



Being Moral
Moral Competence and the Limits
of Reasonable Doubt

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Abstract

In this thesis, I argue that we should conceive of morality as a set of overlapping practices and of moral knowledge first and foremost as the competence to participate in these practices. On the basis of a Wittgensteinian understanding of language and meaning, I defend two interrelated claims: the claim that some propositions are beyond reasonable doubt in moral practices and the claim that understanding moral principles amounts to the mastery of those practices. My reflections on a number of propositions which it seems impossible to doubt from a moral standpoint lead me to the view that for a morally competent agent, some propositions are removed from doubt. In conceiving of justification as a response to doubt based on reasons, I follow Wittgenstein and those contemporary philosophers who defend what are called 'contextualist' approaches. Given the close relationship between justification and doubt, the claim that some propositions are beyond reasonable doubt in moral practices implies that certain philosophical demands for justification make no sense. Like contextualists, I oppose both foundationalist and coherentist accounts of moral justification and moral knowledge. Unlike them, I argue that moral knowledge ultimately amounts to *knowledge how*. This practical knowledge involves cognitive as well as emotional capacities, which are developed through training. On the basis of my account of moral competence, I am able to reject the view that morality can be justified from an extra-moral standpoint. The 'why be moral question' turns out to be one of those purely philosophical questions which lack a role in practice. Despite denying the availability of any practice-independent standards of moral truth and critique, my account allows for moral criticism and moral progress.



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Bio

Julia Hermann graduated in Philosophy and Political Science from the University of Heidelberg. During her graduate studies at the EUI she spent one semester as a visiting student researcher at the Philosophy Department of the University of California, Berkeley. Her main research interests include the philosophy of the later Wittgenstein and its implications for moral philosophy, theories of moral justification and moral knowledge, moral education, moral competence as well as the role of emotions in moral judgment. She is moreover interested in a range of issues within the field of political philosophy, both historical and contemporary. As a Teaching Fellow in the European Master's Programme in Human Rights and Democratisation in Venice in the academic year 2010/2011 she taught theories of International Relations.