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Worries About Philosopher Experts

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Abstract
Well-functioning modern democracies depend largely on expert knowledge and expert arrangements, but this expertise reliance also causes severe problems for their legitimacy. Somewhat surprisingly, moral and political philosophers have come to play an increasing role as experts in contemporary policymaking. The paper discusses different epistemic and democratic worries raised by the presence of philosopher experts in contemporary governance, relying on a broad review of existing studies, and suggests measures to alleviate them. It is argued that biases philosophers are vulnerable to may contribute to reducing the quality of their advice, and that the characteristics of philosophers' expertise, and controversies around what their competences amount to, make it hard to distinguish proper from less proper philosopher experts. Reliance on philosopher experts may also intensify democratic worries not least due to the depoliticization pressures that the introduction of ethics expertise tends to give rise to. Still, philosophers have competences and orientations that policy discussions and democratic deliberations are likely to profit from. Worries about philosopher experts may moreover be mitigated by means of a proper design of expert arrangements. Confronted with the genuine epistemic risks and democratic challenges of contemporary governance any quick fix is obviously unavailable, but when institutionalized in the right way philosophers' involvement in present-day policymaking bears significant promise.

Keywords Expert knowledge · Democracy · Governance · Institutional design · Ethics expertise · Philosophers

Well-functioning modern democracies depend largely on expert knowledge and expert arrangements. Not only do decision-makers nowadays draw extensively on expert advice; relying on expertise also seems to be a condition for good governance and policymaking of high quality: It is hard to make just and effective policies to

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reduce carbon emissions, tame the corona virus, or reform pension schemes, without input from expert communities and expert bodies.

At the same time, democracies' expertise dependence causes severe problems for their legitimacy. 'Real' experts are not straightforwardly identifiable, and the experts we end up relying on may be biased and mistaken and contribute to make decisions and policies poorer. Granting extra political power to experts is also in tension with democratic norms of political equality and popular sovereignty. There are thus *epistemic* as well as *democratic* worries about the political role of expertise.

Experts may have different competences and educational backgrounds. Interestingly, also people with an academic training as *philosophers* have come to play a role as experts in contemporary policymaking. Most visibly, philosophers are relied on as 'ethics experts' within biomedicine and the life sciences and in new fields of technological innovation (e.g. Littoz-Monnet 2020). However, philosophers are also consulted on other issues, be it defence policy, financial regulation, or free speech, for instance as members of advisory commissions or expert groups (Wolff 2011; Christensen et al. 2022).

Initially, the demand for philosopher experts is somewhat puzzling. Powerful trends in present-day governance, such as the emphasis on policies to be 'evidence-based' and 'cost–benefit analysis', seem to leave limited space for philosophers' input. The idea that political rule should be guided by academic philosophical reflection also sits uneasily with the populist *zeitgeist.* Still, in a time where policy challenges are conceived of as increasingly complex, and even 'wicked' (Rittel & Webber 1973), philosophers' particular conceptual competence (e.g. Alexander 2016) may come more in demand. An awareness of how technical and normative issues tend to be intertwined in policymaking, and initiatives to take 'values' seriously, and even an 'ethical turn' in governance (Bogner and Menz 2010), also create opportunities for philosophers. Moreover, on the supply side, there are signs of philosophy being on the rise as a policy science in academia. There is a growing interest in providing political theory and philosophy that is more 'applied' or 'engaged' (Wolff 2018), and recent years have seen a significant expansion of Philosophy, Politics, and Economics (PPE) and similar transdisciplinary fields which produce candidates for politics and public administration.

Yet there are still relatively few empirical studies of philosophers' role in contemporary governance, and those that exist tend to have a restricted scope, focusing largely on bio ethicists (e.g. Nukaga 2016; Littoz-Monnett 2017; Schiffino and Krieger 2019). Importantly, with some exceptions (e.g. Plomer 2008; Hedlund 2014) these studies seldom connect their findings elaborately to implications for the normative legitimacy of political rule. Philosophical studies are also rare. Historically, philosophers have been preoccupied with how to conceive of the relationship between philosophy, political competence, and the good rule, from Plato's defense of the philosopher kings in *The Republic* onwards. Present-day political philosophers have in comparison showed limited interest in how to conceive of the proper role of philosophers in governance. Furthermore, when they have done so, they have either tended to argue dismissively—philosophers should not be policy advisors, but public intellectuals and 'field philosophers' (Frodeman et al. 2012)—or concentrated on

some democratic concerns (e.g. Nussbaum 2002; Lamb 2020), and not on the wider set of challenges.

On this background, this paper asks: *Which epistemic and democratic worries are raised by the presence of philosopher experts in contemporary public policy, and how should expert institutions where philosophers take part be designed to mitigate these worries?*

Among the broader range of *philosophers*, the paper zooms in on those who specialize in moral and political philosophy, whether these are full-fledged philosophers, or scholars from other disciplines with a similar training (such as political scientists who specialize in political theory), or with a PPE or similar degrees. This is to provide a more focused discussion, but this selected branch of philosophy is also particularly relevant under the above sketched demand and supply structures. To be sure, even this sub-field of philosophy includes scholars with varied features and competences, complicating any general analysis. Still, there are variations within all disciplines—take the difference between a sociologist working with qualitative and historical material, and a sociologist specializing in advanced statistics, or the different traditions of law, or within biology. Still, 'professions' and 'disciplines' are by now established objects of empirical study, and recent studies of philosophers add to studies of other professions and disciplines. The fact that practitioners in a domain of expertise—here: moral and political philosophers—would be heterogeneous in different respects calls, however, for caution in descriptions and assessments.

