

ETHICAL EXPERTISE

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Draft, eventually in: Coady (ed.) (2018) *The Routledge Handbook of Applied Epistemology*, Routledge

In the past thirty years or so, more and more ethical ‘consultants’ have been hired by hospitals, businesses and governments (Aulisio et al 2003). In carrying out their job, they seem to possess and to be offering the fruits of some kind of expertise.¹ If we take such consultants as a central example, we can then ask three inter-related sets of philosophical questions.

- *The existence problem.* Does ethical expertise exist? What exactly is it – a body of knowledge, or a skill, or something else? How does it differ from other kinds of legitimate expertise? If it does not exist, what exactly do the above consultants possess?
- *The credentials problem.* Who exactly is the ethical expert, and how is she to be identified by non-experts? How does such a person become an ethical expert? Do people with a PhD in moral philosophy, for example, automatically count as ethical experts? (See Cholbi 2007.)
- *The deference problem.* Should ethical non-experts defer to experts? Why exactly? Is it because ethical experts reliably do something better? What does deference involve here, exactly?

In this article I want to survey some recent answers to these three sets of questions, and develop my own sceptical position. In the final sections, I want to link the questions to similar debates surrounding the problem of ethical testimony and wisdom.

Legitimate expertise

I will take it as relatively uncontroversial that there are legitimate experts in many different domains, such as the medical doctor, the tax advisor, the professional musician, the car mechanic, and the historian.² In each domain, the expertise comprises a body of reliable and demonstrable knowledge and/or skills that are greater than those of the average adult. The expert “gets it right” (a diagnosis, a prediction), “does it better” (more efficiently, profitably, beautifully), or simply “knows more” (academic disciplines, fan clubs). Often the expert has also undergone a domain-specific training at a recognisable institution, where experts teach

¹ Two points about terminology.

First, I will take ethics to be synonymous with morality, and ethical expertise as synonymous with moral expertise. Some authors make use of the distinction, such as Steinkamp et al (2008b), in their response to Scofield (2008). Rasmussen (2011) uses the distinction to argue that *moral* expertise is dubious for lots of familiar reasons, while *ethical* expertise is legitimately claimed, not so much by individuals, but by ethics committees.

Second, I want to avoid the term ‘ethicist’, which is not only ugly, but also has misleading phonetic associations with the legitimate expertise of the anaesthetist and physicist.

² For a general overview of expertise, see Selinger (2006).

them to be experts through a defined career path, and grant them a certificate upon successful completion.

Different domains of expertise will be more or less accessible to non-experts, depending on the amount of 'folk-knowledge' about the domain: if the roof is still leaking, it is clear that the recent expert intervention has not worked, and the expert's authority is thereby weakened. Some domains are so esoteric that we lack the folk-knowledge to do much more than take the expert's word for it (as when we have our healthy kids vaccinated).

Normally it is reasonable for me, as an avowed non-expert, to defer to the expert. This might mean that I reject my own intuitions on the matter and accept the expert claim; it might mean I refuse to think anything at all. On some occasions, as with the leaking roof, I will have grounds to ask the expert to re-examine her handiwork, but that does not mean I have a better idea of what to do. On other occasions I might ignore the doctor's advice if it sounds too painful or too expensive. But note that in so doing I am not disagreeing with the doctor; I am weighing costs and risks and benefits in accordance with the doctor's expert advice.

Every domain of expertise is defined by a certain body of knowledge, with a core that all experts must accept in order to be an expert in that domain. This is compatible with a penumbra where experts can reasonably disagree with each other without undermining their claim to expertise and without yielding license to general scepticism about the possibility of expertise in that domain.³ Indeed, every disagreement requires a shared background of agreement against which the two incompatible claims can be recognised as a disagreement about a single problem. (An academic discipline can be partly defined by the long-standing disagreements between its members.) This fact allows us to reject one obvious objection to the possibility of ethical expertise, which runs as follows: given that so many people have such profound, intractable disagreements about so many ethical issues (be they matters of policy or matters of once-only decision), it is surely impossible for one person to pronounce on an ethical matter with the requisite authority.⁴

The best response to this is: we can and do agree on many ethical issues; indeed we must agree on many issues in order to take the trouble, in many instances, of trying to persuade another person ethically. In contrast, it is most often pointless – and we *know* it is pointless – to try to persuade someone on a genuine matter of taste.⁵ The second best response to this is: in many ethical disputes there are mistakes and gaps in matters of fact. It may be that the acquisition of new facts by one or both parties may lead to *some* convergence in some disputes.⁶

³ See the project 'When Experts Disagree': <http://whenexpertsdisagree.ucd.ie/> [accessed Jan 2017]

⁴ For an explicit discussion of authority in the context of medical ethics consultation, see Agich (1995).

