

Approving on the Basis of Moral and Aesthetic Testimony

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Much ink has been spilled on whether certain responses to normative testimony—in particular, moral and aesthetic testimony—are ‘fishy’ or ‘defective’. For instance, many debate whether it is fishy or defective to believe on the basis of testimony that a painting is beautiful or an act is wrong. Interestingly, both sides of this debate often accept that *approving* or *disapproving* on the basis of normative testimony is clearly verboten.

We can distinguish stronger and weaker versions of this commitment:

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| NO REASON: | Normative testimony gives us no reason for affective responses like approval. |
| NO JUSTIFICATION: | Normative testimony does not justify affective responses like approval. |

Say you told me that a painting is beautiful and an act is wrong. On the first view, I’d have no reason to approve of the painting or disapprove of the act. On the second, I may have *some* reason for these attitudes, but the relevant reasons must be too weak for my responses to be reasonable or justified. We can also distinguish other versions of these views. Some philosophers might accept NO REASON for aesthetic but not moral testimony, for example.

My main goal is to defend approving on the basis of normative testimony. First, I argue that NO REASON is false: once we construct the right comparison cases it is hard to deny that normative testimony gives us *some* reason for attitudes like approval. Second, I argue that these reasons need not be weak in the way that proponents of NO JUSTIFICATION suppose. If you are an extremely reliable informant about aesthetics and you tell me a painting is sublime, that can give me very strong reasons to approve of it.

A subsidiary goal is to show that if approving on the basis of normative testimony is not defective, this matters for broader debates in aesthetics and metaethics. It should make us optimistic that normative testimony can also give us (strong) reasons to believe and act, even though the ‘fishiness’ of these responses is in some ways harder to explain away than it was before.

Let me rephrase these goals in a way that is a little insider baseball—and hence most clear to those familiar with debates about normative testimony. My first goal will be to directly target recent arguments about reasons for attitudes like approval from Whiting (2015) and Lord (2016, forthcoming). My subsidiary goal will be to show how that result undermines several prominent positions: the view that we cannot gain aesthetic or moral knowledge from aesthetic or moral testimony (Meskin 2004; Crisp 2014); the view that moral knowledge does not give us moral reasons for action (Hills 2009, McGrath 2011); and the view that we can explain the puzzle of normative testimony by appealing to connections between normative beliefs and affective attitudes like approval (Enoch 2014, Fletcher 2016).

I—Setting the Scene

So far, this is quite abstract. Some scene-setting is in order to make sense of what a proponent of NO REASON or NO JUSTIFICATION is committed to.

Let's start with what's meant by 'responding to normative testimony'.¹ I'll follow others—especially Fletcher (2016)—in focusing on *direct deference to pure normative assertions*. Say you tell me that a painting is beautiful and an act is wrong. I directly defer to you insofar as my responses are based solely upon your testimony (with, perhaps, my background knowledge of your reliability: see McGrath 2011: 113, Whiting 2015: 93). This rules out my approving of the painting that you tell me is beautiful about after I google photos of it. Your testimony is a pure normative assertion insofar as you do not tell me *why* or *in what way* the painting is beautiful or the act is wrong. This rules out my disapproving of the relevant act based on explanatory or descriptive information about its morally relevant features.² The point of these distinctions is to isolate what normative testimony alone provides.

¹ It may well be that not *all* 'normative' domains testimony generate a prima facie puzzle with deference to normative testimony, as Fletcher notes (2016: 58); I leave that open. My uses of the term 'normative' can be treated as shorthand for 'moral or aesthetic'.

² Two complications. First, pure normative assertions ascribe thin normative properties: i.e., properties like *being good* rather than like *being graceful*. See Roberts (2013) on the distinction. There's a debate about which side *being beautiful* falls on (see, e.g., Zangwill

Now let's turn to *approving* on the basis of moral or aesthetic testimony. This is a generic normative attitude that comes in moral and aesthetic flavors. I take these attitudes to be familiar and intuitive. If you saw Peter Singer gracefully scoop a drowning child out of a pond, you might morally and aesthetically approve of his act; if he did so gracelessly, you might morally approve and aesthetically disapprove, if you were so inclined. There are, as you'd expect, theories about how to demarcate moral from aesthetic approval, and both from non-normative forms of approval. (This is an issue for some non-cognitivist research programs. For discussion, see Bjornnson and McPherson 2014.) But we don't need to wield in such theories here.

I focus on these generic normative attitudes to skirt any problems that may arise from strong commitments about more specific normative attitudes like aesthetic appreciation and moral blame. Some claim that it is *impossible* to appreciate artworks or blame people in response to normative testimony. (For critical discussion, see Whiting 2015: 101 and Hanson 2018: 53-62.) This line is much less plausible for approval, and other similar attitudes such as aesthetic admiration. I leave open how broad this category of attitudes is.

I also focus on these *normative* attitudes—my approving of the painting that you told me was beautiful—to set aside dialectically irrelevant attitudes. It is obviously reasonable to form some attitudes on the basis of your testimony. This includes some non-normative attitudes: I can reasonably believe that *you* believe that the painting is beautiful (Whiting 2015: 93, 99). It may also include some normative attitudes: I could approve of the aesthetic features of your voice after hearing your testimony. But these aren't the attitudes that are at issue in debates about normative testimony.

2013). I assume that *being wrong* and *being beautiful* are thin normative properties, but if you disagree just substitute your preferred alternatives. Second, many contend that responding to descriptions of the aesthetically relevant properties of the painting would still be 'fishy', perhaps unlike in the moral case. Hanson (2018: 53-60) challenges this asymmetry. And related issues crop up in relation to 'impure' deference to moral testimony: cf. Hills (2009: 195-196) and McGrath (2011: 137), on one hand, and Mogenson (2015: 10) and Sliwa (2010: 194), on the other. I only discuss pure normative assertions.

II—The Right Comparison Cases

A major theme of the broader debate about the ‘fishiness’ of deferring to normative testimony is that we need to get the right comparison cases. For instance, an influential way of framing the debate was to focus on comparisons between deference to *normative* and *non-normative* testimony. Learning what we morally owe to distant strangers via deference to moral experts seems odd, whereas learning what we legally owe to the IRS via deference to legal experts seems fine, as McGrath argues (2011). The problem with such comparisons is that they may not isolate any fishiness of responding to *normative* testimony; they introduce confounding factors. Arguably, what we morally owe to others is much more controversial than what we legally owe to the IRS, and this may explain the relative fishiness of deferring about the former (see Markovits 2012: 306; Sliwa 2012: 186-188).