An *expert* is understood in accordance with a standard definition, as someone particularly knowledgeable in some domain (Goldman 2011),[1] called upon—here: by government—to give advice. When the domain in question is moral and political philosophy, this raises the question of whether there can be such a thing as expertise on the normative questions of morality and politics, and hence individuals we could refer to as 'moral experts' (Singer 1972) or 'normative experts' (Lamb 2020). The paper leaves largely aside the fine-grained philosophical debates on this issue, for instance regarding whether there can be true or truth-like claims about what is morally right (which experts could have 'more beliefs' in[2]). Still, it is generally granted that normative positions and considerations can be reasonably discussed—some contributions to moral argumentation will be more well-founded than others (see also Gesang 2010)—and that some people have skills or 'expertise' that are conducive to argumentative quality in this area. Philosophers may possess such skills through their training, but different categories of non-philosophers may possess them as well (e.g. Jones and Schroeter 2012).

Finally, the paper discusses worries about philosopher experts and measures to address them from the perspective of how a political rule ought to be if it is to be *legitimate*, and not from other possible angles, such as the perspective of ethically admirable or culturally esteemed conduct. It is also assumed that for a government

[1] Alvin Goldman (2011, pp. 114, 115) defines experts are those who 'possess a substantial body of truths', and who 'have more beliefs (or high degrees of belief) in true propositions and/or fewer beliefs in false propositions within (a) domain than most people do (or better: than the vast majority of people do)'.

[2] Cf. Goldman's (2011) definition of expertise.

to be legitimate it must have democratic, but also epistemic credentials; strict procedural fairness is not enough (cf. Urbinati 2014). On this background, the discussion takes as its point of departure (i) two ten-point lists of epistemic and democratic worries about the political role of experts, and ii) a three-fold scheme of institutional measures to address them, which have been developed in previous scholarship (see Christensen et al. 2022 for a recent elaboration). *How to conceive of these worries and measures when the experts in question are philosophers?*

As for the epistemic worries, the problem of distinguishing true or the best experts from quasi or second-rate experts arguably sticks when experts are philosophers, even if it takes on a different shape. The paper also highlights how philosophers may have cognitive and disciplinary biases, which are epistemically worrisome, yet also possess competences and orientations that policy discussions are likely to profit from. As for the democratic worries, the reliance on philosopher experts may spur a special type of depoliticization, which in turn may come to intensify other democratic concerns such as political alienation and exaggerated amounts of delegation to the unelected. Yet, the presence of philosophers in policy advice may also contribute to improving the public understanding of democratic requirements, and philosophers' often explicit approach to value considerations facilitate *prima facie* democratic control and critique. As for the institutional design of expert bodies, the paper spells out ways to address epistemic and democratic worries that take into account that expert communities include philosophers.

The paper contributes mainly to discussions in political theory about the proper political role of experts in contemporary democratic governance, concentrating on challenges triggered by the rise of philosopher experts. The paper may additionally be of interest to scholars who study philosophers' characteristics and performance and their role in public policy empirically, as it applies insights from such studies (in the context of political theory). The paper also sheds some light on discussions in moral philosophy and philosophical methodology on philosophers' expertise.

The paper is organized as follows: The upcoming section positions the paper in relation to existing scholarship.[3] The second section presents the general epistemic and democratic worries about the political role of experts. The part that follows scrutinizes what happens to these worries when the experts in question are philosophers. The fourth section discusses requirements to the design of expert bodies that include philosophers, followed by a brief concluding paragraph.

[3] Trym Nohr Fjørtoft assisted me in reviewing previous literature and has given valuable input to the arguments of the paper. I am also grateful for comments to previous versions of the paper from Anders Molander and participants at the GOODPOL workshop 'Ethics and Public Policy' in February 2021 at the Centre for Advanced Studies (CAS) in Oslo; the Centre for Philosophy and Sciences Lunch Forum, University of Oslo; 'The Promises of Democracy' workshop organized in May 2022 by Claudia Landwehr and Armin Schäfer at Villa Vigoni, and the Philosophy of Science Seminar at the Department of History and Philosophy of Science, University of Cambridge.

Contemporary Philosopher Experts: Previous Scholarship

The question of the proper role of experts in political rule is under vivid scrutiny in contemporary political philosophy. Still, recently, prominent scholars have focused largely on debating the relative merits of democracy—a rule of the people—compared to those of an epistocracy—a rule of the knowledgeable (see Brennan and Landemore 2021), and so tended to sidestep the question of the proper role of expertise *in* democracy. Other contributions in democratic and political theory do engage with the reliance and uses of academic and scientific expertise in democratic governance (e.g. Holst and Molander 2017; Moore 2017; Krick 2021; Pamuk 2021), but tend to draw their examples from disciplines such as medicine or economics.

Moreover, the interrogations of political theorists of the proper role of philosophers in present-day governance that do exist, typically focus on areas such as biomedicine and life science (e.g. Hedlund 2014), and on some general democratic worries (see also Archard 2011). These worries are significant, but there is a broader set of concerns, including a range of epistemic challenges that are no less important, granted that a key 'function' of proper expert bodies is 'epistemic' (Christiano, 2012): Experts are given extra political power on the assumption that they will contribute to increasing the 'truth-sensitivity' and 'reasonableness' of political decision-making (Christiano 2012, p. 31; Mansbridge et al. 2012, p. 11). Finally, political philosophers who at all address the role of philosopher experts have given limited attention to questions of institutional design. Illustratively, a recent attempt to clarify the appropriate conduct of philosophers in public policy concentrates more on the individual philosophers' approach and virtues, than on their role in the institutional setting of contemporary policy advice and democracy (Wolff 2018).