⁵ There is one disanalogy between scientific disagreement and ethical disagreement. In the scientific case, scientists will usually agree on a particular test, either now, or under conditions of sufficient funding or time, that would reveal the truth to both disputants. In the case of an ethical disagreement, it is possible to imagine the disputants to be *fully* informed of all relevant information, such that no test would generate new evidence to resolve the issue. This would lend support to the sceptical position, although the point about the widespread background agreement remains.

⁶ See McGrath 2008; Archard 2011; and the most recent version of the 'argument from disagreement' by Cross 2015.

Given the above understanding of legitimate expertise, the biggest question is whether ethics is a domain that would admit of expertise of an analogous type. Many people are sceptical about this right away. In the relevant *Routledge Encyclopaedia* entry, Hooker (1998) says:

In mainstream Western culture to call someone a moral expert would seem ironic. It would typically be thought to suggest that the person is judgemental, interfering, condescending, self-important, hypocritical, and perhaps closed-minded about morality.

Many philosophers are also sceptical. Here is a famous passage by C.D. Broad (2014: 314):

It is no part of the professional business of moral philosophers to tell people what they ought or ought not to do [...] Moral philosophers, as such, have no special information not available to the general public, about what is right and what is wrong; nor have they any call to undertake those hortatory functions which are so adequately performed by clergymen, politicians, leader-writers ...

Perhaps the most scathing of all:

“Clinical ethics” is not medicine, which is to say it is not science, which is to say it is to a very large degree whatever anyone wants it to be [...] The surgeon’s recommendation rests on an agreed upon set of facts and criteria [...] The philosopher’s recommendation depends on a set of criteria that is not agreed upon, but varies from culture to culture and, more and more, from individual to individual. One man’s categorical imperative is another man’s heresy. (Shalit 1997: 24)

A credible account of ethical expertise will have to meet this sort of spontaneous scepticism. Some philosophers are confident. Bernard Gesang (2010: 158) declares forthrightly: “only ethicists reach correct moral judgements with high probability and for the right reasons,” whereas “the decisions of ordinary people can only be dominated by intuitions.”⁷ In a seminal piece in the modern discussion of the subject, Peter Singer says:

someone familiar with moral concepts and with moral arguments, who has ample time to gather information and think about it, may reasonably be expected to reach a soundly based conclusion more often than someone who is unfamiliar with moral concepts and moral arguments and has little time. So moral expertise would seem to be possible. (1972: 117)⁸

In between the confidence of Gesang and Singer on the one hand, and the scepticism of Broad and Shalit on the other, lie a number of possible versions of ethical expertise.

One version could start with moral realism – the existence of moral facts – and argue that this must entail the existence of ethical experts. Since most of us, in our ethical beliefs and concern about the world and in our activities of ethical argument with others, seem to presuppose the existence of some kind of ethical truth of the matter, then most of us should accept the existence of ethical experts, at least in principle. Here is Sarah McGrath, arguing on the basis of the analogy between ethical and non-ethical facts (2011: 12):

⁷ For a rejection of Gesang, see Cowley (2011)

⁸ For a useful dialectic, see Crosthwaite (1982) in support of ethical expertise. Cowley (2005) responds, more sceptically. Crosthwaite (2005) responds to Cowley. And then Eriksson et al (2006) comment on the debate.

After all, when it comes to deep and unobvious facts about the empirical world, we readily defer to others [...] who are better placed to discover those facts than we are. In such cases, even a very sweeping kind of deference to expert opinion seems appropriate. If, similarly, there is a domain of deep and unobvious moral facts, then it is natural to expect that some of us—intuitively, the "moral experts"—would be better placed to discover these facts than others. In principle then, moral deference should strike us as no more peculiar than deference about scientific matters or geography.

