

# *Popularizing Moral Philosophy by Acting as a Moral Expert*



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## ***Abstract***

This paper is concerned with the ethics of popularizing moral philosophy. In particular, it addresses the question of whether ethicists engaged in public debates should restrict themselves to acting as impartial informants or moderators rather than advocates of their own moral opinions. I dismiss the idea that being an impartial servant to moral debates is the default or even the only defensible way to publicly exercise ethical expertise and thus, to popularize moral philosophy. Using a case example from the public debate about the human use of nonhuman animals, I highlight the benefits and risks of endorsing an advocate's and a teacher's or moderator's role, respectively. I argue for a general requirement of judgment transparency which entails that the publicly engaged philosopher ought to be clear and consistent about the type of role she takes on, her publicly advanced opinions generally ought to be her professional ones and that she ought to flag her private opinions. I finally show that, despite general concerns about conflicts of interest, exercising ethical expertise and engaging in advocacy, i.e., acting as if one were a moral expert, are not incompatible modes of public engagement for the moral philosopher.<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:** *moral expertise, ethical expertise, popularization, advocacy, conflicts of interest, value neutrality*

## ***1 Introduction***

This paper is concerned with the ethics of popularizing philosophy, and especially, the ethics of popularizing moral philosophy (although much of the argument applies equally to the popularization of political philosophy as well as research in other disciplines concerned with normative or normatively charged matters). The relationship between academic philosophy and the public has recently become the topic of, at times

passionate, interjections calling for more public engagement by philosophers, not only in the face of the alleged dawn of “post-truth politics,” but also given the pressure on academic philosophy to demonstrate its relevance in order to secure funding and ultimately continued institutional existence [cf., e.g., 2, 10, 19]. Despite these calls for intervention, one cannot say that philosophers are absent from public life – or at least from mass media. We find them commenting on social and political trends as well as events of the day on TV, in newspapers and on other public occasions. Instances of this include, for example, Michael Sandel’s comment on inequality and nationalism at the annual meeting of the *World Economic Forum* in Davos [29], Jeff McMahan and Peter Singer’s opinion piece in the *New York Times* on the first sentencing of Anna Stubblefield, a philosophy professor charged with sexual assault of a man with mental disabilities [17], Martha Nussbaum discussing the role of fear and anger in political action in an interview with *Time* [21], or Slavoj Žižek frequently publishing on multiple issues in various mass media outlets.

Generally it seems that public interest in philosophy is directed more toward issues dealt with in practical philosophy than those addressed in theoretical philosophy. Philosophers might have been superseded by physicists and other natural scientists as experts on the nature of the outside world, and more recently by psychologists and cognitive scientists as experts on the human mind – but when it comes to questions of what to do, of right and wrong, moral obligation and moral excellence, they are still recognized as likely candidates for fulfilling an expert’s role. At the same time, when philosophers do present argued positions on public matters, they risk provoking outrage instead of sparking debate, being recited in misleadingly abbreviated ways, and generally facing backlash [cf. 12] – risks that have often materialized in the public life of the probably most prominent and outspoken contemporary moral philosopher, Peter Singer, who has publicly lamented these repercussions of public engagement [24], and whose statements on issues of public interest are frequently met with indignation to this day.

Singer is a believer in what we might call the *moral expertise hypothesis*: the idea that ethicists – qua being experts in moral philosophy – are likely to be moral experts, where being a moral expert requires that one’s “moral judgments are correct with high probability and for the right reasons.” [11, p.153] Singer has proclaimed that if the moral expertise hypothesis were false, “one might wonder whether moral philosophy was worthwhile.” [23, p.117]

Obviously, belief in the moral expertise hypothesis can motivate the moral philosopher to public engagement and, in particular, to view herself justified (or even obligated) to advance her own positions on moral matters publicly. However, this understanding of the moral philosopher's role on the public stage is often met with reservations, and it conflicts with a different picture that is frequently adduced in the academic debate about ethical and moral expertise: the picture of the moral philosopher not as a self-proclaimed moral expert who expresses opinions (professional opinions though they may be), but rather as the skilled moderator or teacher who provides much more impartial services to the debate [cf., e.g., 6, 9]. The idea that experts in moral philosophy entering the public stage should confine themselves to aiding the discourse rather than participating in it in a partisan way may be based on disbelief in the moral expertise hypothesis or a rejection of the very notion of moral expertise [e.g., 4], but could also be advanced based on the idea that the exercise of moral expertise by ethicists would be in conflict with fundamental democratic values [cf. 1]. Yet another motivation for opposing partisan public engagement would be the intention to safeguard research, not the democratic parameters of public debate. This perspective is grounded in the observation that activism may be a source of bias [26] – but it faces objections pointing to, *inter alia*, the costs to scholars of abstaining from public engagement and the sources of bias found in research environments themselves [14].

One might also think that only the performance of the supposedly more modest task of a philosophically skilled moderator or teacher – not the promotion of opinions – properly counts as “popularizing philosophy.” The proliferation of skills and knowledge presumably fits the concept of popularization better than the proliferation of value judgments – which might be better labeled “activism” or “advocacy.” In this paper, I object to this view and show that it is a desideratum for a philosopher's public advancement of her opinions, that it is an instance of popularizing philosophy. I also argue that this way of fulfilling the ethical expert's role in the public sphere is at least as socially desirable as the performance of a moderator's or teacher's task. I oppose the idea of the latter being the default role of the publicly engaged philosopher, deviation from which requires special justification. The matters discussed in this paper concern the relationship between academia and activism as well as problems with conflicts of interest obtaining in both spheres more generally, but we will restrict our focus to these issues' intersection with the problem of the proper popularization of philosophy. The question

the paper centers on is about a moral philosopher's range of legitimate options for publicly acting as an expert – her options for popularizing philosophy.

The paper is structured as follows: I will begin by addressing the difference and possible interrelation between ethical and moral expertise (section 2). I then show that it is a requirement on the public issuing of a normative judgment by a philosopher that it be an exercise in *popularizing philosophy* – i.e., that the judgment be a professional one and that in uttering it, the philosopher make accessible a piece of philosophy (section 3). Using a case example relating to the public debate about the use of nonhuman-animal products, I discuss some of the benefits and risks of philosophers' engagement in public debate in general and of alternative conceptions of the philosopher's public role in particular (section 4). Based on this discussion, the requirement of value neutrality is considered, but rejected as a reason to favor a disinterested expert's role for the publically appearing moral philosopher (section 5), and a defense of a more partisan public engagement is offered (section 6). In the conclusion (section 7), I point to further questions that a comprehensive *ethics of popularizing philosophy* needs to address.

