely have happened had the asteroid not struck earth. Namely, the dinosaurs would not have become extinct at that time.

Of course, I could consult a climate scientist and receive from her an explanatory story of how it is the case that human activity contributes significantly to climate change. Furthermore, I can accept this story preemptively, that is, I believe it to be true on the


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say-so of the scientist. I could use this new knowledge to answer some questions about how things might be different if humans changed their behavior. Based on my possession of an explanatory story and my ability to answer some "What if" questions, some may be willing to attribute understanding of the matter to me.

However, there still seems to be something deficient with my grasp of the issue. Yes, I can answer some questions about alternative conditions, but what seems important about the possession of such an ability as it relates to having understanding, is that it is grounded in my grasp of the connections between the parts of the explanatory story. If I accept each part of the story based on the authority's testimony, I don't really grasp how it all hangs together. All of my relevant beliefs are based in authority. Grasping the connections between the parts of the explanatory story would seem to entail that basing relations obtain between my beliefs in the propositions in which the story consists. Seeing how each part hangs together includes seeing how each part is related evidentially. I lack this picture when I preemptively defer to an authority. At best, this deference puts me in a position to understand, in that I can start to investigate the story and its internal connections for myself. Furthermore, lacking any comprehensive handle on the force of the relevant evidence, my ability to evaluate the plausibility of my answers to new "What if" questions is limited.

If I want to understand some matter in any robust way, then I should treat the experts as advisors. Their testimony may help me see the force of first-order evidence on the matter, but I need to come to an assessment of that evidence myself to see how it all hangs together. But I can't understand everything. Understanding some questions and domains will take too much time, and some simply will be beyond my cognitive abilities. We must all make choices concerning when to pursue understanding and when simply to defer to the experts. Striking the proper balance will involve weighing the value of understanding some subject and my chances of achieving this against the value of having a better chance of getting the truth by preemptively trusting an expert.

Understanding holds both epistemic and pragmatic value. Georgi Gardiner (2012) argues that having integrated beliefs as one does when one understands is valuable in a way not reducible to the value of those beliefs being true. Furthermore, being able to see how changes in one part of a system will effect changes in other parts of that system, the ability Grimm argues is constitutive of understanding, is required for practical tasks from riding a bike to designing a skyscraper. But many times believing truly is enough. When it comes to climate science, knowing that humans are a major driver of climate change through the release of greenhouse gases is enough to prompt me to reduce my own reliance on greenhouse gases. Spending time pursuing understanding may prevent me from learning important truths such as this should my own epistemic abilities lead me astray. Deciding when to seek understanding and when to defer often will be difficult. However, as long as it is recognized that seeking understanding in every matter is not necessary and sometimes will be inappropriate, the fact that understanding conflicts with preemption is not an argument against preempting in all cases.[11]

11 Recently, Michel Croce (2018) has suggested that the tension between preemption and understanding is not near as strong as I advocate here or as Jäger argues. However, this argument depends on a rejection of the Indirectness Thesis, the thesis that testimony cannot be a direct source of understanding. Croce builds upon Boyd's (2017) argument against the thesis. However, the Indirectness Thesis is built into my own account of understanding, which I cannot give here. Gordon (2016) provides an excellent defense, though.

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## 6. PREEMPTION AND THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

It is worth observing that Lackey motivates the Advisor View by focusing our attention on a special class of examples. In particular, she presents the treatment of expert testimony in the courtroom as a model for its treatment in all situations. I contend that Lackey is correct that, in the courtroom, jurors should treat experts as advisors. Her position mimics that of Lord Cooper who, in the important Scottish legal case *Davie v. Edinburgh Magistrates* (1953), wrote as follows:

> Expert witnesses, however skilled or eminent, can give no more than evidence. They cannot usurp the functions of the jury or judge sitting as a jury, any more than a technical assessor can substitute his advice for the judgment of the Court. ... Their duty is to furnish the judge or jury with the necessary scientific criteria for testing the accuracy of their conclusions, so as to enable the judge or jury to form their own independence judgment by the application of these criteria to the facts proved in evidence.

I have no complaint about what Cooper recommends for the courtroom. But we should not draw general epistemic lessons from courtroom procedures. The reason expert testimony should be treated as mere advice in the courtroom is due to the values underpinning the jury system itself. And these values are sometimes in tension with the value of truth.