It is worth stressing, however, that ethical expertise does not *require* moral realism (Yoder 1998), since there are many other metaphysical conceptions of ethical belief acquisition and ethical dispute resolution that would be compatible with various kinds of non-realism. I fear I do not have the space to say anything more about the metaphysics in this piece.

A familiar form of ethical 'expertise'

Before we examine the putative expertise of the ethics consultant more closely, it is worth separating off one familiar kind of ethical expertise: that of the adult in comparison with the child. The child struggles not only to learn ethical concepts and apply them correctly to paradigms ("Harry Potter is brave"), but also struggles to identify and perform the brave action herself, under encouragement. In both aspects, the child will rely on regular feedback, not only from her parents and other authority figures, but indeed from *any* adult. In this way, the child's struggle to learn ethical concepts is part of her wider struggle to master a form of life. This includes, centrally, learning a natural language as a mother tongue; but it also involves learning the key ethical practices of e.g. promise-keeping, reason-giving, praise and blame; learning other quasi-ethical conventions (politeness, tidiness, patience); and generally learning how to orient oneself in the adult world. Becoming a competent adult means becoming an expert relative to non-expert children, and that includes ethical expertise in this basic sense of language, conduct and understanding.⁹

It is not clear if we can really call this 'expertise' -- if every competent adult is an expert, then effectively none are, at least in the sense of the legitimate expertise described at the beginning. But this point about the moral education of children is important for two reasons. First, it shows how *familiar* ethical problems, ethical deliberation and ethical advice are, right from our youngest years; it is part of the deep fabric of all human lives, unlike the esoteric details of tax law and the human body. Second, it means that any ethical theory has to be anchored in common-sense morality, and any expert ethical advice has to be intelligible to the non-expert.¹⁰ The tax lawyer and the car mechanic and the dentist can try to explain things in lay terms, but in the end they may be forced to say "I have expertise and you do not, so I'm afraid I cannot fully explain the reasoning behind my advice and you will just have to trust me." But the putative ethics expert has to give intelligible reasons for the advice she gives, reasons that go all the way down. The client, in trying to deal with her ethical perplexity, then has to take these reasons or leave them; but if she takes them, she thereby makes them *her own* reasons, without deference.

⁹ Driver (2013) develops the analogy between language and ethics further.

¹⁰ Archard (2011:119) develops this point. But see the criticisms of Archard by Gordon (2014) and Vogelstein (2015).

This is not to deny the existence of ethical expertise, but only to suggest that if it does exist, it has a very different nature than the kinds of non-ethical expertise we surveyed at the beginning. One difference is that when the putative ethical expert attempts to persuade the non-expert, she is not essentially trying to impart new information (though she may be doing that as well) but is instead trying to bring the non-expert *to see* the situation from her point of view. However, there is an important sense in which the non-expert retains the ‘rational right’ to refuse, that is, without necessarily being thought irrational or culpably stubborn. This is a point about moral autonomy made familiar by Kant. Any significant moral deference vitiates the moral value of any subsequent action performed out of such deference.¹¹

If ethical expertise involves bringing-to-see by means of reasons, what else can we say about such expertise? Let me return to the point about ethics being about the mastery of ethical concepts and of the form of life within which those concepts make sense. This implies not only a general expertise among all adults *qua* competent, but also a continuum along which some adults might develop further than others. Bernard Williams puts the point in terms of ‘thick’ concepts, which are concepts that are partly descriptive and empirical, partly moral and action-guiding, concepts such as ‘brave’, ‘cruel’, or ‘treachery’, (as opposed to thin concepts such as ‘right’ or ‘good’). The thought is that an attenuated form of expertise might comprise the skilful deployment of thick concepts as part of the bringing-to-see.

If we concentrate on thick concepts, we do indeed have something like the notion of a helpful informant. We have the notion of a helpful advisor. This is somebody who may be better at seeing that a certain outcome, policy, or way of dealing with the situation falls under a concept of this kind, than we are in our unassisted state, and better than other people who are less good at thing about such matters. [...] he or she can see, for instance, the situation as being an example of treachery, something that hadn’t occurred to the rest of us. (1995a: 235)

Perhaps this could be taken as an encounter between a ‘more expert’ and a ‘less expert’ individual, but it is important to see how far this remains from the tax advisor, doctor and car mechanic. The obvious problem is that Williams’s helpful advisor may not be able to point to any training course that establishes her credentials to a degree sufficient to be employed as a hospital ethics consultant.¹²

The moral philosopher as ethical expert?