## 2 *Expertise, ethical and moral*

Ethicists are first and foremost experts in the field of ethics. *Ethical expertise* or *expertise in moral philosophy* is a matter of knowledge of the branches, topics, concepts, historical developments, consensuses and ongoing debates, outlets, methods (including mastery of argumentative skills), and professional standards of ethics. Due to the current level of specialization in ethics, ethical expertise is always fragmented and context-specific [cf. 3, p.239]. Knowledge of the topics of ethical debates should be specified as including familiarity with “the relevant facts,” which in some cases will include knowledge of “the factual moral codes in different societies.” [11, p.154] This characterization requires the ethical expert to have empirical knowledge both of the factual circumstances of moral problems and knowledge of the kind descriptive ethics produces. When it is emphasized that ethicists qua ethicists can be expected to possess argumentative competence [23, p.117], the focus of the characterization of expertise is shifted from *knowing that* to *knowing how* and philosophy is viewed as a practice. To cover this perspective, the account given above mentions the mastery of skills. On this view, expertise in (moral) philosophy should not be viewed solely in terms of factual knowl-

edge but in terms of being trained in or used to engaging in the practice that is philosophy.

*Moral expertise*, in contrast, is, roughly, proficiency in making moral judgments. Following Bernward Gesang's account of moral expertise, I, too, want to "call people moral experts if their moral judgments are correct with high probability and for the right reasons." [11, p.153] For the purposes of this paper, the notion of moral experts as able moral judges is helpful because we are interested here in ethicists insofar as they issue first-order moral judgments. I am assuming here that the public issuing of such judgments is an expression of a claim to moral expertise in the sense just introduced. It is, at least, a charitable interpretation of the motivation of a moral philosopher who takes to a public forum to proclaim a moral judgment that she does so because she takes herself to be likely right for the right reasons and *therefore* believes that her opinion ought to be heard. So, while there might be reasons to construe moral expertise in broader terms in other contexts (specifically, for including competences that we have subsumed under ethical expertise here), the notion of moral expertise that ties it to correct moral judgments will be more useful here.

As ethical expertise always is, moral expertise can be issue-specific. Whereas Gesang's account is rather global, rendering those people moral experts who tend to be morally right across the board, we can, in contrast, assume that it makes sense to speak of moral expertise *with regard to a certain issue*, when individuals are prone to make correct moral judgments with respect to certain subject matters [cf. 5, p.188]. It also makes sense to allow that these moral judgments are not even "all-in verdicts" of rightness and wrongness, but that they could concern even more limited matters such as a factor's moral relevance or the "nature and significance of different values." [15, p.222]

Note that the account is silent on the procedure by which moral experts arrive at their moral judgments. The relevant skills and characteristics of moral experts may be capacities, resources and dispositions like empathy, life experience, or a caring attitude toward others, i.e., skills and dispositions that do not obviously require knowledge of ethics and might be conceptually separable from the skills that mastery of philosophy as a practice requires (even though they might themselves be of help for practicing moral philosophy). Also note that moral experts *need not be moral exemplars*: irrespective of their ability to make adequate moral judgments, they might lack the disposition to act in accordance with them (because they might suffer from weakness of will, lack of in-

tegrity, a weak desire to act morally right or the like). Either way, the possibility that moral expertise could be based in something other than expertise in ethics, speaks against the idea that ethicists *in particular* are most likely to be moral experts.

The distinction between moral expertise and expertise in moral philosophy allows us to distinguish between different expectations of philosophers asked to exercise one of the two kinds of competences. What you can expect from a moral philosopher *qua moral expert* is *normative guidance*: you ask a moral expert to find or propose solutions to moral problems. What you can expect from a moral philosopher *qua expert in moral philosophy* may be, on the one hand, *information*, broadly construed: information about the field of philosophical inquiry she is an expert in – the questions it deals with, the positions that are advanced in it and the arguments with which they are advanced, the historical dimension of normative debates, metaethical presuppositions of moral discourse, and so forth. One may also seek training from an ethical expert in the practice in which she is professionally engaged, i.e., information on how to philosophize. On the other hand, you might expect an expert in this practice to exercise her competences and *guide the discourse*, i.e., be engaged in the discourse, not in the role of a participant, but rather that of a moderator. We will return to this rough distinction of expectations and according roles in section 4.

It should be noted that the expectation to profit from expertise in ethics can overlap with the expectation of normative guidance – if the latter is (what we might call) an *enlightened expectation*, i.e., if the ethicist and supposed moral expert is expected to back up her verdict by making the ethical reasoning behind it explicit.

When philosophers are approached by the media or are seeking a public forum in one way or another, it is not always clear what they are expected to deliver and what they take themselves to be providing: expertise in moral (or political or social) philosophy, the insights of a moral expert or just an interesting, controversial, entertaining opinion. Probably, all of the above and more, on different occasions, depending on the context and the particular person being asked. Therefore, we need to specify what kinds of situations the following considerations are meant to be about. To characterize the situations the argument is supposed to apply to we might first say that they are to be envisioned as situations in which a) a philosopher is approached or given the opportunity to speak publicly on normative matters at least in part because of her ethical expertise, and b) she has room to interpret her ethical expert's role either

in terms of that of a moral expert or that of a more disinterested informant or moderator. Whenever there are specific legitimate and agreed upon expectations regarding outspokenness or restraint with respect to normative opinions in the specific situation in which the philosopher is given the opportunity to speak, specific obligations might hold. For instance, I do not claim that the arguments advanced here apply equally to special cases of exercising ethical expertise in semi-public settings, for instance to participation in ethics committees or to business or political consultancy. The cases I am concerned with are cases in which no such special considerations apply, and that might – by virtue of the absence of any such special considerations – be considered “standard situations of public engagement.” Types of situations that might come to mind are typical interview settings on occasions of current events or lingering social problems, but possibly also on occasion of an ethical expert’s publication<sup>2</sup>. However, it must be noted that the evaluation of a standard situation is concerned with parameters that influence the audience’s epistemic position vis-à-vis the expert and how this position is influenced by factors such as the selection of the philosophical expert herself, the performance of any moderator who might be present, the maturity of the audience, the availability of facts on the matter the supposed expert is supposed to elaborate on, etc. The relevant evaluation is thus more comprehensive and normative than the identification of a situation as an “interview setting,” and it is focused on matters concerning the epistemic setup and the role of the public performance of the moral philosopher in creating an overall fair and fact-based discourse. At this point, it shall only be indicated that a situation is to be considered a standard one in this sense if concerns with regard to the audience’s susceptibility to a biased performance are not aggravated beyond a certain threshold compared to everyday discourse among adult citizens. The elaboration of this vague threshold would be a matter for another occasion. What should transpire at this point is the idea that there is a general background understanding of standard public discourse which is not considered epistemically dangerous through and through and to which public performances of experts in moral philosophy might well belong. It can be considered a part of the task of the ethical expert to discern whether standard or special circumstances obtain (this might include assessing the performance of an organizer, a moderator, the capacities of the audience and other such factors). The performance of the philosopher in relevant standard situations is to be public in that it is in principle accessible to anyone – even though possibly not entirely

freely (e.g., newspaper articles) – and it is furthermore stipulated to be avoidable in the sense that the audience must be capable of evading the philosopher’s utterances (in contrast to, e.g., appearances in classrooms).