Hence, this paper aims at advancing the state of the art in political theory regarding the issue under scrutiny, while also drawing on existing scholarship in the field. The discussion profits in addition from contributions made in other branches of philosophy. There is an extensive debate within moral philosophy about whether moral expertise exists and if so, whether moral philosophers possess it (e.g. Gesang 2010; Archard 2011; Cowley 2012; Alexander 2016; Hansson 2020), and contributors to this debate try to put into words what philosophers do and which competences they possess. The latter are central issues in the upcoming analysis. Similarly, within philosophical methodology and psychology there is an ongoing discussion concerning the role of intuitions in philosophers' moral and political arguments, and of whether philosophers possess an expertise that make them less biased in their intuitions (e.g. Nado 2014; Schwitzgebel and Cushman 2015; Buckwalter 2016). Once more, some of the findings discussed are relevant for the assessments of this paper, even if its main focus lies elsewhere.

Additionally, the paper makes use of some other empirical studies of philosophers. There is by now a substantial number of studies of 'ethics experts' within bioethics and related areas of 'moral policy' (e.g. Friele 2003; Nukaga 2016; Schiffino and Krieger 2019; Littoz-Monnett 2017, 2020, but the discussion also draws on survey studies of philosophers' beliefs and understandings of their competences (e.g. Bourget and Chalmers 2014; Niv and Sulitzeanu-Kenan 2022).

Worries About Expertise

Before zooming in on worries about philosopher experts specifically, the two ten-point lists of epistemic and democratic worries about the political role of experts will be presented (for more elaborate versions, see e.g. Holst and Molander 2017; Christensen et al. 2022).

Epistemic Worries

(1) Perhaps the most fundamental epistemic worry regarding our reliance and use of expertise, is that we as non-experts often will have a hard time identifying the proper experts in some domain. How to pinpoint the 'real' or 'best' experts when you are not an expert yourself? In the end, novices will need to trust the assessments of wider expert communities in their assessments and rankings of individual experts, but are then confronted with the challenge of distinguishing trustworthy from not so trustworthy expert communities. This is the so-called 'layperson/expert problem' (Goldman 2011).

(2) Moreover, expert advice typically involves not only technical considerations, but also normative judgment. We often see appointed experts enter 'the kingdom of ends' (Kant), whether this is initiated by the experts themselves, or experts are mandated by governments to deliver normative advice. Descriptive and prescriptive considerations may also be intertwined and hard to disentangle in policymaking (e.g. Kitcher 2011). It is worrisome that experts in governance may lack any extra competence in handling moral issues, to the extent that they are selected based on their technical expertise. Yet the challenge runs deeper: Granted that some people are likely to be considerably better than others at inquiring into normative questions, the question arises of how to identify who these people are, since in policymaking contexts normative considerations may be no less complex than technical considerations, and scientific arguments and normative judgments can interact in intricate ways (Bertram 1997; Holst and Molander 2017). Epistemic asymmetries can thus occur also in discussions of ends and value priorities and make it hard for non-experts to identify which experts or expert communities to trust.

(3) Furthermore, for the novice to separate 'real' or 'the best' experts from less trustworthy advisors arguably becomes harder in times of scientific shifts and societal transformation. Generally, we often see how fields or disciplines are characterized by competing research programs and how they, after periods of production of expert knowledge within the parameters of a certain cognitive framework, undergo shifts that change the notions of what qualifies as expert knowledge. The sources of such shifts can be theoretical or conceptual innovation, methodological breakthroughs, or new technologies, but can also be related to social and cultural changes, economic crisis, or political ruptures.

(4) In addition, there are a range of different epistemic worries spurred by how experts may be biased and make mistakes. For one thing, expert judgments are more exposed to fallacies than we like to think (e.g. Kahneman 2012): Like

non-experts, experts tend to make inferences based on heuristics or shortcuts which can lead them astray and cause biases. Due not least to overconfidence and conformation bias, many experts also score disturbingly badly as forecasters (Tetlock 2005).

(5) In addition, experts tend typically to identify with their profession, and are prone to frame problems so that they fall within their disciplinary matrices or epistemic cultures (Lamont 2009). To be sure, disciplinary theoretical lenses are what allows experts to analyze a problem: they bring some aspects of the issue clearly into focus. The downside is that other aspects may be de-focused or ignored.

(6) Yet another worry is that experts may be biased by their self-interests. In a well-functioning political system, manifest conflicts of interest are normally taken care of by selection procedures, but interests may be hard to detect, and even if there are no direct ties to interested parties, experts may favor research findings that contribute to bolster their professional reputation, for instance those that confirm previously defended positions.

(7) Experts may moreover have ideological commitments or other deeper normative concerns that bias their judgments, whether this is an explicit ideological or political outlook or less explicated moral orientations which color experts' advice in subtler ways. Theoretical approaches of academic disciplines may, for instance, frame the problem at hand in such a way that some value options are tacitly favored.

