

OUTLINES FOR A METATHEORY OF EXPERTISE FROM THE VERITISTIC APPROACH AND ITS MAIN PROBLEMS

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Abstract: *Whenever we think of expertise we think of someone who is either in a better or worse epistemic position than us regarding certain topic. Complications arise when we try to explain what makes up expertise: is epistemic asymmetry sufficient? How to characterize such asymmetry? Is it a matter of having more true beliefs (than)? These traits and others have already been claimed as defining features of expertise in many theories that attempt to answer the question "What is expertise?". It is my understanding that the enterprise of providing a unified conception of expertise needs some clarification about what we should be looking for when trying to answer the question of what expertise is. I aim to examine Alvin Goldman's conception of expertise and its most salient problems, and then extrapolate from those to a few general concerns that could be applied to competing theories of expertise. I end with a few provisional and expandable recommendations on how to approach the problem of the concept of expertise from a metatheoretical point of view.²*

Keywords: *epistemology of expertise, veritism, Alvin Goldman*

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²This paper won't be concerned with matters regarding epistemic dependence, or assigning epistemic authority, though I may refer to the contributions from those discussions whenever they are elusive of any particular conception of expertise. There is, however, a necessary operational distinction to be considered henceforth: I take *epistemic authority* to refer roughly to authoritative testimony in a given field or topic and the issues regarding a layperson's reception of such authoritative testimony, while I take *expertise* in a domain or topic not to involve necessarily testimonial knowledge, but solely epistemic acumen.

1. Introduction

A philosophy teacher presents to her students a given proposition [p]. She proceeds to probe her students whether they think it is the case that [p]. The majority of students voice their arguments for [p]. The teacher, then, offers a range of plausible reasons for [~p]. The students, seeing reason in the teacher's argument for [~p], are convinced now that [~p]. This time, the teacher offers a range of equally plausible reasons for [p]. Having presented equally valid arguments for [p] and [~p], the students are now rendered in a state of cognitive dissonance: what to believe? Unbeknownst to the students is the fact that the teacher herself does not know that [p], that she is aware that she does not know that [p], and that the resulting cognitive state was caused by design. However, if the teacher and the students are now on equal footing regarding their belief that [p] and neither knows that [p], how can she still be epistemically superior to the students? This whole scenario is a deliberate oversimplification of a fairly common practice in philosophy classes that can be construed as a pedagogical exercise on withholding judgment, and several potential solutions to the problem can be devised from the current debate surrounding the concept of *expertise*.

Experts are generally thought of as people who have a greater understanding of a certain topic or domain, or who are more greatly skilled in certain activity. However, it has been argued that, at least concerning certain domains, expertise does not exist. We can identify two distinct positions in the attempts at conceptualizing expertise: one that takes expertise as an inherently social phenomenon, and another that takes expertise to be an individual cognitive state of affairs. Moreover, there are also differences in method: some philosophers have defined and challenged conceptions of expertise on doxastic terms, and others have taken an approach to intellectual traits and dispositions. One final issue to be considered is whether (a) it is possible to provide a concept of expertise that is a representation of "the fact" of expertise or (b) the concept of expertise is inherently normative and subject to philosophical design. I expect that, by briefly examining how these elements fit Alvin Goldman's conception of expertise, as well as some of the relevant recent objections to Goldman's work, I will shed some light onto implied common methodological concerns that could ground a metatheory of expertise.

2. The veritistic approach to expertise

A range of methods have been deployed by philosophers when trying to capture what common sense characterizes as expertise: some of which focus on the *know-how* involved in expert practice, that is, the inherent characteristics of expert performance, while others are set to investigate expertise in terms of the propositional content and dispositions of experts, that is, *know-that*. Among those, there is a chief doxastic-centered conception mainly led by Alvin Goldman that has been widely debated. By doxastic-centered conceptions of expertise I mean those accounts of expertise that revolve around the quality of the putative expert's beliefs – as opposed to accounts that emphasize intellectual traits, for instance. According to Goldman's definition, “an expert... in domain D is someone who possesses an extensive fund of knowledge (true belief) and a set of skills or methods for apt and successful deployment of this knowledge to new questions in the domain” (Goldman, 2001, p. 92).³

Though Goldman gives his conception of expertise a more refined treatment in a more recent work – to include error avoidance, for instance –, the possession of more true beliefs (than laypeople) remains the central property of expertise. Now, if we are to understand that moral judgments, as well as aesthetic judgments, for example, cannot be objectively true since they are dependent on value theory, Goldman's conception of expertise empties the domains of morality and aesthetics of experts. A go-to approach to challenge Goldman's conception of expertise has been to evoke instances of widespread peer disagreement among putative experts. The argument can be spelled out as follows:

P1: An expert is an epistemic agent who possesses more true beliefs in domain D (relative to laypeople).