To avoid such confounding factors, many have turned to comparisons between *normative deference* to *normative acquaintance*. What’s helpful about this approach is that it holds fixed the relevant object of evaluation.

To illustrate, consider the comparison cases from Whiting (2015: 96-97):

Suppose that a friend tells Harry that Rembrandt’s *Abraham’s Sacrifice* is good. As a result, Harry comes to believe that the painting is good, which moves him to admire it. In this case, it does not seem rational for Harry to admire the Rembrandt, which suggests that the belief on which it is based, a result of testimony, is not rational. [...]

Compare [this to] a case in which Harry acquires the belief that *Abraham’s Sacrifice* is good in some other way than from bare testimony. Suppose that Harry sees the painting and notices the playing-card-like structure in which the grey, worn face of Abraham and his heavy hands are mirrored by the angel’s smooth, flushed face [...]. As a result of what he sees, Harry believes that the painting is good. This moves him to admire the work. In this case, the

admiration seems rational, which suggests that the belief on which it is based, acquired in a non-testimonial fashion, is also rational.

We're comparing two cases where Harry forms identical attitudes towards *Abraham's Sacrifice*: in one, based on deference to aesthetic testimony; in the other, based on acquaintance. Since the attitudes are identical, there's no way for one to concern a more controversial issue (as in the comparisons between deference to moral and legal testimony). But Whiting intuitively thinks that Harry's attitude is much fishier in the first case. Based on this, Whiting concludes that in cases like this, aesthetic testimony cannot give Harry *any* reason to believe that the painting is good or admire it (2015: 106-107).

Lord relies on similar comparisons between aesthetic deference and aesthetic acquaintance, concluding that in cases of deference the relevant agent can know that the artwork is beautiful but 'does not possess that fact as a reason to admire [the artwork]' (2016: 12). He develops this view about aesthetic and moral deference in his (forthcoming), using comparisons like:

Examining Nefertiti: Hanna is visiting Berlin for the first time. She rushes to the Neues Museum to see Nefertiti's Bust. She is overwhelmed by the beauty of the bust. She studies its features for an hour. She not only passively looks at the bust, but also actively thinks about how the various features of the bust interact.

Nefertiti: Hanna just returned from a trip to Berlin during which she saw Nefertiti's Bust. Hanna's sister Clara asks her about the museums. Hanna tells her that Nefertiti's Bust was especially beautiful. Clara comes to believe that Nefertiti's Bust is beautiful solely on the basis of Hanna's word.

Lord holds that Hanna has reasons for various aesthetic emotions towards the bust, but Clara does not: 'Deference *cannot* acquaint us with the full range of normatively relevant properties', so 'deference *cannot* enable possession of the full range of reasons'; *only* 'acquaintance enables the possession of certain facts as reasons' for affective responses (emphasis his). Lord's stance on moral deference and moral acquaintance is the same.

It should now be clear that both Whiting and Lord endorse NO REASON. Indeed, they both offer an argument for NO REASON based on a comparison between deference to normative testimony and normative acquaintance.

There are two problems with this argument, both of which concern ways in which the intuitions it elicits are not probative. Worse yet, correcting for these problems elicits probative intuitions that militate against NO REASON.

The first problem is that comparing deference to normative testimony to normative acquaintance does not isolate all confounding factors. It only holds fixed the object of evaluation: aesthetic approval of *Abraham's Sacrifice* or *Nefertiti's Bust*. But it does not rely on the use of *minimal contrastive pairs*.

An analogy may help here. Say you wanted to test the hypothesis that eating burnt toast causes cancer. How might you do that? A bad approach would be to compare cancer rates among one group who eat burnt toast and another group who smoke a pack a day. If burnt-toast-eaters had lower cancer rates, that could be because eating burnt toast is not carcinogenic, or because smoking is *more* carcinogenic. To isolate the effect of burnt toast consumption on cancer, we need to use minimal contrastive pairs: in this case, we need to compare cancer rates among groups of people who are as similar as possible, except one eats burnt toast and the other doesn't.

Similarly, since the goal is to isolate whether normative testimony gives us reasons for attitudes like approval we should compare pairs of cases that are as similar as possible except for the presence or absence of the normative testimony (burnt toast *vs.* no burnt toast). We must avoid the confounding factors in comparing deference to acquaintance (burnt toast *vs.* smoking).

How can we generate minimal contrastive pairs here? That is, how can we make the relevant cases as similar as possible, but for the presence or absence of the normative testimony? Consider the following example:

Suppose that a friend tells Larry that he saw Rembrandt's *Abraham's Sacrifice*. As a result, Larry comes to believe that the painting is good, which moves him to admire it.

This case is as identical to Whiting's first example except for the absence of the *normative* content in the testimony: there the friend also told Harry the painting "is good". We can similarly modify Lord's main example:

Hanna tells Clara "I saw Nefertiti's Bust, which is beautiful". Later when her mother, Delilah, asks Hanna about the trip, Hanna is tired of talking about it so she just says "I saw Nefertiti's Bust". Solely on this basis, both Clara and Delilah approve of Nefertiti's Bust.

Clara and Delilah form the same attitude with the same object (approval of Nefertiti's Bust), in response to the same informant (Hanna). But only Clara forms that attitude based on *normative* testimony ("[the bust] is beautiful").

If we want to isolate whether normative testimony alone gives us reasons, we should use minimal contrastive pairs like these. And once we do, the answer—I contend—is fairly clear. Intuitively, Larry has less reason to admire Rembrandt's *Abraham's Sacrifice* than Harry, and Delilah has less reason to approve of Nefertiti's Bust than Clara. If this is right, then Harry and Clara must have had *some* reason to admire and approve of these artworks. Since the only variable that changes in these comparison cases is the presence of the normative testimony, that's what made the difference. Testimony that the painting "is good" gave Harry some reason to admire it; testimony that the bust "is beautiful" gave Clara some reason to approve of it. So NO REASON is false. Normative testimony gives us reasons to approve.

You may have qualms about this argument, but hold them for the moment. After all, some of them may dissipate when we consider the second problem with comparing normative deference to acquaintance.

To warm up to this point, consider an example from an unrelated context—Schroeder's discussion of cases of undercutting epistemic defeaters:

In a first version of the case, you see Tom Grabit come out of the library, pull a book from beneath his shirt, cackle gleefully, and scurry off. Intuitively, you have a reason to believe that Tom just stole a book from the library. But in a revised version of the case, Tom has an identical twin, Tim, from whom you cannot visually distinguish him. If you're aware of this, then it turns out that you don't have any reason to believe that Tom stole a book after all. Right? Of course that's right. This, after all, is a classic case of an *undercutting defeater*, and as everyone knows, undercutting defeaters make it the case that things that would otherwise have been reasons for you, instead are not.