(8) Another concern is that experts belong to and identify with the societal elite, and that their elite position and frame of reference may compromise their independence. Experts may moreover be unable to 'speak truth to power' when they are controlled by politicians. Even in high-performing democracies, decision-makers often consult expertise primarily as a symbolic gesture, or select experts strategically to fit with their predefined preferences (e.g. Boswell 2008).

(9) Furthermore, experts are often bad at stating arguments in a comprehensible way, for instance when they write in jargon and emphasize precision over simplicity. Because of elitist attitudes, experts may also be unwilling to communicate in ways that reach out more broadly. Incentives play a role as well, for instance when academics gain funds and promotion by publishing academic articles rather than engaging in public debate.

(10) A last epistemic worry is that experts may lack 'political literacy' (Eriksen 2020), that is, an understanding of political processes and good political judgment. On the one hand, this may result in recommendations that lack political feasibility. On the other hand, experts may exaggerate how a state of affairs may constrain the space for political action (e.g. Habermas 2015 on 'technocracy').

Democratic Worries

(1) A general democratic objection to experts' political role is that it is inimical to the very idea of 'rule of the people'. A legitimate political rule provides

instrumental goods, including policies and decisions of high quality, but a fundamental requirement to any democracy is procedures that give every citizen an equal say in the shaping of collective decisions. 'Expertization' of governance (Turner 2003)—implying a larger 'say' for experts—is at the very outset in tension with this idea of procedural fairness.

(2) Yet, arguably, expertization may still be legitimate for instrumental reasons: The standard normative rationale for relying on expertise in public policy is that it contributes to increasing the epistemic credentials of political decision-making. Yet this rationale has also been questioned, for instance by democratic theorists who argue that there is an alleged 'wisdom of the many' that makes them collectively wiser than the most knowledgeable (Landemore 2012).

(3) Still, despite these general democratic worries, the need for expert advice and some delegation to expert bodies is often admitted when this delegation is democratically authorized. However, even so, concerns arise regarding the extensiveness of this authorization. Critics worry that the growing number of advisory bodies and the range of delegation of discretionary space to expert communities add up to a shift from elected to unelected power.

(4) A related worry is that delegation to experts and an expanding use of expert advice will not only result in disproportional political power to the unelected, but also in distorting expert dominance in public deliberation. To the extent that expert knowledge and experts' point of views are unduly privileged, this may narrow the space of reasons, devalue the contributions of civil society and ordinary citizens, obstruct the proper functioning of the public sphere, and so strike 'deliberative democracy' at its core (Chambers 2017).

(5) For those who emphasize the importance of bargaining in democratic political processes (Elster 1998), there is the additional worry that the political role of experts interferes with a fair negotiation of social interests. The problem is in part that some interest groups are more capable of utilizing experts' cognitive resources than others. More fundamentally, the grammar of democratic politics comes under pressure: Expertization facilitates talk about political outcomes as more or less 'knowledge based', 'rational', etc., and not as reflective of interests and priorities.

(6) Expertization may moreover increase the feeling among sections of the citizenry that they live under a rule that expresses the will of experts and elites, rather than the will of the people. This can produce 'political alienation' (Dahl 1985), as ordinary citizens will stop seeing themselves as authors of the laws and policies they are required to obey.

(7) Furthermore, experts may tend to underestimate the cognitive abilities and political judgment of ordinary people, and to define 'good policies' as those that are based on 'expertise' and 'evidence', irrespective of public opinion. This is an epistemic problem, as condescending experts may overlook their own limitations. However, these experts also place themselves outside the democratic community and its norms of mutual respect (Mansbridge et al. 2012).

(8) Experts are—and frequently see themselves as—'free-floating' (Mannheim 1936), in the sense that they tend to overlook the political context in which they operate and have their primary loyalties to epistemic communities or

their professions. This makes experts less capable of understanding the *modus operandi* of democratic politics and the motives of their fellow citizens: Most people who engage in politics have particular attachments and identities, and seek communities of the like-minded, and may be less interested in 'hearing the other side' and finding the best solution for all (Mutz 2008).

(9) A related worry is that expertization distorts other essential features of democratic politics, importantly the role of opinion in contrast to truth or evidence (Arendt 1968), and of contestation, disagreement, and conflict. The establishment of expert bodies frequently entails insulating policymaking from political debate and strife, and so to convert political issues into questions to be handled by 'neutral' experts—that is, depoliticization. Depoliticization can be hard to detect because the government or the experts themselves present inherently normative political questions as purely technical questions. Other cases of depoliticization are more explicit, for instance when politically contested ethical issues are turned over to ethical expert bodies (Littoz-Monnet 2020). Importantly, critics of depoliticization do not have to deny that normative questions can be treated in a more or less reasonable way, or that this treatment can profit from expert advice. However, a democratic commitment is strongly associated with the idea that citizens must be 'in the driver's seat' of the value considerations of policymaking, if not in all of the 'instrumental and consequential' assessments (Christiano 2012, p. 33). There is, moreover, reasonable disagreement in the citizenry regarding many ethical and political questions, even if citizens may come to agree on certain moral and constitutional principles.

(10) Finally, even if one grants a role for elites in democracy (e.g. Schumpeter [1942]1994), there is the worry that expertization may hamper processes of elite selection and circulation vital to good democratic governance. As experts typically lack a social constituency, the circulation in and out of governing expert communities is comparably low. Whereas leaders of political parties and interest groups in democracies change as a result of political mobilization or elections, experts in bureaucracies and advisory bodies are more often sheltered from political pressures. No doubt shielding experts and ensuring a long-term horizon of their work helps preserve their independence, but an unfortunate side effect can be that experts in positions of considerable power are unresponsive and resistant to change.