P2: An expert in D is epistemically symmetrical to another expert in D.⁴

³As mentioned, two elements are necessary conditions for Goldman's conception of expertise: (a) true beliefs and (b) the relevant skills to apply this knowledge within the relevant domain in order to broaden one's fund of true beliefs: that is to say Goldman's conception of expertise has both *know-that* and *know-how* elements. An expert must not only possess a significant amount of true beliefs, but must also be capable of manipulating resources in a skillful manner as to acquire more true beliefs within their domain of expertise. Since the focus of the present investigation is element (a), I will not be exploring (b) in greater detail. For more on the latter and how it interacts with (a) in Goldman's conception of expertise, see Goldman (2001).

⁴A reasonable objection can be made to P2: experts can be epistemically symmetrical in a given domain D regarding the number of true beliefs in D, but the content of their respective beliefs can differ. For instance, an expert A can have a true belief regarding [p], but no belief regarding [q] in D, while an expert B can have a symmetrically opposing set of beliefs in D: no belief regarding [p] and a true belief regarding [q]. For the discussion that follows, in P2 I consider solely the ideal scenario of experts' sets of true beliefs in D being symmetrical both numerically and regarding the content of their beliefs, that is, experts believing [p] when it is the case that [p] and so on.

- P3: Widespread peer disagreement among experts in D means there are no true beliefs in D.⁵
C: There can be no experts in D.

Now, objections to the existence of expertise on the basis of widespread peer disagreement, at least the localized existence of expertise, can be tracked down to objections to P1. It would seem that whenever knowledge conceived as the possession of true beliefs (in the way it is advanced by Goldman) is not possible (or too controversial to be likely), expertise cannot exist for it implies knowledge.⁶ However, claiming there is no expertise in the moral domain, for instance, would imply there is no epistemic asymmetry between putative experts and laypeople whatsoever, which is obviously false.⁷ The matter of defining expertise is ultimately about characterizing such asymmetry: Goldman characterizes it in terms of having more true beliefs and, being that the problematic property, it should be revised, rather than dismiss expertise altogether, for the epistemic asymmetry exists. But, it is usually expected from experts that they *know* more than laypeople in their respective domains. How would one characterize expertise without reference to (having more) true beliefs?

Before addressing that question, let's examine what Goldman is attempting with his conception of expertise. When Goldman claims experts have more true beliefs than laypeople in a given domain, is he stating a *fact* about experts or an *expectation*? In other words, is he offering a description of expertise or stating an epistemic desideratum? This matter concerns *the nature of the project of expertise*. Goldman (2018) begins by addressing the claim that expertise can only be understood as a social phenomenon. Many authors, he argues, affirm that a conception of expertise that is not characterized by the social role of experts cannot be achieved. Thus, under this approach, an expert is such only in virtue of the public acknowledgment of their privileged epistemic position

⁵One might argue that it does not follow from widespread peer disagreement that there are no true beliefs in D, but rather that assessing the truth of a given disputed proposition is, up to that moment, difficult. That is indeed one of the flaws of this argument. However, I am not committed to P3 in particular or to this argument in general. I present here what I take to be the general form of an argument that has been featured as an example of the "existential threat" to expertise posed by widespread peer disagreement in a couple of works – such as McGrath (2008), and Lackey (2018) –, so to advance the discussion of epistemic symmetry.

⁶Sarah McGrath (2008) tackles the subject of widespread peer disagreement and the threat to expertise in the domain of morality, and she offers an intellectual-traits-centered account of expertise which I will not be addressing here. As a side note on the subject, authors who take widespread peer disagreement to be evidence of the nonexistence of expertise should be challenged to explain how widespread peer agreement would ground the existence of expertise, for it seems that such an argument identifies consensus with truth, which is problematic, to say the least.