This is a natural thought about the case, but your intuitions mislead you. That you still do have some reason to believe that Tom stole a book can be observed by comparison with yet a third version of the case. In the third version, Tom and Tim have a third identical sibling, Tam. In this case, you have even less reason to believe that Tom stole a book than in the second, and so in the second it can't have gone away entirely. By similar reasoning, you still have a reason to believe that Tom stole a book even in the third case, because there is a fourth case in which there are four identical siblings and your reason to believe that Tom stole a book is still worse (2007: 93).

The upshot of Schroeder's discussion is that to test whether some fact is a reason for A to φ (for you to believe Tom stole a book) you can't just consider a better case to a worse case (where Tom has no twin; where you're aware Tom has one twin); you need to also consider even worse cases (where you're aware Tom has two twins). This same upshot is applicable to our present discussion. As many have noted, normative acquaintance may be generally *better* than deference to normative testimony without the latter being 'defective' or 'fishy' (Driver 2006: 625-629; Sliwa 2012: 193-194). So we shouldn't just compare acquaintance (no twin) to deference (one twin) and declare that in the latter case there's no reason for attitudes like approval. We should also consider comparisons between cases of deference (one twin) and relevantly similar but worse cases (two twins, three twins, etc.).

How can we construct such comparisons? Here's one possibility.

Tom's case: Tom tells you that Nefertiti's Bust is beautiful. Knowing that Tom is a highly reliable aesthete, you approve of the Bust.

Tim's case: Tim tells you that Nefertiti's Bust is beautiful. Knowing that Tim is a fairly reliable aesthete, you approve of the Bust.

The only difference is that Tom is a more reliable informant than Tim. Intuitively, you have less reason to approve of the bust in Tim's case than in Tom's case; if that's right then you must have some reason in Tom's case. Indeed, we can construct a sequence of cases with informants of gradually decreasing reliability (Tom, Tim, Tam...). In each case, there's slightly less to be said in favor of your approval of the bust. Since a trademark feature of reasons is that they are gradable—they count in favor of actions or attitudes to different degrees—this is good evidence that the normative testimony can give you *reasons* for affective attitudes like approval.³

III—From Some Reason to Strong Reasons

In explicitly embracing NO REASON Whiting and Lord may have taken on an unnecessarily strong commitment about normative testimony. For example, Whiting commits to the view that your aesthetic testimony gives me no reason to approve of artworks in order to support a conclusion that it cannot give me *knowledge* of the aesthetic properties of those artworks. The weaker view that your aesthetic testimony does not *justify* my approval would also suffice for that dialectical purpose. And that weaker thesis does not seem to be challenged by the argument so far.⁴

³ Interestingly, a central argument from Maguire (2017) is that there are no reasons for attitudes because the considerations that favor attitudes are not gradable or weighted. I've just provided an inverse form of this argument. The considerations that favor your approval of the Bust in cases like Tim's and Tom's are weighted, so they're reasons.

⁴ You may even think NO JUSTIFICATION is suggested by the argument so far. Consider Schroeder's explanation of what goes wrong in our intuitions about Tom Grabit's thievery (2007: 93). Take the following claim: *there is reason to believe Tom stole a book*. Asserting that claim would implicate that there is a *good* reason to believe Tom stole a book. That implicature is false if Tom has an identical twin. Schroeder argues that the claim is true, but we intuit that it is false due to this infelicity. More generally, we sometimes misleadingly intuit that there is *no* reason to φ when the only reasons to φ are

In this section I'll offer two arguments for the view that if we reject NO REASON, we should reject also NO JUSTIFICATION. The first is quick: NO REASON has a clearer theoretical rationale. Consider the acquaintance principles that have been endorsed in aesthetics. It's one thing for philosophers like Lord to argue that since *only* acquaintance can count give you reasons for responses like approval, normative deference cannot give you *any* reason for those affective attitudes. It's another to argue that normative deference to testimony *can* play the same the same role as acquaintance, but only a little bit. What would explain why deference to testimony can get your foot in the door, but can't push the door wide open? Why would this separate source of normative support be barred from making affective attitudes reasonable, justified, or fitting? Denying NO REASON while accepting NO JUSTIFICATION seems unmotivated.

The second argument against NO JUSTIFICATION is longer, more significant. It appeals to examples like the following as the thin end of the wedge:

Tom's case: Tom tells you that Nefertiti's Bust is beautiful. Knowing that Tom is a highly reliable aesthete, you approve of the Bust.

You must have some reason to approve of the bust here, given the comparison to *worse* versions of this case. Now compare it to *better* versions thereof. There are two ways to get such cases. The obvious one is to *increase the reliability* of the testifier. Intuitively, you have more reason to approve when you get such testimony from an extremely reliable informant. The less obvious way is to *change the content* of the normative testimony: the informant can shift to using aesthetic superlatives like "sublime". Intuitively, if testimony that an artwork is beautiful gives you some reason to approve of it, testimony that it is sublime gives you more reason to do so.

weak. If we've misleadingly intuited that there's *no* reason to approve on the basis of normative testimony, you may think the only reasons to do so must also be weak. This, however, would be a mistake. Schroeder's Gricean story isn't the only way of explaining why we form misleading intuition about existential claims about reasons.

Put the two points together. Consider a case where an extremely highly informant—the Oracle of Delphi, perhaps—tells you that Nefertiti’s Bust is sublime, transcendent, breathtaking, the most beautiful artwork ever made. You approve of the artwork solely on the basis of the Oracle’s word. Now compare this response to your approving based solely on Tom’s word. There’s much more to be said in favor of your response to the Oracle.

Indeed, I contend that you have much stronger reasons to approve of the bust solely on the basis of the Oracle’s word than you would in ordinary cases of aesthetic acquaintance. Recall Lord’s description of Hanna “examining” the bust: ‘She studies its features for an hour. She not only passively looks at the bust, but also actively thinks about how the various features of the bust interact.’ This is far more effortful than most cases of aesthetic acquaintance. If I spent an hour studying each artwork I admired in a museum I’d only ever see a handful of the works I admire in any trip. Aesthetic acquaintance often involves only a few minutes staring at a work. If our approval of artworks can be justified on that basis, the same can be said when you approve of a work because the Oracle says it’s sublime.

IV – Generalizing

I’ve now offered my case against NO REASON and NO JUSTIFICATION. Before we consider an important objection, I want to highlight an important feature of the argumentative strategy. By focusing on the right comparison cases, it offers a recipe for generating counterexamples to NO REASON and NO JUSTIFICATION. We can fill in the details in different ways.