Probably the most important reason to hold that philosophers should avoid taking on the role of the moral expert by default in such settings is disbelief in the moral expertise hypothesis, whereas belief in the hypothesis is a pro tanto reason to recommend that philosophers take on this role. One may legitimately wonder whether there is really anything to recommend philosophers as authorities on first-order moral questions (about what and what not to do), i.e., whether their testimony should be assigned special weight, whether a moral philosopher’s judgment gives others “good reason to endorse the content of [that] judgment.” [1, p.121]

According to Peter Singer, for instance, it is precisely their above-mentioned competences – in combination with the fact that they devote considerable time to engaging with moral questions relying on these competences – that suggest ethicists as moral experts [23, p.117]. Thinking about moral problems is their day job, their share of workload taken on in accordance with a “division of intellectual labor.” [16, p.133]

Given a readiness to tackle normative issues, and to look at the relevant facts, it would be surprising if moral philosophers were not, in general, better suited to arrive at the right, or soundly based, moral conclusions than non-philosophers. Indeed, if this were not the case, one might wonder whether moral philosophy was worthwhile. [23, p.117]

The reference to “*relevant*” facts is the one that most naturally invites an objection: granted all their theoretical skills, are philosophers really more likely to identify the *relevant* facts? Determining that a fact is morally relevant is the basic move from description to normative consideration – are philosophers any more likely to make this move in the right places?<sup>3</sup>

Gesang agrees with Singer’s conclusion, but makes an explicit appeal to a coherentist approach to justification to argue for the likely moral expertise of moral philosophers. To him, it is because of their knowledge of ethical theories that ethicists may reach “complete reflective equilibrium” so that their judgments are “better founded and will be right with high probability.” [11, p.158] Gesang’s view renders philosophers “semi-experts,” because of the other ingredients to the reflective equilibrium: intuitions. Moral philosophers’ might be better placed with respect to the theoretical considerations that go into moral evaluations, but their intuitions might be just as wrong as anyone else’s.

According to Singer, Gesang, and others, expertise in moral philosophy still makes it more likely that one will be (closer to being) right on moral matters than the average person and thus, a moral expert. To see that there is something to this claim, just consider what is given up when it is denied. Dismissing *any* special claim of the moral philosopher to being a likely moral expert implies giving up on the idea that careful moral deliberation increases the chances for correct decisions. This view is highly revisionist regarding the presuppositions of our actual practice of moral discourse.

One reason to accept such revisionism could be acknowledgment of the ever-growing body of evidence for various cognitive biases affecting human reasoning and thus, moral deliberation. One may oppose the moral expertise hypothesis on the grounds that the moral judge's task is so difficult and prone to the effects of bias overall and that some biases work precisely on the extensive study of the factual circumstances of moral problems (confirmation bias – a preference for evidence supporting or a readiness to interpret evidence as supporting one's prior judgment – seems to be especially relevant here) that “a readiness to tackle normative issues, and to look at the relevant facts” alone does not seem to ameliorate the basic difficulties of flawed reasoning.

Obviously, one's stance on the question of moral expertise qua ethical expertise bears on the evaluation of the question of how philosophers should act when being called upon for ethical expertise. If one believes that ethical experts' engagement with moral philosophy will make it more likely that their judgments are “better founded and will be right with high probability,” one will be ready to assign their public appearance in the role of the moral expert special value. If one rejects the moral expertise hypothesis, one assumes that an ethical expert's utterance of a moral judgment is not any more likely to be correct than anyone else's and probably that there is no added value in having a moral philosopher give a moral opinion compared to anyone else. In case we take this latter point of view, even if only for the sake of the argument, i.e., if we reject the idea that the fact that it is the ethicist who utters moral judgments gives them extra credibility (that is, if we are, *on reflection*, not prepared to *treat* her as a moral expert), we can sensibly ask the question whether she may still conduct herself as if she were a moral expert when popularizing moral philosophy. What we are concerned with here are the following questions: Is there a comparably greater risk of harm in *acting as a moral expert* when *expertise in ethics* is what is being sought, vis-à-vis taking a supposedly more neutral kind of role (*given* that we do

not rely on the moral expertise hypothesis to assess the ethicists' public performance)? How does acting as a moral expert relate to the task of "popularizing philosophy"?

### 3 *Exercising moral expertise ought to be popularization*

By 'popularizing' I mean roughly 'making accessible to a wider audience'. There are different ways to 'act as an expert in ethics', not all of which involve the popularization of moral philosophy: first and foremost, the ethicist within her core professional role – going about the everyday business of an academic moral philosopher – acts as an expert in ethics, but obviously, this is not engaging in popularization. From here on, I will mean by 'acting as an expert in moral philosophy' acting in such a role within a public setting or for a public audience. When the moral philosopher acts as an expert toward the public, she can be said to be engaged in popularizing philosophy in some way.

'Acting as a moral expert' is supposed to refer to public actions that may count as the proclamation or advancement of first-order moral judgments. From the first-person view of the ethical expert, it may be tempting to act as a moral expert in this sense because from her view it may be *inevitable* (and it would seem *reasonable* for her) to *regard herself* as a moral expert on certain issues along the lines of the core of the definition above: the moral philosopher who has come to endorse a specific moral view based on the exercise of her philosophical skills might – thereby – take her own moral judgments to be *correct with high probability and for the right reasons*. In fact, we should even *expect* an ethical expert who argues for any conclusion with respect to some moral issue to take this view on her own status as an expert. Giving up on this expectation would mean accepting that a moral philosopher might argue for some moral view while believing that it might just as well be wrong and was not supported by any better reasons than anyone else's differing view. So, in this sense, belief in (one's own) moral expertise is a requirement of rational ethical debate. We can accept this without claiming that others should treat the ethical expert as a moral expert, and we can still address the question of whether we should welcome it if the self-proclaimed moral expert acts as such in the public realm.

If an ethical expert views herself as a moral expert on some issue, she could, accordingly, view an opportunity to take on the role of an expert in moral philosophy as an opportunity to popularize her own – reasoned – point of view, seeking to promote it – thus 'acting as [if she were] a

moral expert'. Acting as a moral expert means not feeling obligated to withhold judgment for the sake of more impartial services to the debate, but using a public forum to advance one's own opinion. It does not, however, imply acting in a demagogic fashion, i.e., deceitful for the sake of persuasion. Furthermore, whether someone will *successfully act as an expert* will, strictly speaking, depend on whether their audience accepts them as one – whether others defer to the would-be moral expert. So what we are concerned with here might actually have to be classified as *attempts to act as a moral expert*. For the sake of simplicity, I will just speak of acting as a moral expert.