Insofar as the ethics consultant is the most obvious candidate for ethical expertise, then the most obvious career path to become such a consultant would be through university education in professional ethics and philosophy. Such an education would introduce the student to the long-standing debates in applied ethics, but would also encourage the

¹¹ McGrath (2011: 31) puts it thus: “if an agent Φ ’s because of her belief that Φ -ing is the right thing to do, but she does not understand why Φ -ing is the right thing to do, this detracts from the status of her action.” The extension of this is a principle of democratic citizenship, according to which democratic participants should be encouraged to understand the issues and vote on them autonomously rather than deferring to ‘experts’. (Dietrich 2012).

¹² Williams 1995b develops this point further, while strongly rejecting the idea of a full ethical expertise comparable to that in the legitimate domains surveyed.

student to take sides within the debates, and to increase their precision and subtlety of thought and self-expression. If they do well on their philosophy course, they might become a philosophy teacher, and would then introduce the next generation to the debates.

The philosophy teacher is clearly an expert in philosophy; the moral philosophy teacher is clearly an expert in moral philosophy. But such expertise is limited to the classroom and to the particular activity of teaching philosophy; it is not yet ethical expertise. The philosophy teacher has to convey a certain amount of information, e.g. about what Kant wrote, or about what moral realism is, or about Nagel's interpretation of Kant. Beyond that, however, the philosophy teacher can present and argue for her own interpretation of Kant, or for her own position on euthanasia. Importantly, when she argues -- and this is surely the essence of philosophy, and of the teaching of philosophy -- she is implicitly or explicitly inviting her students to *disagree* with her. They may need some knowledge of Kant to disagree about her interpretation of Kant; but with euthanasia, the discussion is, as it were, open much wider. Throughout, the fact that the teacher has a PhD in philosophy does not guarantee that her interpretation of Kant or her position on euthanasia is 'correct' or 'better'. She may manage to impress and persuade some of her students; she may anger others and provoke more or less articulate counter-argument. Or she may leave them indifferent.¹³

Even when the student come to disagree with the philosophy teacher's Kant interpretation or position on euthanasia, they still learn from the teacher's display of rigour and depth, the organisation of argument, the marshalling of evidence etc. This is where she, as an expert, "does it better." But ethics is unlike medicine or tax law precisely because "doing it better" can apply to the depth and rigour without entailing that the substantive position correspond, or be more likely to correspond, to a truth of the matter. This 'procedural' conception of expertise allows us to avoid the pitfalls of "getting it right" when applied to ethical judgements: on the one hand the metaphysical pitfalls associated with moral realism, on the other hand the epistemological pitfalls associated with verifiability.¹⁴

For completeness, it is worth mentioning a third kind of expertise, alongside the 'substantive' expertise of the car mechanic and the procedural expertise of the philosophy teacher. Bruce Weinstein (1994) discusses the 'performative' expert, who manages to do it better (and to get it right), but without the ability to justify or explain it very deeply, or perhaps at all: in this respect many athletes and musicians are performative experts. It is revealing that the majority of athletes and musicians are unable to succeed as coaches or teachers or commentators because they cannot explain what they do to non-experts. Many substantive experts also have moments of performative expertise, when they invoke their experience and judgement to 'see' the correct option, without being fully able to justify it at the time.

Can the philosophy teacher deploy her procedural expertise in the clinical ethics committee, and thereby approach a *bona fide* ethical expertise? Engelhardt (2002) describes the process

¹³ There is an additional element that applies to the ethics teacher, which does not apply to the car mechanic or the musician. The ethics teacher's *political opinions and religious beliefs* will often affect her substantive ethical beliefs. Once such 'background' beliefs are known, this may undermine the students' acceptance of the teacher's substantive ethical claims. See Powers (2005).