How Worrisome are Philosopher Experts?

Asymmetries, Biases—and Epistemic Credentials

The three initial epistemic worries listed all concern cognitive and informational asymmetries that make it hard for non-experts to make direct judgments about the trustworthiness of experts and expert communities. What happens to these asymmetries in the case of the philosopher expert?

Some asymmetries may decrease. Expert advice may rely heavily on complex technical arguments and models—think about the macro-economic modeling of

economists, or the risk projections of epidemiologists during a pandemic. It will be difficult for non-experts to conduct independent checks of such expert input, and seemingly much easier for them to scrutinize claims from a philosopher who gives her advice in non-technical language and with appeal to intuitions and everyday examples, inspired by the Socratic ideal. According to some, this ideal reflects how philosophers' theories are in the end reducible to 'common sense' (Archard 2011, p. 1), while their activities essentially overlap with those of ordinary citizens (see Lamb 2020 on 'the qualitative continuity thesis'). Yet, on the one hand, to the extent that philosophers lack technical expertise (Friele 2003), this raises the question of whether they at all should play any significant role as governance experts, as instrumental and factual considerations, for instance regarding policy effects, are at the core of public policy. On the other hand, philosophers may, in fact, have considerable technical domain expertise: For instance bioethicists with competence in both ethics and medicine, or when they specialize in applied philosophy, for instance within development, welfare, or other branches of economics (e.g. Broome 2020), and to the extent that they do, the layperson / expert problem occurs in the case of the philosopher expert after all, even regarding technical issues.

If so, this adds to the epistemic asymmetries in the treatment of moral questions and normative issues that are *prima facie* likely to increase when the proposed experts are moral and political philosophers. Even those who argue that 'philosophers are no better equipped (…) for answering questions about what is morally right', and so that philosophers have no 'moral expertise' (in this respect), admit that they may still have expertise 'in other issues related to morality, for instance in identifying the structure of moral arguments and analyzing the relationship between general and situation-specific moral claims' (Hansson 2020, p. 139). It is generally recognized that proper moral and political philosophers score high on conceptual competence and theoretical accuracy (Alexander 2016) and tend to have 'superior analytical abilities regarding moral matters' (Niv and Sulitzeanu-Kenan 2022), in addition to their intimate knowledge of theories and arguments within this branch of philosophy. Due to this expertise among philosophers, their discussions are not simply for anyone to understand and assess, irrespective of education and training; a well-known point for anyone who has read an academic journal in philosophy. Similarly, policy reports informed by philosophical arguments may also be a hard read because they draw on complex normative theories, for instance regarding health priority or criminal justice, but also because of how philosophical arguments may be intertwined with complex scientific arguments (Bertram 1997). This being said, philosophers may contribute to the quality of moral deliberations in other respects as well, for instance by bringing in trained 'value-sensitivity' (Kovács 2010), or improved 'all-considered judgments' (Rasmussen 2016), and in such cases it may be easier to identify a 'crossover' between what philosophers and citizens do (Lamb 2020, p. 910).

Finally, philosophers' contributions could also be called into question particularly during times of social and political change, where new frameworks and paradigms are introduced and compete with old, and the question of which philosophers we should let ourselves be guided by becomes even less straightforward. A well-known example is how the rise of new social movements during the 1960s changed

knowledge interests in the human and social sciences, and a new type of philosophy inspired by ‘critical theory’ set a different standard for philosophical scholarship. Internal intellectual dynamics make a difference as well. Recently, the rise of experimental philosophy has challenged previous conceptions of what good philosophers do. This adds to a situation where philosophy is already a multi-paradigmatic discipline with controversies around foundational issues, even if disagreements arguably run no less deep in disciplines such as political science or law.

The remaining list of epistemic worries about the political role of experts concerns expert biases and mistakes of different types. It may be granted that proper philosophers are especially trained in formulating valid arguments and identifying fallacies (Hansson 2020) and possess ‘a genuine expertise in a variety of cognitive tasks’ (Williamson 2011). Initially, the worry about cognitive mistakes seems thus less urgent, and studies of bioethicists and of philosophers in advisory committees give several examples of how philosophers, due to their cognitive and analytical skills, contribute to sharper and more substantive conceptualizations of moral alternatives and dilemmas (e.g. Wolff 2011).

However, at a closer look the worry to a certain extent sticks, while taking on special features. First, it is one thing to make valid arguments in academic research; another to perform within the information flows and complex environments of a governance setting. The tendency to make inferences based on heuristics and shortcuts, is primarily linked to humans’ limited capacity for information processing, and philosophers engaged in policy advice are unlikely to escape. Second, a dominant method in moral and political philosophy is to establish ‘reflective equilibrium’ between the conclusions of normative arguments and moral intuitions (e.g. Conte 2022), for instance a conclusion about policy choice and intuitions about whether the effects of such policies are defensible. Intuitions can, however, be biased (see Schwitzgebel and Cushman 2015), and although some studies show a ‘slight advantage’ for philosophers (Horvath and Wiegmann 2021, p. 342), there is little evidence that philosophers’ intuitions are significantly less biased than those of non-philosophers (e.g. Nado 2014; Schwitzgebel and Cushman 2015). Finally, philosophers’ inclination to focus on concepts and argumentative relations before empirical detail (Lamont 2009), along with their sometimes limited historical and contextual knowledge of policy issues (Wolff 2018), may compromise forecasting and approximations of long-term developments.