It may seem as if only acting as an expert in moral philosophy (and not acting as a moral expert) qualifies as popularizing philosophy or at least that acting as an expert in moral philosophy is the default way of popularizing philosophy for the ethicist. When the moral philosopher shares knowledge of philosophical methods, arguments and questions, she unquestionably seems to be in this business, whereas the promotion of an opinion seems rather to fall under the notion of *advocacy* or *activism*. For instance, when political philosopher Will Kymlicka spoke to various German newspapers after the publication of the German translation of Zoopolis [8], proclaiming the relevance of the Categorical Imperative to our interactions with animals [13], promoting rats' right to life [20] and citizenship for nonhuman animals [22], his public performances might have struck some as primarily those of an advocate of animal rights rather than as instances of popularizing philosophy. On the contrary, I propose that the idea of a dichotomy between advocacy and popularization of philosophy is mistaken. Whenever philosophers advocate certain causes *as philosophers*, we should (normatively) *expect* them to also be in the business of popularizing philosophy.

The reasoning behind this claim starts with the observation that when philosophers are approached or themselves publicly pronounce their views *as philosophers*, it is philosophers *qua philosophers* issuing judgments. This fact is a constitutive part of the discourse situation, or the philosophers' speech acts. On the part of the philosopher, there may be a claim to whatever authority comes with being educated as a philosopher and being a member of the discipline. That there is such a claim may also just be a supposition on the part of the audience. Importantly, just as *approaching* a philosopher *qua philosopher* out of an enlightened interest in normative guidance comes with an expectation of a judgment based on philosophical reasoning, when the philosopher *offers* her views *as a philosopher*, there is also an insinuation that the view proclaimed is

not just some unspecified individual's view, but a *philosopher's* view – thus, a *philosophically underpinned* view. There is a reasonable expectation then that a moral philosopher who is given the opportunity to speak publicly as a philosopher and who (given room to choose to use this opportunity either in the role of the disinterested teacher of philosophy or for advancing her own position) chooses to promote her own view will rely on the knowledge and skills she possesses qua expert in moral philosophy. This pragmatic expectation seems to be legitimate and worthy of being respected. Making a philosopher's profession a salient feature of the situation in which she issues judgments indicates, by default, professional knowledge and competences. In special situations it may indicate something else, for instance, special interests. When the topic at issue is public funding for humanities departments, mentioning a philosopher's profession may indicate a conflict of interest – but this is not the case for the standard situations of public engagement by philosophers envisioned here.

To say that it is legitimate to expect that a moral philosopher's publicly advanced opinion be grounded in her ethical expertise is to say that this expectation gives rise to a requirement. The requirement flowing from this legitimate expectation, given basic considerations of a fair discourse, is this: the ethicist who acts as a *moral expert* ought to rely on her *relevant ethical expertise* in doing so. The qualification 'relevant' is important here, because expertise is context-specific. The desideratum implies that the philosopher ought to speak *as a philosopher* only on matters in which she possesses professional expertise.

The public promotion of a (professional) opinion by a moral philosopher that fulfills this desideratum is therefore to be recognized as an instance of popularizing philosophy, viz., the popularization of the moral philosopher's own philosophizing about the matter at hand. If this is the case, it is a quality attribute of the philosophers' public engagement. Therefore, it turns out to be reasonable to expect statements that philosophers make as philosophers to be exercises in the popularization of a piece of philosophy – however idiosyncratic – namely, the individual philosopher's philosophically substantiated position.

Failure to fulfill this *desideratum of self-confinement to areas of expertise* renders public statements by philosophers problematic. Publicly issuing judgments as a philosopher when this is not at the same time an instance of popularizing (a piece of) philosophy betrays expectations of underlying ethical expertise and thereby frustrates what we have called an enlightened expectation of normative guidance. The *desideratum of*

*self-confinement to areas of expertise* holds both in standard situations and beyond. It concerns the expert role of the philosopher, in whichever context she takes on this role and utters value judgments as well.

#### 4 *The ethicist's expert role: teacher, moderator, or advocate?*

Given that they rely on their best professional judgment, i.e., that they fulfill the desideratum just outlined, should moral philosophers choose to act as moral experts – or is there still a default duty to be an impartial informant about philosophy instead? Should philosophers usually abide by the motto: “Teach, don’t preach!”?

Prima facie, it seems obvious that philosophers are not forbidden to speak their minds – as a matter of fact, they are allowed to and often do promote their own views. Again, whether there is any risk or harm in choosing to promote one’s own view rather than to give more comprehensive information about the field or provide the services of a moderator will be highly dependent on the context that provides the opportunity to speak publicly; the expectations of the audience and their possibility to identify the offered opinion as the individual philosopher’s and so forth. Still, given that a restriction of the role of the ethical expert is often advertised for other, more specific contexts in which ethical expertise is sought, especially ethics committees, this might also be a viable recommendation for the moral philosopher on any public stage. With regard to work on ethics committees, some hold that “bioethicists are at best geographers of facts, values, and sociopolitical influences,” [6, p.133] and those who allow for moral philosophers to take a reasoned stand might still require them to provide alternative views as well, i.e., exercise ethical expertise in other ways in addition to acting as a moral expert: Gesang, for instance, despite defending the idea of moral expertise qua ethical expertise, recommends this combination for work on ethics committees: “ethicists should not only promote their own normative judgments, but should also show the other participants of the discourse what consequences their own views have. Ethicists should provide others with a kind of land map.” [11, p.159]

As far as performance in more public settings is concerned, we have mentioned different types of roles an ethical expert can take on. The distinction of paradigmatic roles needs to be made more explicit at this point:

First, there is the role of the *teacher*, i.e., the ethicist who, drawing on her factual knowledge, is only in the business of informing a target

group about her field of expertise and the relevant facts at hand. The teacher may also be concerned with training an addressee in the practice that is philosophy.

Second, there is the *moderator*, i.e., the ethicist who uses her argumentative skills to guide discourse, ensuring that it proceeds in a productive manner, so that fallacies and error are avoided and all parties and opinions are heard. The moderator's performance still profits from the ethicist's capability to *also* act as a *teacher* within the same setting, i.e., from her ability to also provide information about the relevant facts associated with the moral problem, the state of academic debate and so forth.

Finally, there is the *advocate*, i.e., the ethicist who takes a stand and advances her own professional opinion on a normative issue.

The deepest difference runs between the impartial teacher and the moderator on the one hand and the advocate on the other, i.e., between those who interpret the ethicist's role as being that of some kind of servant to the discourse and those who view it as being that of a discussant. Again, regarding oneself as a moral expert in the above specified sense provides a pro tanto reason for acting as an advocate in public debate.