¹⁴ "By contrast [with non-moral judgement], there seems to be no analogous way to calibrate the accuracy or reliability of someone's moral judgement, because one lacks the relevant kind of independent access to the moral facts." (McGrath 2011: 26).

by which academic bioethicists are 'ordained' as secular ethical experts.¹⁵ With respect to the medical ethics consultant, there are two important principles that govern the relationship between the doctor and the consultant: first, it is the doctor who decides whether and when to call the ethics consultant in the first place; second, it is the doctor who makes the final treatment decision, and who carries full legal and ethical responsibility for that decision, regardless of whether the doctor summoned the consultant or heeded her advice. The ethical aspects of the situation might already be clear to the doctor. Or, if the doctor is ethically perplexed, she may prefer to discuss the matter with a colleague, or a friend, in order to come to see what ought to be done. If the doctor ends up calling the ethics consultant, she may ignore the advice entirely, and without 'owing' any reasons to the consultant. The doctor has just as much of a claim to ethical expertise, if not more, simply by having had to face these ethical dilemmas on a regular basis as part of her job, by having discussed many such dilemmas with her colleagues, and by having to defend many ethical decisions to patients, to families, to management and perhaps in the occasional malpractice suit.

Insofar as the medical ethics consultant can *facilitate* an ethical discussion at the clinical ethics committee, could she do so with expertise? Certainly. But it is not obvious why a specifically *philosophical* training would make someone a good facilitator of ethical discussions. People with many other non-medical backgrounds might be just as good.¹⁶ And every facilitator will increase their expertise on the job, and increase their authority in challenging the doctor's ethical position, as they learn more about the human body, about possible medical interventions, about the institutions of medicine and about medical law.¹⁷

Ethical testimony¹⁸

There are two further topics that need to be considered, both relevant to ethical expertise: ethical testimony and ethical wisdom. The debate about ethical testimony goes deeper into the question of what one person can learn, ethically, from another, be she putative expert or non-expert.

As such, the problem of ethical testimony begins upstream from the problem of ethical expertise, since the testimony in question makes no overt claim to authority, let alone to credentials. In the same way that I set out the problem of expertise by comparing 'legitimate' non-ethical forms to putative ethical forms, so too the literature on testimony

¹⁵ See the recent special issue of the *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* vol. 41 (2016), devoted to ethical expertise in the healthcare context.

¹⁶ Cf. Vogelstein: the ethical expert contributes to clinical decision-making through "(1) mediation and consensus-building, (2) clarification and explanation of moral issues, concepts and arguments" (2015: 330). Walker (1993) suggests that the ethics consultants can be 'architects' who keep space open for moral reflection and deliberation about professional practice.

The Medical Mediation Foundation in the UK offers relevant courses:

<http://www.medicalmediation.org.uk/medical-mediation-foundation/> [accessed January 2017]

¹⁷ Yoder (1998: 18) draws an interesting, but ultimately incomplete analogy. The ethics consultant is like a project manager, who is in charge of a team, who knows a little about every aspect of the project, and who coordinates, guides and ensures coherence. However, this is not the best analogy because even if the ethics consultant chairs the meeting, ultimately it is the doctor who is in overall charge of the 'project' and who bears legal and ethical responsibility for the final decisions.

¹⁸ The literature concerns the term 'moral testimony', but I will use 'ethical' without drawing any distinctions. The 2014 *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* vol. 88(1) has several pieces on moral testimony.

usually compares the non-ethical to the ethical, taking the former to be largely uncontroversial and necessary (see Coady 1992). When I am in a foreign town, it is rational to ask for directions, and to follow those directions (if they cohere with what else I know about the town); when I am unsure how to make a change in an institutional setting, I consult my colleague who has been demonstrably correct in her past advice (without claiming to be an expert on the institution). When I am ethically perplexed, I can ask my (non-expert) friend for advice. Here the sceptic would say that it is not appropriate to follow such advice blindly, without first 'adopting' the advice as mine. Let us explore this position. (The exception would again be with children who usually ought to defer to the ethical testimony of adults.)

As before, scepticism about ethical testimony essentially relies on the Kantian idea of moral autonomy. Hills (2009: 95), following Hopkins (2007), says:

Once you have reached maturity as an adult and have the ability to think about moral questions by yourself [...] you have strong reasons to do so, indeed that refusing to do so is unacceptable.

And Hills (2009: 94) offers the following example:

VEGETARIAN: Eleanor has always enjoyed eating meat but has recently realized that it raises some moral issues. Rather than thinking further about these, however, she talks to a friend, who tells her that eating meat is wrong. Eleanor knows that her friend is morally trustworthy and reliable, so she believes her and accepts that eating meat is wrong.