So far I’ve focused on *aesthetic attitudes towards particular artworks*. We can also consider aesthetic attitudes towards *groups* or *genres* of artworks: Tom and Tim could tell you about the beauty of (a) Rothko’s *Black on Maroon*, (b) Rothko’s Seagram Murals, or (c) abstract expressionism. Substituting in groups or genres to the cases above may elicit even stronger intuitions against views like NO REASON and NO JUSTIFICATION.

It's also worth showing that the argumentative strategy works at least as well when we focus on cases of moral testimony. Start with a simple case:

Wei's case: Wei tells you that he saw a man do something wrong. Knowing Wei to be highly reliable, you disapprove of the man's act.

Here are two comparisons that elicit the intuition that you must have at least *some* to disapprove of the man's act on the basis of Wei's word:

Xiao's case: Xiao tells you that he saw a man do something. Knowing Xiao to be highly reliable, you disapprove of the man's act.

Ying's case: Ying tells you that he saw a man do something wrong. Knowing Ying to be fairly reliable, you disapprove of the man's act.

Wei's case and Xiao's case provide minimal contrastive pairs: they are identical but for the presence of the moral testimony ('wrong'). You have less reason to disapprove in the latter than the former. Wei's case and Ying's case differ only in the reliability of the informant. You have less reason to disapprove of the act in Ying's case since Ying is less reliable. So you must have *some* reason to disapprove on the basis of Wei's word.

If this is right, we're also under pressure to say moral testimony can make affective responses like disapproval justified. Just consider cases like:

Zhao's case: Zhao tells you that he saw a man do something evil, monstrous, utterly reprehensible, and so on. Knowing Zhao to be extremely reliable, you disapprove of the man's act.

As before, I think you have very strong reasons to disapprove on the basis of Zhao's word. This is plausible when we compare Zhao's case to Wei's. But it is also plausible when we consider Zhao's case to ordinary cases of moral acquaintance. When you witness another commit a wrongful deed, I doubt that you always "study its features for an hour, [...] actively thinking about how the various features of the [action] interact." Often we disapprove of others' misdeeds on a much flimsier basis than that. And

often we're *justified* in doing so. (One who denies this risks being committed to an overly intellectualized view of moral epistemology.) If our disapproval of wrongful actions on the basis of ordinary acquaintance can be justified, surely the same can be said when we disapprove on the basis of extremely reliable testimony that actions are evil, reprehensible.

These cases all involve disapproving of particular acts. But just as we can substitute artworks for genres, we can also substitute particular acts for act-types. Take an act-type like *doxing*: finding and publishing identifying information about particular individuals online. Imagine a grandmother who knows little about doxing. In one case, she asks a highly reliable grandchild about it, who tells her "Doxing? It's horrendous thing some people do online"; based on this alone, she disapproves of it. In another, she asks a fairly reliable grandchild, gets the same testimony, and forms the same response. Intuitively, she has less reason to disapprove of doxing in the second case than the first. (You can fill in other comparison cases by cutting "horrendous" or increasing the reliability of the grandchild.) In such cases, I find it highly plausible that people can have strong reason to disapprove of act-types solely on the basis of testimony that it's wrong.

V—Unreasonable or Irrational?

So far I've argued against NO REASON and NO JUSTIFICATION. But some might object to the argumentative strategy. For the sake of brevity, I'll focus on the two strongest objections, and use the moral example from above.

The first objection appeals to the distinction between reasons *for* and reasons *against*. It's worse to kill someone painfully than to kill someone painlessly, but that needn't mean there's some reason for killing someone painfully; it could just mean there's more reason against killing painfully. Likewise, disapproving on the basis of Xiao's word or Ying's word is worse than disapproving on the basis of Wei's word, but that need not mean that there's some reason *for* disapproving on the basis of Wei's word; there may

just be more reason *against* disapproving in Xiao's or Ying's case (where the testimony is stripped of its moral content or the informant is less reliable).

To fill out the objection a little more, note that there are cases where there's more reason *against* one person's response to testimony even though there's no reason for the other's response to testimony. Consider these examples:

Weaker and Stronger Response: I tell Adele and Belle that the Mona Lisa is in France. This prompts Adele to believe that it's in Germany and Belle to believe that it's in Berlin.

Unreliable and More Unreliable Testifier: Adele tries to predict who will win the next election by asking me, even though she is in a position to know that my answer is based on the flip of a coin. Belle tries to predict who will win the next election by reading propaganda, even though she is in a position to know it is inaccurate most of the time.

In both cases there's more reason *against* Belle's belief than Adele's, but no reason for Adele's beliefs about the painting or the election. So, why not say the same in my cases of disapproving on the basis of normative testimony?

Three responses. First, the explanations for why there's more reason *against* Belle's belief even though there's no reason for Adele's beliefs does not carry over to the cases of disapproving on the basis of normative testimony. Why? *Weaker and Stronger Response* illustrates how it's epistemically worse to believe something stronger than something weaker on the basis of no evidence. Belle's belief is stronger than Adele's (in the familiar sense that Belle's belief entails Adele's but not vice versa).⁵ Neither has any evidence for their belief. That's why there's more reason against Belle's belief even though there's no reason for Adele's belief. This doesn't apply to our cases. You form the exact same response to testimony when you defer to Wei, Ying, Xiao, and Zhao you; so in no case do you form a *stronger* response. What about *Unreliable and More Unreliable Testifier*? This case illustrates the following: there's no reason to believe on the basis of evidence that you're

⁵ For helpful discussion of this issue, I'd like to thank [REDACTED] and [REDACTED].

in a position to know has a .5 chance of being accurate, but there's more reason against believing on the basis of evidence that you're in a position to know is *inaccurate*. This doesn't apply to our cases either. In each of the four cases you respond to a reliable informant; and in two of those cases-- Wei and Ying's—we hold fixed the reliability of the informant.

The upshot is that the objector needs to explain why it's plausible that there'd be more reason against disapproving in Xiao's or Ying's case. (And this explanation, of course, cannot require us to accept that there's any reason for disapproving in Wei's case.)⁶ I'm skeptical about the prospects for such an explanation, but the onus is on the objector to provide one.