Evidence may be prohibited in a trial due to its provenance even if its presentation to the jury would or should lead to a more reliably true verdict. The United States court system goes so far as to exclude evidence gathered indirectly from an unconstitutional search, the so called "fruit of the poisonous tree." The court must look away from such evidence because it values fairness over truth in this case. Another value central to the justice system is community participation. The upholding of justice is not just the work of an elite group of judges. The designers of the U.S. justice system thought that involving the community in the justice system would help to guard against arbitrary prosecutions and other miscarriages of justice. Juries promote community involvement, and so it is important that the verdict delivered in a jury trial is due to the jury. This means the verdict must be a result of deliberation upon the evidence by members of the jury. Consequently, in the courtroom, the value of preemptive testimony is outweighed by other values and preemption is rendered inappropriate. The objection JUSTICE is sound. My point, though, is that we should not assume that preemptive deference to experts is always inappropriate outside the courtroom.[12]

## 7. PREEMPTION AND MORALITY

Recently, the connection between authority and testimony has come up in the debate over whether there is something wrong with relying too strongly on testimony for one's moral beliefs.[13] Here, I'll take for granted the existence of moral experts. Peter Singer (1972)

12 This is not to say that the values of fairness and community involvement will not be relevant outside the courtroom. An expert may be able to tell us whether some proposed ballot initiative is sound policy. However, in a democracy where political outcomes are to be reflective of the will of the people, citizens will need to deliberate for themselves, treating the expert's testimony as advice.

13 See Crisp (2014), Hills (2009, 2010), McGrath (2009, 2011), and Nickel (2001) for examples.


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argues for the possibility that certain people have a superior ability to select which features of a situation are relevant inputs for moral reasoning. Such individuals might also be more reliable at discovering what action these inputs support. So why might it be appropriate for the moral layperson to abstain from preemptively deferring to these moral experts?

Philip Nickel (2001) and Alison Hills (2009, 2010) argue that testimony fails to convey understanding and that understanding is uniquely valuable in the moral domain. Perhaps testimony does fail to convey understanding.[14] I will not defend this general claim, but above I argued that treating testimony preemptively precludes the layperson from obtaining understanding. The important question is whether understanding is uniquely valuable in the domain of morality. For, if so, one should never treat moral experts as authorities. Hills suggests moral understanding is somehow necessary for morally worthy action. However, this seems doubtful, especially if we assume moral knowledge can be transmitted by testimony even if moral understanding cannot. As Andreas Mogensen suggestively asks

> [S]omeone might fail to understand why a given action is required despite knowing the action is obligatory, knowing why it's obligatory, and knowing how the moral status of the action would change across variations in its descriptive properties [where this knowledge is via testimony]. If a person does the right thing guided by this rich body of moral knowledge, how convincing is it to suppose that her action lacks moral worth because she does not also see the relevant grounding relationships? (Mogensen 2015: 10)

Mere knowledge appears to be sufficient for morally worthy action. Therefore, the supposed necessity of understanding for morally worthy action and the inability to obtain it through preemption fails as an objection to preemptively deferring to moral experts.

Intuitively, though, there appears still to be something wrong with basing all of one's moral beliefs entirely on the testimony of others. I contend that the *MORAL DEVELOPMENT* objection best explains this. Every mature adult must make many moral decisions each day, and much of the time there will be no moral experts nearby to consult. If one always has relied on the testimony of others in the past, one will not have developed the moral reasoning skills necessary to succeed in these situations. But there will be some situations where getting it right is supremely important and there are moral experts on whom one can rely. Will it be permissible to preemptively defer to the expert in such situations? I believe the answer is yes, though it will not be the ideal solution. We should take almost every possible opportunity to develop our powers of moral reasoning and increase our understanding of morality. This includes seeking to understand the reasoning behind a moral expert's testimony. However, there will be times when decisions must be made quickly and much is riding on their being correct. In these instances, preemptive deference will be necessary. Therefore, morality is a domain where a hybrid approach to expertise is warranted.

## 8. CONCLUSION

We rely heavily upon expert testimony in many domains; therefore, what appropriate reliance looks like matters. Jennifer Lackey argues that we should always treat experts as

14 Though again see Boyd (2017).

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advisors and presents several arguments against ever treating experts as authorities. I have responded to these arguments to show that there need not be anything epistemically inappropriate about treating experts as authorities and preemptively deferring to them. Furthermore, I've demonstrated that Lackey's Advisor View lacks the advantages over the Authority View she argues it possesses. Treating experts as authorities often is a reliable and efficient way of obtaining the truth. However, I've argued, as well, that treating experts thusly will not always be appropriate.

In his account of deontic authority, Joseph Raz (2006) denies legitimacy to an authority that otherwise satisfies the conditions that justify authority if it is more important that a subject make a decision for herself rather than merely get it right. The same goes for epistemic authority. Sometimes it will be important for the non-expert to assess for herself the evidence relevant to some question because understanding the issue is supremely important. At different times moral concerns will dictate that a person's belief reflects the results of her own deliberation. In other circumstances, however, we can justifiably replace our judgment on matters with the superior judgment of experts. A hybrid approach to the testimony of experts is warranted.[15]

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