Sliwa (2012) defends ethical testimony by arguing that it is essentially no different from non-ethical testimony. Whenever we are ethically perplexed about whether to choose option A or Option B, we can, do, and should consult those whom we already trust, especially the judgement of a friend who already knows us well, who is thoughtful and caring, and who has given us good advice in the past. As Sliwa puts it, "in relying on someone else's moral judgement, we acknowledge that the other person is in a better epistemic position with respect to the particular moral judgement than we are" (Sliwa 2012: 179). Our own position, we acknowledge, might be undermined by ignorance of other relevant facts or implications or likely consequences, or undermined by more or less conscious bias or self-interest. A friend, almost by definition, is someone who has the ability and the standing and the concern to compensate for our ignorance and bias.

Sliwa makes an important point about the role of friends as ethical advisors, which is separate from the role of putative ethical expert at the hospital. However, she fails to undermine Hills's Kantian argument. Consider again Eleanor's conversion to vegetarianism, and how she might explain it to her surprised carnivorous friends. I suggest she would *not* say "I became a vegetarian because my friend advised me to;" instead, she would make reference to the *reasons* that her friend adduced for being a vegetarian, reasons which Eleanor herself chose to adopt as *her* reasons. The friend is part of the story of how she became a vegetarian, perhaps, but in ethical terms, what persuaded Eleanor was not the friend but the reasons.¹⁹ Of course counter-factually, Eleanor might have consulted other

¹⁹ Confusingly, Sliwa (2012: 181) draws an analogy between consulting an ethically discerning friend and consulting an "experienced supervisor" when learning how to read an X-ray. This would bring her point about

people, might have received the opposite advice, and might have made a different ethical decision (Sliwa 2012: 187).²⁰ But that does not take away from the fact that it is Eleanor who leads her life and makes her own ethical decisions based on the reasons available to her, regardless of the source (or indeed reasons which might just occur to her without consultation). Of course Eleanor might have been biased in any number of ways, but that does not undermine her moral autonomy: she may well revisit her ethical decision later, discover that she was biased, and changed her mind. But this too will be an expression of her autonomy.

There is a question here about the role of reasons, not only in cases of ethical persuasion, but also in cases of ethically changing one's mind. One could imagine a vegetarian friend gripping Eleanor by the arm, fixing her in the eye and *urging* her to stop taking part in the slaughter of animals. If Eleanor changes her mind, this will not be on the basis of new reasons supplied by the friend; nor would Eleanor explain her change of mind with reference to reasons: she might instead say something like: "I suddenly realised that I could no longer eat meat." The friend has not persuaded Eleanor, but has brought Eleanor to see something that she did not see before. I would accept this, but would deny that this is a case of deference to testimony, for the final assent – the final decision about what Eleanor puts in her mouth – remains Eleanor's.

Morgensen (2015) accepts a basic pessimism about the possibility of ethical testimony, and then seeks an explanation for it. He considers and rejects the Kantian autonomy line, in favour of an "ideal of authenticity," which sees ethical beliefs as central to one's self. As a result, it is particularly important that ethical beliefs come from within rather than without, and authenticity requires the individual to navigate a complex world of incentives and threats in order to decide-and-discover what she most cares about.

Wisdom

The above has been generally sceptical about the existence of ethical expertise and testimony. Such scepticism would seem to double when we turn to a similar concept, wisdom. For while it at least makes sense to ask what subject the expertise is on, how it was acquired, and what credentials might underpin it, none of that can easily be said about wisdom. Sometimes wisdom might just be a synonym for expertise; but when it is not, what is it exactly? And can one be a sceptic about the possibility of ethical expertise and yet acknowledge the existence of ethical wisdom?

Despite the greater cause for scepticism, the concept has a much older lineage than expertise, and is better covered in the philosophy encyclopedias, so I do not need to survey the scene;²¹ suffice to make some brief remarks to compare it to expertise. For a start, they are obviously not co-extensive: it is perfectly possible for a tax adviser and a car mechanic to lack wisdom, just as it is possible for a wise person to lack any credentials-based expertise in

moral testimony into the debate about ethical expertise. As I have been arguing, however, ethical discernment is very different from the clinical-diagnostic discernment because of the supervisor's clear authority and experience, and because of the inductive patterns and post-mortem verifiability underlying the diagnosis.

²⁰ There is a separate debate about whether the historical contingency of my present ethical views undermines any robust conception of ethical objectivism.