Second, the objector needs an error theory for our intuitions, and the distinction between reasons for and reasons against isn't a promising basis for one. Intuitively, you have less reason to disapprove in Xiao or Ying's case than in Wei's case. If this false, why do we find it intuitive? The suggestion that we're conflating *less reason for* and *more reason against* doesn't seem promising because we don't seem to make the same conflation in cases like Adele's and Belle's. I don't find it at all intuitive that *there's less reason for* Belle's response than Adele's; I find it intuitive that Belle's response is *more unreasonable* than Adele's. (It also isn't intuitive that your response is *more unreasonable* in cases like Ying's.) So this isn't a promising error theory.

Third, the objector needs to explain our intuitions not only about cases like Xiao's and Ying's (which are intuitively worse than Wei's), but about cases like Zhao's (which is intuitively much better than Wei's). Why is it intuitive that you have more reason to disapprove on the basis of Zhao's testimony

⁶ You might think Hopkins' view fits the bill here. Hopkins' 'Unusability Pessimism' holds that there's a duty *not* to form moral or aesthetic beliefs without grasping the 'grounds' or reasons for those beliefs (2011, 2017). If you violate this duty in Xiao or Ying's case, plausibly there's reason against your disapproving in those cases. But that's not enough. Why is there *more* reason against your disapproving in those cases? The natural answer seems to be: you are grasping some reasons *for* your responses in Wei's case. So I'm not sure that this view fits the bill. There's more to be said about Hopkins' view, but I won't discuss it more in this section. As Hills (2009: 98, fn. 8) notes, her view is "an elaboration" of Hopkins' view; I discuss Hills' view in much more detail in §VI.B.

if you have *no* reason to disapprove on the basis of Zhao's testimony? The appeal to reasons against doesn't seem well placed to explain this.

The second objection similarly tries to explain why some of these cases are worse than others without positing reasons for your responses to normative testimony. But it does so in a different way. It appeals to the familiar distinction between what I'll call *rationality* and *reasonableness*:⁷ the former is a relation of coherence between your attitudes, and the latter is a relation between your attitudes and the facts that favor them. On many views, your attitudes can be more or less *rational* without being more or less *reasonable*. Plausibly, if an assassin intends to kill a target quietly, it is less rational to shoot the target with a loud AR-15 than with a silenced sniper rifle; but that doesn't entail that it's less reasonable to shoot the target with an AR-15. Likewise, disapproving on the basis of Xiao's word or Ying's word may be less rational than disapproving on the basis of Wei's word, without being any less reasonable. The hypothesis is that we are conflating what's rational with what's reasonable: we misleadingly intuit that *there's less reason* to defer to Ying or Xiao when in fact that *it's less rational* to defer to Ying or Xiao.

Note what this objector does and does not need to say. She does need to say that there's no reason for disapproving on the basis of Wei's word. But she doesn't need to add that there's more reason *against* deferring to Ying or Xiao. (Shooting the target with the AR-15 and sniper rifle could be equally unreasonable, even though the former option is less rational than the latter.) So the second objection does not inherit the same problems as the first one.

But it does encounter other problems. First, we're owed an explanation for why it is more irrational—more incoherent—to defer in Ying or Xiao's case than in Wei's case. Additionally, we're owed an explanation for why it is less irrational—more coherent—for you to defer in Zhao's case than in Wei's case. Otherwise this objection will only cover a fraction of the relevant data. Explaining all of this will be somewhat tricky for the objector because in

⁷ The distinction here is familiar (e.g., see Kolody 2005), but the relations are often somewhat confusingly labeled 'structural rationality' and 'substantive rationality'.

each case you for the exact same response: you disapprove of the relevant action. Presumably your other attitudes don't change either. So why would your disapproval cohere any better or worse with your other attitudes? By contrast, my view offers a very straightforward explanation of our intuitions about these cases. The changes in the testimonial evidence vary the strength of the reasons for these attitudes. These changes in the evidence need not affect how well your response coheres with your other attitudes.

Second, any explanation that the objector can offer will appeal to contingent features of the case, so it won't be a sufficiently robust explanation. To illustrate, consider the comparison between Wei's case and Ying's. Say you have a background disposition to morally disapprove of actions iff you have some evidence that they're immoral. This disposition coheres well with your disapproving of an action solely based on hearing Wei say he "saw a man do something wrong". But the disposition does not cohere well with your disapproving of an action solely based on hearing that Ying say he "saw a man do something". So far, so good. But we can imagine someone with different background attitudes. Imagine a person who believes—contrary to all reason—that every action is wrong. For this person, disapproving of an action based on Wei's testimony or Ying's would be equally rational. But it is still highly intuitive that this person has less reason to disapprove on the basis of Ying's testimony than Wei's. More generally, once we locate a source of attitudinal incoherence we can factor it in to the set-up of the case and still preserve the intuitive verdict that there's less reason for one response to normative testimony than another, even though both responses cohere equally well with relevant agents' other attitudes. So an appeal to incoherence does not robustly explain the intuitive data.

Third, the objection generates implausible predictions. Consider Skeptic. Skeptic believes that if a reliable informant tells you that p , that's never a good basis for you to believe p . (Let's hold fixed that this view is false and contrary to reason: for at least some domains, we have good reasons to defer to testimony, and we have good reason to believe that this is so. If we didn't hold this fixed there'd be no puzzle of deference to *normative* testimony.)

Like many proponents of revisionary philosophical views, Skeptic might find it hard to live up to her scruples. She might hear testimony from a reliable informant that p and find herself believing p . She's especially likely to do so with expert testimony. Now compare Skeptic's response to an expert to my response to someone like Ying. It's *less rational* for Skeptic to defer to an expert than for me to defer to Ying (as you can tell from reading this paper, I think it's kosher to disapprove on the basis of normative testimony). The view that we're conflating what's reasonable with what's rational predicts that we'll find it intuitive that it's *less reasonable* for Skeptic to defer to experts than I have to defer to Ying. But this isn't intuitive at all. The expert is far more reliable than Ying. So intuitively, the Skeptic has more reason to defer to the expert than I have to defer to Ying. If that's right, it's not plausible that we're conflating rationality and reasonableness here.

Perhaps neither objection is conclusively debunked. But that's not my goal. I'm throwing down the gauntlet for those who resist my simpler diagnosis of the cases. If you think we don't have *any* reason to approve or disapprove on the basis of normative testimony, you have a lot of explaining to do.

VI—From Approval to Belief and Action

Say you grant that I'm right about NO REASON and NO JUSTIFICATION. You might think this is a narrow victory since these claims only concern *affective* responses to normative testimony like admiration and approval. What about *believing* or *acting* on the basis of aesthetic or moral testimony?