⁷It is worth noting that epistemic asymmetry is a feature of epistemic life regardless of the phenomenon of expertise. I do not claim that epistemic asymmetry is sufficient for expertise, only that it must be necessary.

and is sought after for that same reason. Hence, properties such as reputation and social function would be defining features of this socially grounded characterization of expertise.⁸

Goldman reminds us that (1) reputation can be ill-earned, that is, one can enjoy the social recognition of expert without possessing the cognitive capacities of genuine expertise in the domain at hand, and (2) one who does possess those cognitive capacities may not be socially regarded as an expert (for either they have never publicly exemplified their expertise or they have exemplified it poorly, like a teacher who is perfectly knowledgeable of her subject matter but lacks competence in teaching skills).⁹ Though Goldman admits there must be a *relational* property to the concept of expertise, he rejects the view that it is *exclusively* social:

[...] expertise is a comparative state of affairs. It's a matter of how the candidate expert compares to others in terms of truth-possession and error avoidance (or similar notions formulated in terms of credences rather than categorical beliefs). It also presents expertise as an objective matter rather than a reputational matter. Under this definition, it is possible for S to be an expert even if he or she hides this expertise from friends, acquaintances, and the public at large. (Goldman, 2018, p. 2).

Since a reputational approach to expertise is prone to delivering false positives at large, such a conception fails to capture what expertise *is*. Christian Quast (2016), for instance, tells us that expertise is “a defeasible notion [...] which default ascription can be retracted given some kind of relevant defeat” (Quast, 2016, p. 6), and Carlo Martini (2020) is positive that a unified concept of expertise is not possible “[...] because the knowledge and abilities of experts change with the community in which they are embedded” (Martini, 2020, p. 121).

Now, taking ascriptions of expertise and how faulty they are to be somehow indicative of the *nature* of expertise is at the very least dubious. Also, taking the diversity of domain-specific *instances* of expertise to be counter-evidence to a unified concept of expertise is unwarranted and begs the question as to what is that under which such a diversity of abilities and knowledge is grouped? Simply put, neither error in social ascriptions of expertise nor the many different expressions of expertise are reasonable evidence against a *unified* concept of expertise. Social approaches to expertise tend to take a theory of the *social value* of expertise to be the same thing as a theory of what expertise is. While the former would explain what an expert scientist means for science, for instance, it wouldn't explain what scientific expertise is.

⁸For more on the socially-grounded accounts of expertise, see Watson (2021), chapter 6; and Watson (2023).

⁹The problem of identifying experts is a subject on its own, often overlooked in the literature. Nonetheless, I will not be addressing this issue directly in this investigation. For some insight into the current state of discussion on the topic, see Scholz (2009).

Thus, Goldman's project of expertise could be normative in two ways: in matters of method, an adequate concept of expertise must be engineered with regards to what a hypothetical expert *knows* and how that knowledge sets them apart among non-expert epistemic agents – in other words, there must be methodological demands to qualify expertise's inherent epistemic asymmetry; in matters of theory, the content of such demands must be *truth-linked* beliefs. Goldman's understanding of expertise as an objective phenomenon has merit in attempting to avoid, with relative success, both relativistic and skeptical notions of expertise: an expert is neither a matter of whom the members of a community judge them to be nor it is evident that expertise does not exist for it is not sufficiently clear what expertise is. However, as pointed out earlier, characterizing expertise in terms of possessing more true beliefs has its problems.

3. Main challenges to the veritistic approach

There are objections to Goldman's *veritistic approach* in particular and to the doxastic-centered accounts of expertise in general that are worth looking into. Jamie Carlin Watson (2021), for instance, claims that designing a general account of expertise is feasible, but he rejects any doxastic-centered account of expertise. Moreover, he opposes to arguments that we ought to be satisfied with only "operational accounts", that is, conceptions of expertise whose criteria are determined within a given domain or according to the particular demands of a given problem. Under the operational accounts thesis, there would be expert oil painters, expert paleontologists, expert accountants, and so forth, but no instance of expertise would have a shared, universal property or set of properties that would make up expertise itself.

Thus, while Watson does not believe in grounding expertise on what one *knows*, he is no relativist either: though having more true beliefs can be paramount in certain domains – cognition or information domains –, it would beg the question of how to ground expertise (in doxastic terms) in domains of skillful action; there are commonalities to *all* instances of expertise, but they are not best defined in terms of the quality of the expert's beliefs. Watson's understanding is that the veritistic approach is insufficient for explaining expertise.