Such features of philosophers’ epistemic orientation can also result in disciplinary biases, potentially no less distorting than the disciplinary biases of other expert professions. Whereas lawyers may overlook non-judicial aspects of policy problems, and economists may exclude dimensions that cannot be transformed into objects of mathematical calculation, philosophers may disregard descriptive and contextual complexities that are typically the topics of empirical science, not philosophy. However, all philosophers are not the same (see e.g. the contextualist critique of evidence-based policy-making in Cartwright and Hardie 2012), and the more applied training in philosophy may soften the drift toward exaggerated abstractness.

Regarding biases induced by self-interests, it is likely that philosophers mostly have less connections to parties with firm economic interests in the issue under scrutiny, such as corporations, compared to, for instance, economists or medical

scientists. Still, to the extent that philosophers are increasingly relied on as policy advisers, conflicts of interest can occur, for instance between an interest in being loyal to the government to ensure new assignments and broader academic and public interests. The inclination to stick to previously held positions to bolster professional reputation is also likely to apply to philosopher experts and other experts alike.

Moral and political philosophers may have ideological outlooks and moral views—like all other experts—but it is an advantage that they typically will try to explicate normative assumptions and positions and their implications. An important source of ideological or political bias in expert advice is the often vague and implicit treatment of normative questions. Still, philosophers may also have political biases which they are unaware of, and even if they take an argumentative approach to certain normative issues, other normative issues may be disregarded. Philosophy as a discipline has generally avoided strong accusations of leanings towards the political Left or to the Right. Yet, there are debates about whether certain dominant frameworks have ideological underpinnings; it has, for instance, been argued recently by Katrina Forrester (2019), that post-war political philosophy has been developed 'in the shadow of' John Rawls's political liberalism (for a critique, see Freeman 2020).

Moral and political philosophers have traditionally been less central in elite networks, but their increased involvement in governance is about to change their role, and it was maybe always the case that philosophers have a social position that easily tilts them toward elite conceptions of political problems. Yet sociological and demographic factors do not seem to predict philosophical views among philosophers (e.g. Yaden and Anderson 2021). Arguably, philosophers involved in policymaking can also be hard to control for governments, because many of the ethics boards where philosophers take part have been allowed to function at arm's length, but also because philosophers' training makes them insistent to define their own normative basis, rather than uncritically adopt any political mandate handed over. Still, the picture is mixed, as recent studies highlight the often varied selective and political uses of ethicists' advice (Littoz-Monnett 2020; see also Plomer 2008).

Furthermore, among philosophers, as in other disciplines, there may be tendencies to write with unnecessary jargon to please fellows, and elitist attitudes that underestimate laypersons' ability to provide sound moral argument. Incentives in contemporary academia to prioritize excellence above public engagement and dissemination have also heavily influenced philosophy.

Finally, it is well known that experts may have poor political judgment, but it is likely that the technocratic inclination to derive moral and political conclusions somehow seamlessly from 'evidence' and instrumental considerations is less persuasive among moral and political philosophers. Yet the problem of unfeasible recommendations may be significant, given the high prestige of ideal theory and many philosophers' limited interest in context and feasibility (Wolff 2011).

To sum up, the layperson-expert problem not so much decreases as changes shape in the case of the philosopher expert; whereas philosophers sometimes lack the technical expertise that policy professionals typically possess, asymmetries between philosophers and non-philosophers may be considerable in the moral domain. Philosophers have also cognitive and disciplinary biases that may be worrisome from

an epistemic point of view, such as an insufficient regard for context and empirical nuance, and their involvement in governance may spur new conflict of interests and cooptation challenges. At the same time, the conceptual competence and theoretical training of moral and political philosophers are likely to facilitate sophistication in their normative considerations, and the applied turn may modify their inclination to idealize. Even if no one is beyond the risk of undue value bias, philosophers' often explicit and analytical approach to questions of normative standards is likely to reduce such bias and complicates attempts to politicize and control their advice.

Depoliticization and its Implications—and the Promise of Democratic Theory

Whereas epistemic worries are variably, but significantly influenced by the fact that the experts in question are philosophers, most democratic worries would seem to be rather unaffected, at least at a first glance. There are tensions between expertization and procedural fairness, and between expertization and the idea of the wisdom of crowds, irrespective of which experts we have in mind. Similarly, worries about too much delegation to the unelected, and how expertization may hamper a fair negotiation of social interests and a healthy circulation of political elites and contribute to political alienation, do not seem to hinge on whether the experts in question are philosophers, or, for instance, engineers or social scientists.

However, other democratic challenges are likely to intensify as the philosopher expert enters, particularly that of depoliticization. An expression of this is how most of the contributions that have addressed the legitimacy challenges that 'ethics experts' engagement in contemporary governance gives rise to (e.g. Hedlund 2014; Littoz-Monnet 2020), focus on how this engagement, as it becomes too extensive or takes the wrong shape, may come to disregard legitimate political contestation and reasonable disagreement on how to interpret and prioritize values to an extent that it 'appears incompatible with equal respect for the committed ethical searching of (…) (all) citizens', central to any democracy (Nussbaum 2002, p. 502). Arguably, modern democracies have already a persistent problem of silent technocratic depoliticization (Habermas 2015): A range of questions that are often depicted as purely technical and so delegated to experts, are in fact political and value-laden. An increasing use of philosophers in policy advice and ethical committees to push seemingly definitive answers to normative questions which citizens of polities that are 'culturally and morally diverse' may legitimately contest or disagree with (Plomer 2008, p. 839), and so 'unfairly strengthen some in preference to other moral positions' (Friele 2003, p. 301) adds a highly explicit variant of depoliticization 'detrimental to democracy' (Hedlund 2014, p. 282).