As I mentioned earlier, my subsidiary aim is to show that if approving on the basis of normative testimony is not defective, we should be optimistic that normative testimony can also give us strong reasons to believe and act. Why? Because the argumentative strategy from before generalizes. For any thesis like NO REASON and NO JUSTIFICATION, we should test them using the right comparison cases, and once we do so we elicit probative intuitions in favor of broadly optimistic views about the power of normative testimony.

A. Epistemic Reasons and Knowledge

Let's start with pessimistic views about reasons for belief. There are, once again, stronger and weaker versions of such views, along these lines:

- NO EPISTEMIC REASON: Normative testimony that p cannot give us any epistemic reason to believe p .
- NO KNOWLEDGE: Normative testimony cannot transmit knowledge that p .

We could further distinguish between such varieties of pessimism. Many, for example, allow for exceptions in a narrow range of rare cases;⁸ some endorse pessimism about aesthetics but not about morality.⁹ I'll discuss the prospects of pessimistic theses about both domains and set aside exceptional cases, since the distinction between weaker and stronger theses about believing based on normative testimony is what matters most here.

Consider NO EPISTEMIC REASON first. It's easy to see how the foregoing sets us up to challenge this thesis. We start by setting up the comparison cases:

Amare's case: Amare tells you that doxing is an immoral online practice. Knowing that Amare is highly reliable, you come to believe that doxing is an immoral online practice.

Barak's case: Barak tells you that doxing is an online practice. Knowing that Barak is highly reliable, you come to believe that doxing is an immoral online practice.

Camilla's case: Camilla tells you that doxing is an immoral online practice. Knowing that Camilla is fairly reliable, you come to believe that doxing is an immoral online practice.

⁸ In the aesthetics literature, the exceptions are meant to include lost artworks, past performances, and common knowledge (see Robson 2012: 5, and references therein). We could also treat deference to experts in emergencies as an exception to pessimistic views about moral testimony (see, e.g., Mogenson 2015: 3). Note that my argument applies even when no such exceptional circumstance obtains, so it is a genuine threat to pessimism.

⁹ See, e.g., Pettit (1983, 2008).

Daquan's case: Daquan tells you that doxing is an immoral online practice. Knowing that Daquan is extremely reliable, you come to believe that doxing is an immoral online practice.

The other cases are identical to Amare's case except that: Barak's case strips away the moral content from the testimony; Camilla's case decreases the reliability of the informant; and Daquan's case increases the reliability of the informant. As before, I find it highly intuitive that these changes make a difference. You have less reason to form the belief that doxing is immoral in Barak or Camilla's case, and more reason to form that belief in Daquan's case. This is, I think, a strong argument against NO EPISTEMIC REASON.

You may think that here I'm attacking a strawman here: perhaps proponents of pessimistic views have only ever been sympathetic to NO KNOWLEDGE. They have no stake in whether NO EPISTEMIC REASON is true.

Two responses. First, many offer views that are ambiguous between NO EPISTEMIC REASON and NO KNOWLEDGE. Wollheim, for instance, defined the 'Acquaintance Principle' as follows: 'judgements of aesthetic value, unlike judgements of moral knowledge, must be based on first-hand experience of their objects and are not, except within very narrow limits, transmissible from one person to another' (1980: 233). We don't literally transmit judgments when we give people testimony. We transmit some form of normative support for those judgments. Wollheim's language suggests the principle precludes the transmission of knowledge (given the comparison to moral knowledge), but it isn't clear that it allows the transmission of reasons. A similar ambiguity is present in a recent discussion from Hanson:

By and large, independently of whether they are evaluative realists or anti-realists, most people accept that evaluative judgments of an object should be responsive to certain nonevaluative features of that object. Without being aware of certain details of what Betty did, you're not in a position to judge that what Betty did was wrong. Similarly, without any awareness of what Ryoanji looks like, you're

not in a position to judge that it is beautiful. Call this *the minimal epistemic requirement* (MER). (Hanson 2018: 55, footnote omitted).¹⁰

If your judgment that doxing is immoral is not based on the nonevaluative features of doxing, you've violated MER. But what does that entail? If you're 'not in a position to judge', do you lack *any* epistemic reason for that judgment, or does the judgment merely fall shy of knowledge? Is the thesis that 'most people accept' NO EPISTEMIC REASON or NO KNOWLEDGE?

Second, and more substantively, denying NO EPISTEMIC REASON puts pressure on a commitment to NO KNOWLEDGE. This is not, as far as I can see, an issue that gets taken up in the literature. Consider Groll and Decker. They note in passing that 'while testimony can give epistemic reasons for moral belief, it can never give the sort (or level) of justification that is required for propositional *moral knowledge*' (2014: 56, emphasis theirs). This is a rare case where philosophers explicitly deny NO EPISTEMIC REASON while committing themselves to NO KNOWLEDGE (in this case, for moral testimony). But they never explain why this package of views is plausible.

And we have good reasons to think that it isn't a plausible package, which track the points made earlier in relation to approving based on normative testimony. For one, NO EPISTEMIC REASON is a far more principled position than NO KNOWLEDGE. If testimony can transmit *some* degree of epistemic justification, why can't it transmit the level of justification required for propositional moral knowledge? If our evaluative judgments must be responsive to the non-evaluative features of their objects, why is there *anything* to be said, epistemically, in favor of testimonial beliefs that flagrantly violate this requirement? In other words, we're owed a

¹⁰ The omitted footnote is important, as there Hanson notes that 'a possible exception to this might be judgments formed on the basis of testimony, but this is highly contentious'. Later, in discussions of the Acquaintance Principle, she seems to rely on a version of MER that does not include any exception for testimonial aesthetic knowledge (2018: 62).

theoretical rationale for the view that deference to testimony can play the same epistemic role as acquaintance, but can only ever play it a little bit.¹¹

For another, the comparison between cases like Amare's and Daquan's, where we increase the reliability of the informant, raise problems. So will cases in which we beef up the content of Daquan's testimony: perhaps Daquan tells you that doxing is vile, reprehensible, and so on. If you have some epistemic reason to believe that doxing is immoral in Amare's case, you have much stronger reasons in Daquan's. So why can't you get to reasons that are strong enough to suffice for moral knowledge?

The same points apply to believing based on aesthetic testimony. If the Oracle of Delphi tells someone that sixteenth Century choral compositions are sublime, rapturous, transcendent, and so on, intuitively you have far more claim to aesthetic *knowledge* (in this case, that such compositions are beautiful) than one gets from ordinary cases of aesthetic acquaintance.