The distinction drawn here is a conceptual one and in practice it might be desirable that different roles are exercised simultaneously. Consequently, alternative distinctions of different roles for the ethical expert can be offered that cut across the categories proposed here. For instance, one could distinguish different degrees of approximation of a final moral verdict in a deliberation process in which the ethical expert is actively involved: van Es [27] proposes a classification system of this kind for different types of "ethical consultants" in business ethics. He distinguishes an "ethical engineer," who actively takes and advocates a personal stand (in the terms proposed here: the 'advocate' or the ethicist in the role of the 'moral expert'), from the "ethical playwright," who not only guides the recognition of the moral problem but also maps out possible ways to deal with it, and the "ethical interpreter," who omits the second step and only seeks "to reach a full interpretation of all the moral aspects" of the situation (p.231). Again, the most significant difference is that between the ethical engineer on the one hand and the playwright or interpreter on the other, where the latter two may be seen as variations on the exercise of the roles of teacher and moderator.

The question we are facing is whether the moral philosopher is overall better advised to restrict herself to the role of a moderator or teacher, i.e., to exercise her ethical expertise without acting as a moral expert.

However, framing the question this way is problematic to begin with. Saying that this is what the ethicist should “restrict” herself to presupposes that fulfilling the role of the teacher or moderator is actually the more feasible way of exercising ethical expertise. This is a highly contestable suggestion.

The difficulties and pitfalls of endorsing an ethical expert’s, but not a moral expert’s role can be nicely illustrated by some short excerpts from an interview with two philosophers working on the ethics and politics of the relationship between humans and nonhuman animals published in the weekly German newspaper DIE ZEIT [25]. The topic is the killing of nonhuman animals for food. Notably, both interview partners are approached *as philosophers, but not exclusively* as philosophers. The biographical notes reveal to the reader that Herwig Grimm, in addition to being a professor of ethics – at a veterinary school –, is also an agriculturist by training, and Friederike Schmitz, in addition to being a research fellow in philosophy at a university, is also an animal rights activist. The professional and personal backgrounds of the interview partners point to the problematic phenomenon of financial and ideological conflicts of interest. This issue, of course, bears on the subject matter of this paper, but must still be largely left aside. Financial and ideological conflicts of interest affect philosophy more generally, not just its popularization. How they are best described and dealt with cannot be adequately addressed here. What is clear, however, is that both interview partners in our example are approached not only because of other facts about their personal backgrounds, but, in part, and apparently even foremost *as philosophers*. This is the opening exchange:

DIE ZEIT: Frau Schmitz, on my way over here, I ate a ham sandwich. Did I behave morally wrong?

Friederike Schmitz: I do in fact believe that you should not have done that. You supported an industry that commits tremendous violence on animals for trivial reasons.

DIE ZEIT: Is satisfaction of a basic need a trivial reason?

Schmitz: You could have easily appeased your hunger in a different way. Your ham sandwich conforms to a gustatory preference. To this end, animals are being caged, mutilated and killed. Put in theoretical terms: your benefit bears no proportion to the suffering you contribute to. From an ethical perspective, there is no justification for that.

DIE ZEIT: So, millions of Germans violate morality, Herr Grimm?

Grimm: Ethicists are not referees. My task is not to judge, but to aid the autonomous reaching of a verdict. . . . (*translation FA*)<sup>4</sup>

While Schmitz readily endorses the role of the moral expert, Grimm declines the invitation to take on this role, denying that moral philosophers *do or may* view themselves as moral experts (in the above specified sense), at the very least when speaking publicly. He alleges that when philosophers do issue judgments, they act, illegitimately, as “referees” – a metaphor that implies that they (while remaining *impartial*) apply a *fixed and agreed upon set of rules* to a situation of a specific type.

It is easy to think of this refusal to judge as a strategic move. On the assumption made at the beginning of section 2, there is a sense in which behind any sincere issuing of a moral judgment there is a claim to (a local, circumscribed kind of) moral expertise: seriously and decidedly putting forward a moral verdict implies that one takes oneself to be likely right on the issue for the right reasons. Grimm’s rejection of the moral expert’s role effectively works to make the claim to moral expertise that lies behind Schmitz’s unhesitant assessment of the interviewer’s conduct salient for the audience. By denying the ethicist’s authority on moral matters, he shifts the topic of the discussion onto the very practice of making judgments. In a situation in which a judgment of severe moral wrongdoing on the part of – as the interviewer rightly deduces – “millions” of people (and hundreds of thousands of the newspaper’s readers<sup>5</sup>) has just been uttered, Grimm’s reaction adds a layer of controversy to the actual issue at hand: he raises the question of whether his interlocutor is in any position to make this sort of judgment at all. At the same time, he positions himself as someone who will not judge the reader. Avoiding moral judgment is, of course, a strategy that is more conducive to the preservation of the status quo than to considerable changes, as it takes away an entire kind of grounds to challenge the status quo, leaving only considerations of prudence at disposal.

Prima facie, Grimm’s view paradigmatically exemplifies the one we are examining here: the rejection of the moral expert’s role for the publicly engaged moral philosopher and a recommendation to be a servant to rather than a participant in the public debate. His characterization of the practice of moral judgment – relying on the metaphor of the referee –, however, seems odd. The denial of a place for judgments in the ethicist’s role as an expert in the public sphere furthermore establishes a discontinuity between this public role and the professional everyday life of the (normative) ethicist. In normative ethics, philosophers are not

impartial moderators of a discourse between third parties, but they do what Gesang recommends they should be doing outside of academia as well: they defend “their own standpoints.” [11, p.159] Grimm denies that this is what he should do *as an ethicist* in this interview setting, insinuating that his taking a certain stance would not aid others’ autonomous reasoning – or might even hinder it.

This view leaves only the role of the teacher or moderator available. Since, in this particular setting, there is a limited number of active discussants and no direct interaction with a wider audience, and since it is *prima facie* the interviewers who take on the moderator’s role, the most obvious option in order to avoid the role of the partisan advocate is to act as a philosophical teacher for the readers. Fulfilling the teacher’s role would require laying out the state of the philosophical debate on the use of nonhuman animals for food and, respectively, moral veganism, including basic arguments from the debates about criteria for moral considerability, speciesism, and the justification and implications of animal rights. It would also require assembling the relevant facts these debates are taking into account, such as the types and scale of harms inflicted upon nonhuman animals in the processes involved in their utilization, knowns and unknowns regarding health implications of different types of diets for humans, the psychological, ecological and economical presuppositions and impacts of the use of animals for food, and so forth. As is obvious from this incomplete list, the task of the philosophical teacher is a difficult one (the same is true of the moderator’s task, who needs some of the same competences as the teacher in order to be able to *spot* error and faulty reasoning). Nevertheless, committing to fulfilling the teacher’s role and withholding judgment can still earn the ethical expert the reputation of being modest. It is the eschewal of a personal moral verdict that underlies this reputation (the refusal to base a claim to moral expertise on one’s ethical expertise), even though aiding others in the autonomous reaching of a verdict may require almost all of the same efforts as reaching that verdict oneself.

