

Elizabeth Fricker. Innsbruck, December 2016

Title: The Prizes and Perils of Trusting Others.

Abstract: In the modern world, each one of us enjoys huge benefits arising from the exercise of specialised epistemic and practical expertises by others. One depends for these benefits on these others who possess skills that one lacks oneself. This dependence is direct when one trusts what an expert in some domain tells one, or relies on an expert to exercise a specialist practical skill on one's behalf; and indirect, when one relies directly on complex machines and technology designed by such experts.

This dependence engenders risks, as well as gains. Moreover, it may be that one forgoes something that is part of human flourishing, when one fails to acquire a skill, and instead relies entirely on others, or on devices designed and created by others, to achieve a practical end. I consider these matters. In particular, I consider the status of the following principle, considered as applying to all humans:

SkillsHaveIntrinsicValue (SHIV): For any possible human skill (practical-and/or-epistemic), one has some reason (pro tanto reason) to acquire that skill; where this reason is not merely instrumental; and applies to one regardless of whether one has subjective inclination to acquire that skill.

I will argue that the unrestricted principle SHIV has no obvious defence available; but that there is a plausible case to be made that each one of us has some reason to acquire some skills (to bring it about that there are some skills that one possesses); and furthermore, that there are certain core skills - whose possession and exercise is essential to human agency - that each and every one of us has some reason to acquire. I suggest that the ability to locate oneself in one's environment, and to navigate one's way around it unaided, is such a core skill.

Eizabeth Fricker. Fellow, Magdalen College Oxford, and Lecturer in Philosophy (Associate Professor), University of Oxford.