Furthermore, to the extent that the use of philosopher experts triggers this type of depoliticization—in addition to the standard depoliticization that we know from technocratic governance—other democratic worries may be intensified as well. The number of expert arrangements with delegated powers may increase to the extent that ethical advice and boards come in addition to existing expert arrangements, strengthening further the position of the unelected relative to the elected. Similarly, this depoliticization will interfere with the grammar

of democratic interest negotiation on yet another level: When experts are scientists, the risk is that conflicting interests are transformed into questions of technical efficiency and empirical effects; when experts are philosophers, the risk in addition is that conflicting interests are prematurely reduced to questions of the 'right' ethical answers. Arguably, yet another twist to political alienation is added if citizens not only stop feeling responsible for laws and policies *qua* technical governance devices, but also *qua* bearers of ethical and political judgment.

Still, the problematic depoliticization that could be triggered by ethicists' engagement in policy advice is rather outspoken—philosophers are involved when the issues under scrutiny are recognized as value-ridden and called upon explicitly to deal with them. From the perspective of democratic control and criticism, this explicitness is arguably an advantage, compared to when normative questions are swept under the carpet and left to be treated by experts with a technocratic mindset.

Effects on other democratic worries seem to be even more mixed. Elitist attitudes among philosopher experts may result in arrogant treatment of non-philosophers, but there are also rich traditions of respectful dialogue in philosophy, and some philosophers operate as experts as well as conversationally oriented intellectuals. Many moral and political philosophers are likely to have a self-image as relatively 'free-floating', bound in their policy investigations primarily by the disciplinary and argumentative standards of philosophy. This may make them distant to and contemptuous of the messy compromises of democratic politics and other political actors' exposure of interests and attachments. At the same time, philosophers from this branch may have a keener understanding than other expert professions of how democratic political controversy can involve disagreement over values, and not only reflect conflict of interests and conflict over facts.

Finally, philosophers, particularly trained in argumentation through their education, can, on the one hand, come to contribute to increasing an already worrisome dominance of expert reasoning in democratic deliberations, and to marginalizing non-expert voices and concerns. However, importantly, on the other hand, philosophers who work on democratic theory can also contribute valuably to an increased public understanding of democratic norms and institutions, including an awareness of the varied pitfalls of expertization. Too much or the wrong kind of political power to theorists, even as they theorize democracy, may be democratically worrisome, but an institutionalization of public deliberations more informed by insights from philosophers of democracy also bears profound promise.

In short, when experts are philosophers, it is not least the democratic worry about depoliticization that is intensified, and as a result of this intensification, other worries regarding, for instance, exaggerated delegation and alienation of the citizenry may increase as well. Effects on other democratic worries are more mixed, and the explicit approach to value considerations cultivated in this part of philosophy and broader dissemination of lessons from democratic theory may prove immensely valuable for democracy.

The Philosopher Expert—and the Design of Expert Bodies

Worries about experts' political role are sometimes treated as being beyond mitigation. Seemingly, we are then left with the unattractive alternatives of either bashing expertise or just living with its dysfunctional effects, hoping that the benefits of including experts in governance will somehow outweigh the costs. Here the issue is rather approached as one of institutional design: Given the set and shape of worries that the presence of philosopher experts in governance give rise to, which measures could be taken?

Mitigating Epistemic Worries

Regarding the epistemic worries, at least three types of measures can be put in place to better ensure that the experts we rely on are trustworthy, and to alleviate biases and mistakes in expert bodies (see also Christensen et al. 2022). These measures are no less important when the involved experts include philosopher experts and should be tailored toward the possibility that they do.

Targeting *expert behavior,* the first type of measures are those that contribute to ensuring that experts operate in accordance with sound epistemic norms. Investigatory procedures based on such norms can be spelled out in laws and guidelines, for instance that expert advice should be based on scientific research or other validated knowledge, answer to its mandate, and take a deliberative approach to value judgment. This is crucial also in cases where moral and political philosophers are involved, for instance in an ethics board, to safeguard against selective and anecdotal treatments of factual issues, context-insensitivity, and exaggerated certainty regarding moral conclusions. There can also be procedures for sanctioning sloppy work, and for excluding experts with bad records or with a stake in the matter. As philosophers enter politics and policy advice, conflict of interest assessments must be made, and come in addition to checks on the quality and relevance of their academic merits.

Targeting *expert judgment*, the second type of measures are those that contribute to holding expert accountable by having their explanations and assessments put under review in different fora. Such measures are also crucial in the case of philosopher experts. The most obvious forum for testing judgments is that of immediate peers, for instance when engineers are being questioned by other engineers, psychiatrists or architects by other psychiatrists or architects—or philosophers by other philosophers, including those with dissenting views or who argue based on alternative fundamental presuppositions. However, review from other disciplines may be crucial as well, for instance that philosophers' factual and technical considerations are checked by specialists in relevant empirical research areas, and their policy recommendations by other policy professionals. Epistemic considerations may also suggest scrutiny in more and broader fora, for instance by bureaucrats who can test the feasibility of philosophers' policy advice against their administrative experience, or competent stakeholders with special insights in what works on the ground. Fora of the particularly affected and concerned, but also parliaments and the public sphere at

large may be decisive to scrutinize philosopher experts' ethical judgments and moral considerations. Importantly, demands can be put on philosophers along with other experts to explain the limits of their competence. For example, a philosopher expert may have no special competence in law or economics, or be a specialist in some area within bioethics, but know less about discussions on climate justice or just tax systems.