However, the ethical teacher’s difficult task is not the one that Grimm takes on, after all. Within the same response in which he has just refused to act as a “referee,” he goes on to utter some substantive moral judgments: “What is certain is that industrial farming has a massive legitimization problem. The way we rear, treat and slaughter livestock is highly problematic ethically. But just to call for its end is a bit too simple.” [25, *translation FA*]<sup>6</sup>

Now, one might legitimately wonder: who is judging now? Grimm

has just claimed that it is not his job *as a philosopher* to issue any judgments. So in what capacity is he making these judgments about the status quo being deeply problematic and Schmitz’s favored solution being overly simplistic? In a paper on the very question whether philosophers should be “[e]xperts or mediators,” Michael Dusche distinguishes between the philosopher as an expert in ethics who can offer “specialized knowledge of their field” to aid the discussion others are participating in, and the philosopher as an “‘intellectual’ drawing only on common sense and claiming a certain moral authority.” [9, p.22] While Grimm explicitly endorses only the first role, he, in effect, quickly slips into the second one. When an avowal of neutrality is followed by the advancement of an opinion, we can be reasonably confused about whether it is the philosopher’s professional opinion or that of the intellectual who is appealing to “common sense” – where the additional complication is that it is far from clear what we may regard as common sense in this case and what weight we should assign to it.

In principle, it might, of course, be a legitimate option to assume the role of the expert in philosophical reasoning and thereby an impartial standpoint from which to aid the audience’s own moral deliberation. But it seems that not even this is what Grimm thinks should be done with respect to the topic at hand. Regarding his approach to working through conflicts between interests of humans and animals, he remarks: “Moralizing debates will only lead to hardened fronts.” [25, *translation FA*]<sup>7</sup> From the commitment to withhold judgment we have now moved to the recommendation to avoid thinking in moral terms about the issue (i.e., moral philosophizing) in the first place – shortly after the issue has been identified as “highly problematic ethically.”

The example may be criticized on the grounds that it looks cherry-picked for the purposes of disqualifying the roles of the philosophical moderator or teacher. This is, however, not its purpose. I do not want to claim or show that philosophers seeking to act as disinterested teachers predominantly fail to commit to and fill out this role. The example is, rather, supposed to illustrate the burdens and risks the philosopher incurs by undertaking the performance of a disinterested expert’s role – and the risks and harms that come with changing between this role and a more partisan role within the same discourse. These burdens and risks at least speak against the roles of the moderator and the teacher being the *default* options for the philosopher on the public stage.

## 5 *The requirement of judgment transparency*

In the above cited example, it is insinuated that a philosopher publicly advancing her (professional) opinion would not aid others' autonomous reasoning – or might even hinder it. However, this is far from obvious. In fact, this view conflicts with the rationale behind freedom of expression, the classic justification of which turns on the epistemic benefits of engaging with different opinions (cf. section 6). John Stuart Mill, who prominently provided such a justification, also makes specific remarks about the importance of a staged public dispute somewhat like the debate set up for the newspaper interview cited above. Mill is concerned with the downsides of a basically desirable kind of progress: the reaching of consensus in the course of social progress.

But though this gradual narrowing of the bounds of diversity of opinion is necessary in both senses of the term, being at once inevitable and indispensable, we are not therefore obliged to conclude that all its consequences must be beneficial. The loss of so important an aid to the intelligent and living apprehension of a truth, as is afforded by the necessity of explaining it to, or defending it against, opponents, though not sufficient to outweigh, is no trifling drawback from, the benefit of its universal recognition. Where this advantage can no longer be had, I confess I should like to see the teachers of mankind endeavouring to provide a substitute for it. [18, p.56]

As a substitute, Mill is thinking of debates along the lines of Platonic dialogues (p.56) or medieval disputations (p.57). Mill sees participation in public dispute as an important contribution to the intellectual liveliness of liberal societies. In contrast to the situation Mill is primarily concerned with in this passage, the debate in the example in section 4 – the debate about the human consumption of nonhuman animals – is ongoing. However, the benefit of engagement in an arranged dispute on an unsettled matter seems to be quite similar: it might likewise serve to engage the audience – just as Mill thought was necessary with respect to matters on which a consensus had been reached. Sparking engagement with a topic seems to be especially valuable when there are incentives to avoid contemplating the subject matter, as there are in the case of the use of animals for food. According to Mill, it is the confrontation with an opinion that just might aid – not inhibit – autonomous reasoning. This view presupposes that the autonomous reasoner has reached a certain

level of intellectual maturity. And in fact, Mill mentions that for the benefits of liberty (including freedom of expression) to obtain, mankind first has to make progress: “Liberty, as a principle, has no application to any state of things anterior to the time when mankind have become capable of being improved by free and equal discussion.” [18, p.15] The same could be said about progress on the individual level. Benefitting from confrontation with another individual’s moral judgment requires a certain level of progress in one’s own capacity for moral reasoning.

This brings us to a final consideration in favor of the presumably modest teacher’s or moderator’s role – thus, against Mill and philosophers who do promote their views in public – which centers on Max Weber’s concerns about the harmful potential of value judgments in teaching. Weber famously argued for restraint when it came to mixing value judgments into the information that a scientist qua lecturer has to provide students. Since students are basically placed at a lecturers’ mercy, lecturers should not use their position to advance viewpoints that they could not claim any special competence in holding [28, p.490]. The main motivation behind Weber’s call to restraint when it comes to value judgments is his conviction that there is no way to settle normative questions that is analogous to and therefore remotely as reliable as observation as a way to resolve empirical questions [28, pp.498-501]. This is a complication we have taken into account in observing the controversy over the path from ethical to moral expertise. Because there is no agreed upon method for conclusively settling normative questions – and thus, no agreement that ethicists are more in command of this method than others –, there is disagreement about ethicists’ claim to moral expertise. But as we mentioned above, the moral expertise hypothesis need not be presupposed in arguing for or against the philosopher’s right to *act as a moral expert* on public occasions. Either way, in the context of *teaching*, Weber saw value judgments as a practically inevitable evil that still had to be minimized as much as possible and – where it could not be avoided – flagged. When moving from the reporting of scientific facts to the issuing of a value judgment, lecturers should make this move explicit and clear [28, p.509]. Thus, Weber’s *requirement of value neutrality* in academic teaching includes the avoidance of value judgments and the marking of those that are not avoided, respectively.