Oliver Scholz (2009) claims that by dismissing *how* beliefs are acquired, the veritistic approach allows false positives: for instance, a layperson could build an equally great – or even greater – fund of true beliefs pertaining to a given domain D as an experienced practitioner with

proper training in D solely by reading the literature on D or sourcing from a wide range of different “experts” in D whose funds of beliefs, individually, would fall short from the “expert” layperson's.

The case would be even more dramatic when considering the *fewer false beliefs* addition to P1 as reformulated by Goldman, for, as rightly pointed out by David Coady (2012), a layperson could have never even been aware of D and, hence, have no beliefs in D whatsoever and she would still outweigh an expert based on their having *any* false beliefs in D – which would be virtually any expert, since forming false beliefs – and revising them – comes with the package in intellectual endeavors: if the overall amount of beliefs of an expert in D is greater than a layperson's, then there should very likely be false beliefs among them.¹⁰

However, Goldman's reformulated P1 (R-P1) is not a matter of either/or: an expert is someone who has more true beliefs in domain D than a layperson *and* fewer false beliefs. That means an expert X cannot be epistemically symmetrical to a layperson either solely by both of them having the same amount of true beliefs *or* the same amount of false beliefs in D; X also cannot be epistemically outweighed by a layperson either solely based on X's having fewer true beliefs *or* solely based on X's having more false beliefs in D: it must be *both*. But, is it plausible that a (presumed) layperson could *at least* have as many true beliefs *and* as many false beliefs in D as an expert in D in the first place? Let's postpone this question for the moment.

Now, there is a different way of reading Goldman's R-P1: an expert X is someone who has more true beliefs in domain D than a layperson and *fewer false beliefs relative to X's true beliefs*. That is a more unconventional understanding of R-P1 and Watson seems to think as much too. However, there are objections to the veritistic approach based on that reading of R-P1 as well. Consider, for instance, domains in which *objective* true beliefs are not attainable, such as the moral domain (*mD*): X would have no true beliefs in *mD*, and it is perfectly possible for X to simultaneously have false beliefs in *mD* for *any* beliefs that X might have in *mD* would be objectively false by default. Hence, by having any beliefs whatsoever in *mD*, X would have a greater amount of false beliefs than true beliefs in *mD*.

Coady's solution to the risk of creating epistemic symmetry between experts and laypeople seems to be dismissing the quality of the expert's beliefs altogether: expertise, he claims, implies

¹⁰Additionally, a gullible or an overall epistemically reckless person who just believes any proposition that is presented to them would eventually amass a great deal of false beliefs, but also a greater deal of true beliefs than an epistemically prudent person who only believes a proposition after careful examination for the careful examiner would hesitate to form even beliefs that happen to be true: the raw balance of true beliefs would make the gullible person an expert rather than the trained examiner, which is a false positive. For a more detailed discussion of *The Argument from Gullibility* and *The Argument from Sloppiness*, see Le Morvan (2013).

possessing a greater fund of *information* in *D* than non-experts. That means that *X*'s expertise is grounded on how much better informed *X* is than non-experts in matters pertaining to *D* regardless of *X*'s doxastic attitude towards the content in that fund of information. It would also challenge the common assumption that expertise is defined in terms of knowledge – at least in the strict sense of knowledge as true belief.

Thus, under Coady's proposal, *X* could, for example, be perfectly informed on the debates about the nature of personal identity by reading extensively the philosophical literature on the matter and that would be sufficient to place *X* within the boundaries of expertise in the philosophy of personal identity regardless of *X*'s favoring either of them in *X*'s doxastic framework. But what if *X* does favor one of them? What if *X* believes, say, David Hume's skeptical take on the existence of personal identity over John Locke's memory-grounded account of personal identity? Is that not relevant at all? Circling back to the moral domain, what if *X* has an extensive fund of qualified information in *mD* and still forms positive and necessarily false beliefs in *mD*?

It seems that it would be rational to withhold judgment when the amount of information possessed is not sufficient to form a belief, and it would be just as much when, regardless of the amount of information possessed, the nature of the matter itself does not allow for true beliefs. Possessing an extensive fund of information cannot be sufficient for P1 if "experts" can freely form an equally extensive fund of false beliefs about the content of that information. The issue of the quality of a putative expert's beliefs remains pressing for expertise.