A third type of measures target the *organization* of expert inquiry and judgment: Here an obvious concern is avoidance of undue political control, as ethics boards and committees can also be politicized and made into strategic tools for governments. Another concern is avoidance of group think, confirmation and other biases by ensuring that experts make their inquiries and assessments in deliberative groups characterized by relevant cognitive pluralism (Mercier 2011; Koppl 2018). This may speak for including philosophers in expert bodies dominated by other expert professions, for instance in an advisory committee on social policy mandated to interrogate issues of distributive justices, or a committee on migration regulation tasked to recommend legislation in a landscape of conflicting rights. However, it speaks also against expert bodies, for instance ethical committees, that consist exclusively or predominantly of ethicists and other philosophers, and a practice of delegating assignments of ethical assessments, for instance of a new technology, to a single 'wise man' such as a philosophy professor.

This is not to say that measures of these three sorts are enough; the epistemic credentials of experts' advice depend on the design of expert bodies, but also on features of the broader set of public institutions that affect the recruitment and behavior of experts. Central as well are no doubt the epistemic virtues and strategies that are developed and cultivated within academic and professional communities, including among philosophers (Wolff 2018). Yet institutions matter, and one should resist the tendency to conceive of philosophers as somehow beyond institutional norms and incentives.

Mitigating Democratic Worries

Importantly, the measures that address epistemic worries may also mitigate some of the democratic ones. Institutionalizing a deliberative ethos among experts is likely to have epistemic benefits, but also targets disrespect and expert arrogance. Accountability of experts in broader fora may reduce the risks of expert biases and mistakes but can also safeguard against the new depoliticization and alienation pressures introduced by the rise of philosopher experts and curtail the political power of the unelected. Efforts to increase cognitive diversity are important for epistemic reasons, but have also democratic credentials, for instance when they result in stronger civil society and citizen representation.

In addition, there are other ways to 'democratize expertise' (Krick 2021). There are democratic reasons for introducing measures to ensure descriptive representation in advisory arrangements, for instance to increase the proportion of women or ethnic minorities, even without firm evidence of epistemic benefits. Making ethics committees more transparent, for instance by publishing background documents, or by

having committees consult and engage with lay audiences, may or may not increase the epistemic credentials of their advice, but it enables democratic control and voice. Establishing ethics bodies in parliament may contribute to improving the quality of policies and decisions, but may be important even if it does not, as it contributes to keeping the elected in 'the driver's seat', and to counteracting exaggerated depoliticization and delegation.

Still, when democratizing expertise has clear epistemic costs, for instance when transparency in the shape of public and media exposure hampers free-spirited deliberations among experts, or spurs increased pressures from lobby groups, or when the inclusion of lay knowledge results in undue and disproportional consideration of arguments that are irrelevant or invalid, there is a case for prioritizing epistemic credentials above democratization, granted that the primary normative function of expert bodies within the division of labor of democratic systems is epistemic (Christiano 2012). Moreover, addressing contemporary distrust in experts and elites, alienation tendencies, delegation overloads, depoliticization, etc., calls for a range of measures and policies; obviously, a one-dimensional focus on redesign and democratization of committee systems and advisory arrangements will not do.

Concluding Remarks

This paper has discussed epistemic and democratic worries raised by the presence of philosopher experts in contemporary governance, and suggested measures to alleviate them. Philosophers are vulnerable to biases that may reduce the quality of their advice, and the characteristics of their expertise and controversies around what their competences amount to make it hard to distinguish proper from less proper philosopher experts. Reliance on philosopher experts may also intensify democratic worries not least due to the depoliticization pressures that the introduction of ethics expertise tends to give rise to. Still, philosophers have competences and orientations that policy discussions and democratic deliberations are likely to profit from. Worries about philosopher experts may moreover be mitigated by means of a proper design of expert arrangements. Confronted with the genuine epistemic risks and democratic challenges of contemporary governance, any quick fix is obviously unavailable, but when institutionalized in the right way, philosophers' involvement in present-day policymaking bears significant promise.

The discussions provided have some limitations. First, several philosophical discussions that deserve more attention have been left aside, for instance regarding concepts such as 'moral expertise', 'political legitimacy', and 'ideology', and the relationship between epistemic and democratic concerns. Second, the proposed recommendations of mitigating measures are presented in relatively abstract terms. Discussions of institutional design should ideally draw upon the more detailed experiences from real-world institutions. Thirdly, even if the paper has built on empirical studies of philosophers' competences, views, and behavior, existing scholarship is limited, and more studies are needed. It should be looked more closely into whether there are systematic differences in the epistemic orientation among different subgroups of moral and political philosophers.

Still, the paper has tried to fill a peculiar a gap in contemporary political theory discussions that, despite a preoccupation with ‘experts’, have had relatively little to say about the proper role of philosopher experts in democratic societies. Furthermore, it has done so by combining different branches of philosophical and social science scholarship, siding with those who see a need for political-theoretical analyses that seek to bridge normative and empirical perspectives. Finally, the paper has put the rise of philosophy as a policy science on the scholarly agenda; a topic which is less esoteric than it may seem at a first glance.

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