²¹ See Sharon Ryan's 2013 entry 'Wisdom' in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Nicholas Smith's 2002 entry 'Wisdom' in the *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. For other useful surveys, see Whitcomb (2011) and Grimm (2015).

a particular domain. Notoriously, it also seems to be perfectly possible for a moral philosopher to lack wisdom, especially a philosopher with a more technical approach to the ethics.²²

In parallel to the ethical 'expertise' that adults possess in comparison to children, so too adults necessarily have more enlightened self-interest: canny street-smartness, spotting connections and causal patterns, avoiding compromising situations, deferring gratification, and distinguishing between the useful and the pleasurable (Nozick 1989: 269). But wisdom is more than enlightened self-interest, and includes an ethical dimension; the wise person orients her life toward the good – at least according to the traditional conception. There is a debate about whether a life-long gangster such as Marlon Brando's Don Corleone can be wise, however revered and admired (and feared) he might be.

One essential difference between expertise and wisdom seems to be that the former is domain-specific, whereas we tend to think of the wise person having wisdom to offer across *many* domains, including new and unfamiliar domains; while at the same time relying on accurate self-knowledge to recognise the limits of her wisdom and the occasional need to defer to experts. While expertise is often based on training paths and credentials, there is no obvious single route to wisdom. Public figures such as Nelson Mandela and Mother Teresa seem to be wise in very different ways, without any necessary relation to their 'day jobs'. We could say that wisdom is an aspect of the person as such, of their particular character, rather than something detachable possessed by the person, like expertise.²³ Even though the expert may closely identify with their domain of expertise, it still makes sense to imagine the bank manager being quite ordinary outside the bank; whereas Mandela and Mother Teresa would be extraordinary in almost every context. (Although note the adage that "no man is a hero to his valet.")

In addition to wise public figures, each of us knows a great-aunt²⁴ whom we would consult because of a wisdom borne of many years of rich personal experience. But mere experience is not enough; there has to be a certain capacity to reflect on the experience, to build on it toward a deep sympathetic understanding of human beings, and to strive to articulate it accurately and forcefully. There also has to be a sense that the wise person is living their own life and nobody else's; and that they stand clearly behind everything they say. However, it is not accidental that the wise person (like the good person) will find it difficult to describe themselves as wise (or good), however entitled they might be.

Perhaps certain groups of people are more likely to develop wisdom than others. A long history of relatively intimate interaction with people, especially people from diverse backgrounds, and especially people in crisis, might help. I have in mind the wisdom of teachers, social workers, psychotherapists, priests, nurses and doctors. Perhaps novelists as

²² In the *London Review of Books* Vol. 24 No. 16 dated 22 August 2002, Stephen Mulhall offers a scathing review of Jeff McMahan's *The Ethics of Killing* (OUP 2001). While acknowledging the author's prowess and technical skill (expertise), Mulhall has severe doubts about McMahan's deeper understanding of morality and of the human condition (wisdom). Indeed, Mulhall notes that the dust jacket blurb (by Peter Singer) describes McMahan as "novel and ingenious" rather than "wise and insightful".

²³ Jason Smartwood (2012) tries to bring expertise and wisdom together by modelling wisdom on expert skill. Such stipulative resolution is fine as far as it goes, but I do not think it goes very far.

²⁴ Sliwa's understanding of a friend in her discussion of ethical testimony (see above) could be a case of a personally 'tailored' wisdom, based on her knowledge of me and my life.

well, given the extent and detail of their imaginary encounters with others. There is no guarantee that their experience will generate wisdom, of course: it might be just as likely to produce cynicism, and there is a real question about whether wisdom and cynicism are compatible. Similarly, prolonged adversity can make one wise or it can make one self-absorbed or bitter or petty, or it can crush the spirit.

John Kekes (1983: 277-78) sought to define wisdom by looking at what a paradigmatically unwise person lacked, and he chose Tolstoy's Ivan Illyich. Illyich clearly possessed cleverness, skill and expertise in many domains, as well as the necessary worldliness to get along in life well; and yet he was ignorant about the important questions of life, and therefore unprepared for the reality of his imminent death. In moving from panic and indignation to serene acceptance, we would be inclined to say that Illyich was growing wiser. I contend that this kind of 'ultimate' wisdom is a far richer notion than mere ethical expertise, and more appropriate for philosophical examination.

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