Another common concern about the veritistic approach is the issue of whether the epistemic asymmetry that should characterize expertise is either synchronic or diachronic or both. To put it differently, some authors have argued that, due to the historical nature of scientific progress, an account of expertise that emphasizes the possession of true beliefs as a necessary condition would mischaracterize historical figures that have played central roles in the development of human knowledge and thus have been long regarded as experts in their respective fields. Moreover, the epistemic agents we regard as experts today may not be experts if we come to discover, as happened to their predecessors, that the beliefs they take as true are not so much. Such is the concern, for instance, of Watson (2021):

[...] We might, for example, say that Newton was an expert in his own time even though he would not be one today. But veritism will not allow this qualification; it requires reliable access to true propositions in a domain. But if the current state of physics is correct, Newton did not have reliably true beliefs in physics in his own time because he did not have true beliefs in physics. The force of this argument comes from the fact that the current state of physics – and any domain, for that matter – is just as likely to undergo the same eclipse as classical physical theories. If physicists two hundred years from now turn out to be

right, and this implies that physicists today are wrong, then current physicists are not experts according to [reliable access to true beliefs], either. (Watson, 2021, p. 63).¹¹

This concern is puzzling for it seems that no matter whether expertise's epistemic asymmetry is taken as synchronic or diachronic, historical "experts" would fall short of expertise in terms of true beliefs. First, if we take it to be diachronic, then the historical progress in science is enough to show that not only past "experts" had a significantly greater deal of false beliefs – even fundamental beliefs – in their respective domains compared to current putative experts, but even compared to the judgment of a layperson of our time: in other words, it is often the case that even facts we all take for granted defeat past "experts" beliefs. We are, except for rare exceptions of epistemically anomalous groups, in a better doxastic position than previous knowers in general. Past "experts" would be epistemically inferior to current putative experts and laypeople alike under both readings of P1: (1) by having more false beliefs and fewer true beliefs compared to the current state of knowledge, and (2) by having a greater proportion of false beliefs compared to their true beliefs than the current state of knowledge.

Now, if we take expertise to be synchronic, there are two dramatic results for the epistemic asymmetry if past "experts" had a fundamentally defective fund of beliefs in their fields: (1) past "experts" and the laypeople of their time are epistemically symmetrical if the latter's fund of beliefs is also false; (2) past laypeople are epistemically superior to their contemporary "experts" when they do not have any beliefs on the matter whatsoever (circling back to Coady's objection to the *fewer false beliefs* condition).

Under the first reading of R-P1, past "experts" should have overall more true beliefs and fewer false beliefs than their contemporary laypeople, so if the former's fundamental beliefs in their respective domains turned out to be false, that would tip the doxastic balance against their epistemic advantage over their contemporaries, and even more so if such contemporaries are not even aware of the topics of the domain. The same could be said about the second reading of R-P1, which suggests that the expert should have fewer false beliefs compared to their true beliefs and that this positive ratio of beliefs is what grounds expertise: it comes down to the fact that past "experts"

¹¹It has been proposed that, as an argument for the veritistic approach, the possession of true beliefs ought to be replaced by the possession of reliable access to true beliefs (RA). That renders P1 more lenient and allows for expertise even in the face of false beliefs. However, Watson's objection to RA is straightforward: true beliefs can be evidence of RA, not the other way around. To put it differently, if one has true beliefs in D, one likely has reliable access to true beliefs in D, but it would be absurd to conclude that by having false beliefs in D one has reliable access to true beliefs in D. It would be hard to say that past "experts" had reliable access to true beliefs if their beliefs turned out to be false. The RA condition seems rather a red herring, and for that reason, I will not be exploring it further. For more on the RA condition, see Watson (2021), chapter 2.

would have more false beliefs than true beliefs, and that negative ratio would tip the balance against expertise again.¹²

The reason for these results for the problem of historical expertise is that the truth value of a belief is objective, not subject to the prevailing state of beliefs in a given context, thus those beliefs are not true now and were not true then. But that is an assessment according to *our prevailing state of beliefs*. There is, of course, the likelihood that beliefs that we take for granted now would, as history tells, come to be falsified.¹³ Goldman acknowledged the problem of historical expertise under the veritistic approach; in his words:

One liability is that we shall often be unable to *tell* (with confidence) whether someone is or isn't an expert until decades, or even centuries, after he is dead—because we may not be able to tell how many of the propositions he believed are true or false. I would respond as follows. This might indeed be a common problem; but such is life. That we are challenged when trying to *know* the truth is hardly news. But this doesn't suggest that there are no facts of the matter. Facts may simply be elusive; especially when they pertain to non-observable matters. But in itself this does not undercut the appropriateness of veritistic criteria, especially when viewed from a "God's eye" perspective. (Goldman, 2018, p. 6).

It is clear that, for Goldman, whether whom we regard as experts turn out to be not so much in the future based on the quality of their beliefs is a well-known challenge, but not one that impedes the advancement of veritism. Now, Goldman does not address the problem of historical expertise directly, but what we could infer is that if their beliefs did not have a successful correspondence to facts, they were just not experts: we only thought they were. Nevertheless, the concern for "saving" historical expertise seems inconsequential either way.

Goldman (2018) makes a – necessary – distinction between the problem of *defining expertise* and the problem of *identifying experts*: the former attempts to answer the question "What are experts?", whereas the latter addresses the issue of "How can we, as laypeople concerning domain D, safely tell who the most competent epistemic agents in D are?". These two problems are sometimes treated indistinctly in the literature and are other times taken as necessarily implying one another, which can be itself a source of confusion.¹⁴ When it is objected that the veritistic approach

¹²If my assessment of the problem of historical expertise under veritism appears rushed and convoluted, it's because it is my understanding that the topic would render an investigation of its own. For that reason, it may be lacking in details and proper qualification in the present work. Nonetheless, it should not hinder the development of the general point of the problem.

¹³And if that comes to be the case, what would it mean for the past beliefs we ruled as false? Will it demand a complete historical revision? Would it be possible that at least some past "experts" were right in matters that we now believe they weren't and we are? I set these concerns of "epistemic implosion" aside for now for they are more fundamental for epistemology. Suffice it to say that the problem of historical expertise under the veritistic approach has ramifications that go beyond the concerns about expertise.

¹⁴Goldman addresses the problem of identifying experts in particular in a dedicated section in Goldman (2018), though the matter first appeared in Goldman (2001) in which he addresses an additional third problem regarding expertise, epistemic deference, or "what to do with expert testimony once we have safely identified experts?". The problem of

does not accommodate current putative experts, for instance, one must first acknowledge that this objection is grounded on some current heuristics for identifying experts, that is, the veritistic approach does not accommodate *who we now identify as experts*. But those are different problems. Perhaps our mechanisms for identifying experts are not sufficiently effective; perhaps they cannot be and we ought to accept there will always be a gap between the concept of expertise and our identifying experts; perhaps it could even be the case that a “layperson” could fit the doxastic requirements of expertise and the error is in our misevaluation of such an agent as “layperson” (resuming a problem I posed earlier). Whatever the case, it is misguided to dismiss the veritistic approach based on it not fitting whom we regard as experts now.

Putting aside the problem of identifying experts, if Goldman is not offering us a concept that captures who we regard as experts now, what is his concept of expertise?

4. From the veritistic approach toward a metatheory of expertise

To answer the question above, we must first consider the general aspects of Goldman's project, and, hopefully, that will shine some light on what I mean by a *metatheory of expertise*. Goldman's veritistic approach is supposed to lead to a unified theory of expertise, but it is also partial: he claims to be focusing exclusively on cognitive expertise, as opposed to performative expertise. Whether *know-how* can be successfully reduced to *know-that* is a different epistemological enterprise entirely, but Goldman does not claim as much: his choice is methodological. On top of that, he also claims that it is not his intention to have the last word on what expertise entails, but solely to offer objective criteria for expertise, so the veritistic approach remains an open project. Thus, the veritistic approach is an attempt to explain the cognitive portion of expertise. As Goldman puts it, whether we take to examine performative expertise, there must be some distinctive cognitive states that underlie superior performance.