If this is right, then we should be skeptical of both the weaker and the stronger forms of pessimism, which is a threat to views that are so widely entrenched in aesthetics that Meskin recently described them as a 'Neo-Kantian orthodoxy' (2004: 72). But there's also a final, more direct implication for pessimism. As Robson (2012) notes, 'pessimism is more often assumed than argued for'. Whiting (2016) argues for the view that we cannot gain aesthetic knowledge from aesthetic testimony via arguing that aesthetic testimony cannot 'rationalize' affective attitudes like approval. If aesthetic testimony *can* 'rationalize' affective attitudes like approval, proponents of pessimism have ever fewer arguments for their view.

¹¹ Of course, knowledge may require more than true belief that is sufficiently supported by epistemic reasons, but it's not like your beliefs in cases like Daquan's are always Gettiered. So we still need a rationale for *why* they can't ever amount to knowledge.

B. Moral Reasons for Action

The view that aesthetic testimony cannot transmit aesthetic knowledge is more common than its moral counterpart. By contrast, the view that moral testimony cannot give you moral reasons for action is far more common than its aesthetic counterpart. But once again, we need to start by disambiguating stronger and weaker versions of this commitment.

NO MORAL REASON:	Testimony that φ ing is morally right cannot give you any moral reason to φ .
NO PRAISE:	Testimony that φ ing is morally right cannot give you sufficient moral reason to make it praiseworthy for you to φ .

To illustrate the difference, imagine I tell you “ φ ing is morally right”. Knowing that I am a reliable and virtuous person, you φ . The first view says that there was no moral reason for you to do so—where moral reasons are the ‘the right kind’ of reasons to make your act morally praiseworthy. The second says your testimony only gave you a *weak* moral reason to φ .¹²

A few points are worth noting here. First, many metaethicists have explicitly endorsed the stronger view, NO MORAL REASON. This is in part because many metaethicists are committed to the view that moral reasons are ‘right-makers’: the moral reasons to φ are the facts in virtue of which φ ing morally right. Your testimony does not make φ ing morally right. Nor does it give me access to any other facts that make φ ing morally right. So it does not give me any moral reason to φ *at all*. As Markovits characterizes this common view: ‘The problem with moral deference [...] is that morally deferential agents can’t act for right-making reasons’ (2012: 304). And this is a problem because the moral reasons *are* the right-making reasons.

¹² Note the connection between this view and the ‘minimal epistemic requirement’ that Hanson said ‘most people accept’: if ‘evaluative judgments of an object should be responsive to certain nonevaluative features of that object’, presumably they must be responsive to the features *in virtue of* which that object has its evaluative properties.

The two most prominent proponents of this view are Alison Hills and Sarah McGrath. Here's a key passage where McGrath endorses it:

[M]oral deference does not put one in a position to do the right thing for the right reasons even in those cases in which it delivers genuine moral knowledge. If the child refrains from lying on a given occasion because he knows that lying is wrong but has no grasp on why it is, then his refraining from lying on that occasion *is not based on the reasons that there are not to lie* (2011: 133, emphasis added).

Similarly, in a range of cases where an agent φ s on the basis of testimony that φ ing was the right thing to do, Hills says: 'She is responding to testimony, not to moral reasons' (2009: 111, 116). Moral testimony does not give us any moral reasons to act, as those reasons are 'the features of actions that determine whether those actions are right or not' (2009: 112).

Second, the commitment to NO MORAL REASON is meant to be plausible independently of a commitment to NO KNOWLEDGE. As McGrath said in the quote above, when we act on the basis of moral testimony we don't act for moral reasons even when we act on 'genuine moral knowledge'. Similarly, Nickels (2001: 259) holds that 'all that moral testimony provides is a correct moral belief without understanding', and in particular 'it does not provide a basis for morally good action.' (It's not clear here whether lacking 'a basis for morally good action' means lacking *any* moral reason whatsoever.)

Third, not everyone who endorses the view that moral reasons are right-makers also endorses NO MORAL REASON or NO PRAISE. Here we must distinguish two views: (a) that testimony that φ ing is morally right *gives* you any moral reason to φ ; and (b) that testimony that φ ing is morally right *is* a moral reason for you to φ . Many deny (b), but not (a). For example:

[T]he fact that your reliable friend told you that you have overriding moral reason to φ is evidence that you ought to φ . But, we think, this fact isn't a reason for you to φ in the relevant practical sense—rather it's an epistemic reason for you to believe that you have such a practical reason (McNaughton and Rawling 2011: 101).

McKeever and Ridge deny that the testimony *is* a reason for you to φ ‘in the relevant practical sense’; they don’t deny that you *have* such a reason. The same holds for Broome (2008), McBride (2013), and Brunero (2018). Granted, denying (b) while accepting (a) generates what McKeever and Ridge call ‘the Puzzle of Normative Testimony’ (2012: 110-111).¹³ But the important point for our purposes is that Hills and McGrath deny (a) *and* (b).

With these points in mind, we can now consider the plausibility of NO MORAL REASON and NO PRAISE. To do so, we need to consider cases where the relevant response to testimony involves actions, such as the following:

Pablo’s case: A spy infiltrates a villain’s lab. Her highly reliable informant, Pablo, left her a message: “There’s a big red button in the next room. It’ll be hard for you push it, but morally you *must* do so.”

Say that against all odds, the spy manages to push the big red button. She saves the day. I already find it intuitive that she had at least some moral reason to do so; indeed, I find it intuitive that she is morally praiseworthy, even when we stipulate that she was acting solely on the basis of Pablo’s testimony (supposing, as we have throughout, that the testimony was true). But we can bolster these intuitions by considering variants on the case:

Quentin’s case: A spy infiltrates a villain’s lab. Her highly reliable informant, Quentin, left her a message: “There’s a big red button in the next room. It’ll be hard for you push it.”

¹³ That puzzle is, according to McKeever and Ridge, that ‘each of the these ‘four theses has considerable prima facie plausibility, but together they entail a contradiction’:

- (1) When an agent A performs an action Φ in circumstances C, and his so Φ -ing is entirely on the basis of the fact that his virtuous and reliable friend told him that he ought to Φ in C, A thereby Φ -s in C for good reason.
- (2) If someone Φ -s in C entirely on the basis of some fact F, F is thereby A’s only reason for Φ -ing in C.
- (3) The fact that a virtuous and reliable friend has told one that one ought to Φ in C is not itself a good reason to Φ in C—rather, the good reason(s) is (are) the practical reasons on which the virtuous and reliable friend’s testimony is based.
- (4) If someone’s only reason for Φ -ing in C is not a good reason to Φ in C, then A does not Φ in C for good reason.

Rae's case: A spy infiltrates a villain's lab. Her fairly reliable informant, Rae, left her a message: "There's a big red button in the next room. It'll be hard for you push it, but morally you *must* do so."