Weber’s recommendation seems to make sense first and foremost for situations in which Mill’s prerequisite of maturity is not fulfilled or where the exercise of mature, autonomous reasoning is at least inhibited, e.g., through the students’ subjection to a professor in the lecture hall. While

one might initially think that the public should not have to put up with philosophers' pushing certain agendas any more than students should have to put up with professors' uttering value judgments in the lecture hall, the difference between the two kinds of cases is that in the kind of standard situations of public engagement described in section 2, the public is not put at the mercy of the philosopher promoting his point of view in the way students are put at the mercy of their professor. Even Weber thought that different rules obtained outside the lecture hall. In public, sociologists – with whom Weber was concerned – are free to participate in moral and political discourse [28, p.492]. We may claim the same freedom here for the philosopher.

Still, Weber's considerations about the limitations of freedom of expression in the lecture hall are relevant to the ethics of popularizing philosophy, because some considerations about the implications of claims to authority and expertise hold in the latter case as well. The *requirement of judgment transparency* for the popularization of philosophy (adapted from the requirement of value neutrality for teaching contexts) would be that the ethical expert make it clear when she is reporting or advancing her own professional judgments, even though she is under no obligation to withhold judgment as much as possible. This entails that the philosopher ought not to claim to be offering mere moderation services or disinterested information and then go on to report her own view. She should not deny it when she is in fact making judgments, thus insinuating the judgment she issues is just common sense or a statement of fact. Again, this holds for standard situations and beyond: in different situations different measures will be required to achieve transparency.

Stated this way, the requirement of judgment transparency maybe easy to fulfill, depending on the circumstances: the presumable competences or intellectual maturity of the audience and parameters of the overall setting (e.g., whether it is already clear that the expert is asked for her opinion). But there are further dimensions of transparency to an ethical expert's moral judgment that make the augmentation of the requirement desirable: a fully transparent judgment is one for which it is clear what its empirical and normative grounds are, which of the normative grounds are especially fundamental to the individual's value system (i.e., if there are any quasi-dogmatically held normative views that went into the judgment at hand – those she is hardly prepared to give up), and also by what financial and ideological conflicts of interests it may be affected. While full transparency may be more of an ideal than a realistic standard, it must at least be recognized as that, and in what

ways it could be translated into a standard is a worthwhile question for a more comprehensive ethics of popularizing philosophy.

Referring back to the insight from section 3 and the case example in section 4, we have to note that one very important corollary of the transparency requirement is that the philosopher ought to make it clear when she is speaking as a philosopher and when she is speaking as an “intellectual,” an interested layperson or concerned citizen, i.e., when she is leaving the field of her own ethical expertise and goes on to promote a personal, but not a professional opinion. That is, philosophers speaking publicly *as philosophers* should flag their private opinions. Since the default expectation of an opinion uttered by a professional is that it is a professional opinion, flagging private ones will usually require more effort from the publicly appearing moral philosopher than marking opinions off from statements of facts. Just as the sociology professor should make it perfectly clear to his students when he begins uttering a value judgment instead of reporting sociological facts, the philosopher as an expert in the public sphere – while she may be free to report primarily the results of her own research – should make it clear when she leaves her area of expertise and utters a private opinion instead.

Thus, the *requirement of judgment transparency* answers to considerations of basic conversational fairness given certain pragmatic presuppositions that are triggered when someone is introduced or introduces him- or herself *as a moral philosopher*. Failure to flag the departure from one’s field of expertise amounts to purporting to be an expert in a field where one in fact lacks the relevant expertise, given that respective expectations in the audience have been conjured up before. The expert’s utterances will then evoke wrong or baseless assumptions about a certain opinion’s grounds, its level of acceptance in the field the ethicist purports to be an expert in, where in reality, a given opinion might not even stand a chance of *being heard*, i.e., might not be considered worthy of publication (*anymore*), given progress in the relevant field. As we already noted at the end of section 3, failure to conform to the requirement will frustrate the rationale for turning to the philosopher at all: the moral philosopher who proclaims a mere personal opinion frustrates enlightened interest in normative guidance, i.e., the demand for a moral recommendation that will be backed by the presumed expert’s best philosophizing.

## 6 *In defense of partisan experts*

Because the roles of the moderator and the teacher come with the burdens of commitments to disinterestedness and comprehensiveness, the exercise of these roles is vulnerable to tendentious performance in ways in which the exercise of moral expertise is not so vulnerable. This result does not imply that, eventually, the moral philosopher on the public stage could not legitimately choose the role of the ethical expert as a teacher or moderator over the role of the partisan moral expert. It just shows that being an impartial moderator or teacher is a lot more demanding than a default recommendation to take on one of these roles rather than the role of the moral expert implies.

In situations where there is room to interpret one's expert role in one way or another, i.e., where no special considerations hold that require taking on the difficult task of the moderator or teacher, it can be desirable from a professional, moral and social perspective that the philosopher take on the role of a moral expert. The reasons for this evaluation are basically provided by the classic considerations in favor of freedom of speech. We may turn again to Mill on the issue of freedom of expression:

the peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is, that it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the existing generation; those who dissent from the opinion, still more than those who hold it. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth: if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error. [18, p.23]

The moral philosopher's public issuing of judgments may just be epistemically valuable in the senses outlined by Mill. Insofar as these judgments flow from her *ethical expertise*, there is a chance that they will be especially valuable, provided that her public performance conforms to the requirements discussed above.

However, there is a complication with regard to the judgment transparency requirement that arises in a special way for the moral philosopher, because there may be a fundamental conflict between her professional duty to conform to this requirement and the professional motivation to act as a moral expert. It is a peculiarity of disciplines that tackle normative questions that working in such a discipline can generate the normative requirement to make one's results publicly accessible – i.e. to

popularize them – to the degree they relate to public issues. Honestly caring about the normative questions of one's discipline and honestly caring about finding answers will also make one care about making these answers known, defending them in a convincing way and letting them gain practical impact. Would it not be a performative contradiction to care about the action-guiding answers to one's normative questions only in a detached, theoretical fashion? The case of moral philosophy is even more peculiar in this regard, because the requirement to popularize its results is to be justified within that same discipline. Whether it is obligatory to secure one's own results recognition and impact beyond academic circles is itself a moral question, i.e., it lies within the jurisdiction of the moral philosopher herself.

The complication for the moral philosopher's efforts to popularize her own results in accord with the requirements outlined here arises because the results of ethical reasoning might entail duties to go beyond their popularization. Taking positions in normative or applied ethics might generate the requirement to achieve wide acceptance of certain conclusions by any means – a requirement that conflicts with the obligation to transparently popularize the reasoning behind these conclusions. Arriving at a normative conclusion will typically generate not only the commission to make this conclusion known, but to seek its practical realization. Taking a stand on moral matters will typically entail a pro tanto reason to do whatever is most effective in order to gain acceptance of one's position and ensure that what follows practically from it becomes implemented. Unfortunately, one's philosophical arguments may not be the means of choice when it comes to being most effective in this sense. Suggestive figurative speech, concealing certain background assumptions, arguments from authority and the like may be more conducive to persuading an audience. So, a philosophically underpinned position can well license the philosopher to go beyond the proper popularization of her work and leave behind (or employ in a deceitful way) philosophical means in the service of the practical implementation of her conclusions.