The veritistic approach is often read as being insufficient or misguided for explaining the cognitive competence of current experts and, as I argued before, that reading would beg the question about how we are currently identifying experts. That the veritistic approach is too demanding and creates a range of unavoidable and unsolvable mismatches with putative experts is

epistemic deference, or epistemic authority, is also widely debated, especially by Jennifer Lackey, Linda Zagzebsky, Harvey Siegel, and John Hardwig. Since my focus is on the *concept* of expertise, I will not be addressing those. The distinction between the concept of expertise and the problem of identifying experts also appears salient in Scholz (2009), as mentioned before.

true. But maybe it is supposed to be so. It is not the case that the veritistic approach aims to capture the quality of the beliefs of our current – or past – putative experts. As Goldman says, the veritistic approach offers objective *criteria* for expertise: it might be an *ideal* conception of expertise. Its value would lie in the normative power to steer putative expertise toward desirable epistemic goals; be those achievable or not, it would not undermine the pragmatic value of an ideal conception of expertise. Also, the veritistic approach could have metatheoretical value for it can function as a benchmark to assess whether alternative theories of expertise are too permissive about false beliefs. Thus, even if a unified concept of expertise that captures all instances of expertise proves unfeasible, it is still possible to design a normative concept of expertise that is instrumental for expertise itself, i.e., an ideal concept of expertise.

To summarize, Goldman's veritistic approach addresses the cognitive dimension of expertise, and it does so by defining expertise based on the quality of one's beliefs. That project is, overall, a response to the risk of relativism that emerges from some socially-based conceptions of expertise: it attempts to provide an objective account of expertise. When read as a description of expertise, many problems arise for the veritistic approach. To quote a few: it threatens the possibility of expertise in domains that are not grounded on true beliefs; it allows epistemic symmetry between putative experts and laypeople when the proportion of true beliefs is the same for both groups; it creates false positives by overlooking how those beliefs are acquired; it makes impossible to tell who the current experts are for there are no means of objectively measuring their funds of beliefs; and so on.

Thus, as an objective *description* of the cognitive states implied in expertise, the veritistic approach fails in virtue of its commitment to a truth-linked condition. It seems that any conception of expertise that aims to be descriptive in nature ought to be grounded in something other than knowledge – at least in the strict sense of true belief. When read as an attempt at a normative conception of expertise, the veritistic approach points us to the need for tools to objectively assess the degree of success of descriptive theories of expertise.

It follows that one of the first metatheoretical concerns for assessing and advancing any conception of expertise should be (1) whether such a concept is descriptive or normative. I have hinted above at what a normative conception of expertise would entail, but if one is yet committed to the project of providing a unified concept that is a *description* of expertise, one should also have to explain how one's ascription of expertise is grounded on such a sufficiently efficacious heuristics for identifying experts as to grant an objective conception of expertise. Thus, a second metatheoretical concern for any theory of expertise should be (2) a clear distinction between the

problem of *the concept of expertise* and the problem of *identifying experts*. And even if one is to provide a normative conception of expertise, that is, a conception of expertise that is not, in principle, committed to representing the current putative experts, that does not mean those epistemic agents are unreliable or untrustworthy: again, that is a different problem. Above all, one should have the understanding that defining expertise is primarily (3) qualifying the epistemic asymmetry that should characterize the epistemically advantageous position expertise is supposed to occupy, which can seem like a trivial notion to the investigations about expertise but that social accounts of expertise nevertheless fail to grasp, leading us to relativism and a myriad of false positives.

5. Conclusion

This examination is partial at best. It is an attempt at speculating about the possibility of a metatheory of expertise by extrapolating from the considerations of the veritistic approach and its challengers. Much needs to be expanded on this project by examining competing unified theories of expertise, such as the cognitive systems approach or the performance approach. Starting from the veritistic approach was, mostly, a choice of convenience: it is the most discussed attempt at conceptualizing expertise, so even if I failed by not addressing other approaches, I believe I would have failed even worse if I had given the veritistic approach equal treatment. My starting assumption was that the concerns posed by the critics of the veritistic approach and Goldman's concerns about an objective definition of expertise were, put together, revealing, and could be generalized into a metatheory of expertise. If the matter of defining what expertise is appears to be hopeless, it may be that there are too many answers to a question we have yet to learn how to formulate properly. A metatheory could help us identify what we should be looking for in a theory of expertise. And if this project turns out to be unsuccessful, well, "such is life" (Goldman, 2018, p. 6).

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