Sami's case: A spy infiltrates a villain's lab. Her extremely reliable informant, Sami, left her a message: "There's a big red button in the next room. It'll be hard for you push it, but morally you *must* do so."

In each case, we can hold fixed that the spy pushes the button, which was the right thing to do. Intuitively, she had less moral reason to do so when the moral content of the testimony was stripped away (as in Quentin's case) or when the informant was less reliable (as in Rae's case); and she had more moral reason to do so when the informant was more reliable (as in Sami's case). This suggests that moral testimony must give us *some* moral reasons to act, and can sometimes give us *strong* moral reasons, meriting praise.

This is a novel argument against Hills and McGrath's views. And it has a broader metaethical upshot. Their view, recall, was that deferential agents do not act for 'moral reasons' because they do not act for 'right-making reasons' and moral reasons are right-making reasons. If deferential agents do act for moral reasons then *either* deferential agents act for right-making reasons,¹⁴ *or* moral reasons need not be right-making reasons after all.¹⁵

Of course, the conclusion that moral testimony can give us strong moral reasons to act is consistent with the view acting on those reasons falls shy of some moral ideal. Perhaps it does not give us *maximal* moral worth. (Some of McGrath's remarks suggest sympathy for such a view.¹⁶) But even if this is right, as Sliwa (2010: 193) notes, it 'does not show that the obstacle

¹⁴ This is Markovits' view: 'it is *subjective* reasons that are relevant to the assessment of an action's (or an agent's) *moral worth*', and when moral testimony gives us moral knowledge, that 'testimony *is the reason* we ought to perform that act'. So 'the deferential agent may [...] act for right-making reasons after all' (2012: 306-307, emphasis hers).

¹⁵ This view is held by, e.g., Johnson King (forthcoming) among others.

¹⁶ If someone *φs* because she has testimonial knowledge that it is the right thing to do, 'this detracts from the status of her *action*', but she could 'deserve praise' even though she 'falls short of an important ideal associated with moral agency: that of doing the right thing for the reasons that make it right' (McGrath 2011: 132, 135, emphasis hers).

to moral worth is moral testimony', rather than 'the agent's moral ignorance'. Acting with knowledge of right-making reasons may be better, without that showing anything *defective* about acting on moral testimony.

VII—Conclusion

Normative testimony gives us *some* reason, and sometimes *strong* reasons, for affective attitudes like approval. And if this is right, we should be optimistic that aesthetic and moral testimony can give us reasons to believe and act, and these reasons can be sufficient for *knowledge* and *moral worth*.

However, I want to close by noting that if normative testimony gives us reasons for affective attitudes like approval, this makes it even harder to explain the 'fishiness' of believing or acting based on normative testimony. To see why, consider a prominent, promising explanation of the 'fishiness' of deference to normative testimony from Enoch (2014) and Fletcher (2016).

Enoch claims that 'to explain the fishiness of moral deference' we should appeal to 'plausible connections between the making of moral judgments and certain emotional responses' (2014: 26). Say you get testimony that a war is morally wrong. Enoch says it would be fishy to come to believe the war is wrong and not form certain emotions: there is something atypical or odd—'cold', 'too intellectual'—about judging that the war is morally wrong without corresponding emotional responses like disapproval. But what if you judged that the war is wrong *and* formed those emotions? Enoch says that to 'respond emotionally to the war's wrongness *de dicto* ... is sufficiently atypical to be odd' (29-30). This is because '[t]ypically, the emotional responses that are closely connected with moral judgments are responses to the morally wrong (say) *de re*, and not merely *de dicto*, that is, under the description "morally wrong"' (28). So either way, your deference is fishy. This explanation generalizes to cases of aesthetic testimony:

[I]f having formed the comparative aesthetic judgment by deferring to an expert, I then proceed to emphatically assert how much greater Mozart is than Bach, [...] and so on, this would be odd at the very

least. And the oddity may be explained by the fact that the relevant emotional responses—typically, to the beautiful *de re*, not merely *de dicto*—are absent here (2014: 30).

Fletcher’s view differs from Enoch’s in important ways, but the underlying explanation of the fishiness of deference to normative testimony is similar. Moral ‘sentiments are at least difficult to form on the basis of pure, direct, testimony’, and given plausible connections between making moral judgments and forming certain emotional responses, this explains the fishiness of deferential moral beliefs in a way that’s friendly to realism:

[I]n cases of pure, direct moral deference] the receiver is told that someone performed some wrong action but is given no further details. In such a case, unless the receiver enriches the content of the testimony, they will have insufficient information to form the appropriate sentiments towards the agent or their action. This is because moral sentiments are responses that we have to the properties of the relevant action or agent (etc.). Without proper acquaintance with them the attitudes are very unlikely to arise even if we know that they would, were we so acquainted. [So] in cases of such deference the problem stems from the receiver coming to form the judgment that negative moral sentiments are fitting whilst probably lacking such attitudes (2016: 65).

Fletcher holds that this explanation generalizes to other problematic cases of normative deference, like aesthetic and prudential deference (2016: 68).

I used to find this explanation satisfying. But if normative testimony gives us reasons for emotions like approval, the explanation is at best incomplete. To see why, let’s walk through it step by step, holding fixed that p is a normative proposition (the war is wrong; Mozart is better than Bach):

- (1) It is odd to believe p in response to such testimony.
- (2) But testimony that p provides good epistemic reason to believe p .
- (3) It is odd to believe p without (e.g.) approving of x .
- (4) It is odd to (e.g.) approve of x in response to testimony that p .

There's an initial tension between (1) and (2): *Why* it is fishy for you to respond to reasons to believe p by believing p ? The solution is meant to come from (3) and (4): it is odd to form the beliefs without certain emotions, and odd to form those emotions on the basis of normative testimony, so it is odd to form normative beliefs on the basis of normative testimony. But now note that if my main arguments are right, we should also accept:

(5) Testimony that p provides good reason to (e.g.) approve of x .

But if we accept this claim, the same tension we saw between (1) and (2) reemerges, only this time between (4) and (5). If we need to explain why it is fishy for you to respond to reasons to believe p by believing p , we also need an explanation for why it is fishy for you to respond to reasons to approve of x by approving of x . More generally, if normative testimony gives you reasons for certain attitudes, *why* is it fishy to form those attitudes in response to normative testimony? The view provides no answer.

This is why the puzzle posed by normative testimony looks even harder to solve once we recognize that normative testimony gives us good reasons to believe, act, *and* form affective attitudes like admiration and approval.

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