This is a deep normative conflict, which constitutes but one kind of conflict of interest that can affect the proliferation of insights from philosophical work, i.e., the popularization of philosophy. Depending on the stakes in the individual case and her normative framework, the individual philosopher may at times find that her responsibility to be most effective as far as the realization of her moral recommendations is concerned outweighs professional responsibilities – or that it requires her to

dirty her hands and violate professional responsibilities. In other cases, one may find that professional responsibilities legitimately constrain the means that the ethical expert is allowed to use when taking on the role of a moral expert and thereby, an advocate's role. How this is to be determined is a substantive normative question that needs to be addressed with the specifics of the case in mind.

The example from section 4 is instructive with respect to some intricacies of this basic problem. An ethical expert who does have a personal opinion on the matter at hand might not only choose to advance this opinion by straightforwardly taking on the role of the advocate, but might also find that his cause will be better served if he endorses the teacher's or moderator's role instead, precisely because openly promoting moral views – i.e., acting as a moral expert – is, in certain circumstances, prone to provoking disapproval. The salience of the claim to moral expertise that lies behind the promotion of a moral view is one crucial factor in this regard. In the example, we have seen how committing to the role of the impartial teacher can serve to make an interlocutor's claim to moral expertise salient and give oneself the appearance of modesty. Next, the ethical expert who endorses the role of the teacher or moderator might continue to fulfill his publicly endorsed roles in less than impartial ways, directing the debate in specific directions or promoting specific views after all. In other words, the advocate's methods can include *purporting* to restrict oneself to role of the disinterested teacher or moderator, but not really doing so. Thus, taking on either of these seemingly more modest roles can be a way of dirtying one's hands.

There is, however, no general argument to the effect that professional and other moral duties are irreconcilable. In fact, regarding oneself a moral expert on a certain issue *prima facie* motivates contributions to public debate that are in accordance with the requirements formulated here: it motivates to enter the debate instead of overseeing it (as a mere ethical expert) or circumventing it and seeking to secure practical effects in any way possible. Regarding oneself as likely correct on the issue at hand provides the motivation to *partake* in the discussion – to get one's view “out there”; and regarding oneself as likely correct, but not infallible, motivates to partake *in a discussion* instead of trying to force one's position onto others. Accordingly, there can be ways to responsibly exercise ethical expertise in the role of a moral expert, i.e., advocacy and professionally underpinned moral expertise can be compatible and exercisable at the same time.

## 7 Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued for two claims: 1. When acting as moral experts, ethicists should be popularizing philosophy. 2. When popularizing philosophy, ethicists may well act as moral experts, if they confine themselves to their actual areas of expertise (which concerns the *content* of their utterances) and do what they can to fulfill the transparency requirement (which concerns the *mode* of their public performance). The argument has touched on issues to be addressed in further investigations into the ethics of popularizing philosophy. There are interesting problems relating to various conflicts of interest philosophers might be subject to, including financial conflicts of interest, which are not often problematized with respect to philosophy, but which exist nevertheless. Then there are what, for lack of a better term, one might call ‘ideological conflicts of interest’, influences on non-professionally acquired beliefs on professional opinions. These various conflicts raise important questions not only for a comprehensive ethics of popularizing philosophy (or public philosophy), but also for academic philosophy itself.

## Acknowledgements

For useful comments on earlier versions of this paper, I thank Alexander Christian. I am also thankful for discussions with Sascha Aulich, Christian Feldbacher-Escamilla, Christoph Kann, Oliver Victor, and the participants of ‘Popularizing Philosophy’, an affiliated workshop held at SOPhiA 2018. For helpful comments, I also wish to thank two anonymous reviewers for this journal.

## Notes

- 1 This paper builds on the blog entry “Populäre Moralphilosophie und moralische Expertise”, in: Paulo, N. & Schweiger, G.: *prae—faktisch.de*. Ein Philosophieblog. URL = <https://www.praefaktisch.de/populaere-philosophie/populaere-moralphilosophie-und-moralische-expertise/>, co-authored with Alexander Christian.
- 2 These are already importantly different situations, as the promotion of a publication, where this is not a survey of some debate or field, but an argument put forward for a particular position, might license and even call for a more opinionated performance than the exercise of ethical expertise in view of current events, but *any* publication can be promoted in more or less opinionated ways.
- 3 Some would argue that the expertise a moral philosopher has qua moral philosopher includes proficiency precisely in this fundamental type of judgment – that

because “moral philosophers have dealt in detail with the analysis of moral questions in a variety of contexts [...], [...] they are particularly capable of identifying the normatively relevant aspects of a matter.” [7, p.277] The question whether this is in fact the case would lead deeper into the debate about moral philosophers’ claim to moral expertise than I want to go into here, but it seems to me that the move from the description of facts to the selection of the morally relevant ones is at least suspect of falling outside of the ethicist’s special professional expertise precisely because it is such a basic moral evaluation.

4 original: “DIE ZEIT: Frau Schmitz, ich habe auf dem Weg zu unserem Gespräch ein Schinkenbrot gegessen. Habe ich mich unmoralisch verhalten?”

Friederike Schmitz: Ich denke in der Tat, dass Sie das nicht hätten tun sollen. Sie haben damit eine Industrie unterstützt, die Tieren zu einem trivialen Zweck immense Gewalt zufügt.

ZEIT: Ist das Befriedigen eines Grundbedürfnisses ein trivialer Zweck?

Schmitz: Sie hätten Ihren Hunger leicht auf andere Weise stillen können. Ihr Schinkenbrot entspricht also einer geschmacklichen Präferenz. Dafür aber werden Tiere eingesperrt, verstümmelt und getötet. Theoretisch formuliert: Ihr Nutzen steht in keinem Verhältnis zu dem Leid, das Sie mitverursacht haben. Aus ethischer Perspektive lässt sich das nicht rechtfertigen.

ZEIT: Dann verstoßen also Millionen Deutsche gegen die Moral, Herr Grimm?

Herwig Grimm: Ethiker sind keine Schiedsrichter. Meine Aufgabe ist es nicht, zu urteilen, sondern zur selbstständigen Urteilsfindung beizutragen.”

5 At the time of the interview, the paper was selling over half a million copies <https://www.ivw.eu/aw/print/qa/titel/967?quartal%5B20142%5D=20142&quartal%5B20191%5D=20191#views-exposed-form-aw-titel-az-aw-az-qa>.

6 original: “Sicher ist, dass unsere industrielle Tierhaltung ein massives Legitimationsproblem hat. Die Art, wie wir Nutztiere züchten, behandeln und schlachten, ist ethisch hoch problematisch. Aber einfach ihr Ende zu fordern ist etwas zu einfach.”

7 original: “Die Moralisation von Debatten führt nur zur Zementierung der Fronten.”

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