

Moral modesty, moral judgment and moral advice

A Wittgensteinian approach

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Moral philosophy has traditionally aimed for correct or appropriate moral judgments. Consequently, when asked for moral advice, the moral philosopher first tries to develop a moral judgment and then informs the advisee. The focus is on what the advisee should do, not on whether any advice should be given. There may, however, be various kinds of reasons not to morally judge, to be ‘morally modest’.

In the first part of this article, I give some reasons to be morally modest when moral advice is asked for. Second, I show how Wittgenstein radicalizes these reasons to such an extent that the very possibility of giving moral advice seems threatened. Third, I argue that taking Wittgenstein and the need for moral modesty seriously does not make moral advice impossible, but rather asks for a notion of moral advice in which moral advice is not necessarily linked to the ideal of a moral judgment. Fourth, I highlight some advantages of a Wittgensteinian notion of moral advice over traditional notions.

Keywords: Wittgenstein; ethics; moral modesty; moral advice; moral judgment

In philosophy the winner of the race is the one who can run most slowly.¹

Suppose that someone struggles with a moral problem. I take an example from Rush Rhees.² Alex has come to the conclusion that he must either leave his wife or abandon his work of cancer research. He asks Sarah for moral advice. What should she do? A simple answer is: she should work out a moral judgment and communicate her judgment to him, that is, tell him what he should do (leave his wife or abandon his work) or what would be right for him to do. She also has to explain convincingly how she came to that judgment, what her reasons are for

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thinking that he should do this or that. But are things as simple as that? There seem to be situations in which it is not appropriate to judge when moral advice is asked for, contexts in which what is needed is not a moral judgment, but, in Paul Johnston's words, moral modesty.³

In the first part of this article, I will give some reasons not to morally judge, to be morally modest when moral advice is asked for. Second, I will show how Wittgenstein radicalizes these reasons to such an extent that the very possibility of giving moral advice seems threatened. Third, I will argue that taking Wittgenstein and the need for moral modesty seriously does not make moral advice impossible, but rather asks for a notion of moral advice in which moral advice is not necessarily linked to the ideal of a moral judgment. Fourth, I will highlight some advantages of a Wittgensteinian approach to moral advice and show how it can account, in contrast to traditional conceptions of advice, for many appropriate answers in the example of Alex and Sarah.

I. Reasons to be morally modest

Let us stipulate that a person is morally modest in a certain situation if she believes that, in this situation, she should not morally judge and therefore withholds judgment.⁴ A distinction is sometimes made between judgment as a mental state and judgment as the linguistic expression of that state.⁵ The latter is not possible without the former, but the former is possible without the latter: someone can form a judgment and not express it. The reasons to be morally modest I will discuss are all reasons not to express judgment (although some of them are also reasons not to form a judgment), and I will therefore use 'to judge' as synonymous with 'to express judgment' unless otherwise indicated.

Questions as to the need for moral modesty have remained largely outside the scope of moral philosophy. When confronted with our example, the moral philosopher typically asks himself in the first place *what* Alex should do and *what* advice should be given, and no attention is paid to the question of *whether* it is at all appropriate to advise him or to tell him what to do. The moral philosopher tries to come to a correct or appropriate moral judgment, but seldom wonders whether he should judge at all. Moral judgments are mostly understood as 'judgments that apply [...] moral concepts to [...] actions, persons or personal qualities', and that is how I will use the term here.⁶ Although there is considerable disagreement over which concepts are moral, 'right', 'good', 'bad', 'wrong', 'duty' and concepts for virtues and vices ('courage',

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‘brutality’, ‘kindness’) are commonly taken to be such concepts. To morally judge Alex is to tell him what would be right, good, bad, wrong, courageous etc. for him to do or to tell him what he is obliged, should or ought to do.

What reasons can someone have not to morally judge when asked for moral advice? First, there are meta-ethical reasons. Suppose that Sarah is a meta-ethical emotivist who thinks that a moral judgment cannot be true or false and is nothing but the expression of an emotion, a merely personal emotional response. It is difficult to see how such a person could believe that moral expertise is possible or that there could be such a thing as useful moral advice.⁷ She could reason as follows: ‘I feel such-and-such about the situation, but why would that interest *you* and why would that tell you anything about what you should do? After all, your question was a question for moral advice. You want to find out what you should do, you did not ask for my feelings. You want to find out why you should do this or that and what reasons there are to do it, but I have no reasons for having this feeling, I just have it. So telling you how I feel will not help you.’⁸

Another meta-ethical reason not to judge could be the adviser’s being a relativist.⁹ Relativists think, in contrast to emotivists, that moral judgments express beliefs and can be true or false. But their truth is relative to a context or framework, shared with others or strictly individual (in the case of subjectivism), which the advisee may not share. And so a relativist could reason as follows: ‘It is true for me, given my context, that you should leave your wife, but it may be false for you, given yours. When asking for moral advice, you do not ask for my truth, you ask me what would be true for you. But my moral framework is different from yours, so different that it is impossible for me to judge what would be true for you.’¹⁰ Again, as in the emotivist’s case, moral modesty seems appropriate: why would Sarah impose her truth on someone for whom that truth may not be a truth at all?

Meta-ethical reasons not to judge, of which there may be others than the ones I have mentioned, often have to do with *disbelief in the overall possibility of moral knowledge and/or moral expertise*.¹¹ If Sarah believes that there is no moral truth or that it is relative, she may reasonably doubt what she could have to offer an advisee. In both cases, it is not clear whether her judgment, expressing a personal emotion or a relative truth, has any value for others.

The second category of reasons not to judge does not concern the overall possibilities of moral knowledge or expertise, but a *lack of knowledge of a particular case*. Sarah will probably only feel capable of advising Alex if she knows him and his situation well enough.

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How is the relationship with his wife? Do they have children? Why is his research so important for him that he considers sacrificing his marriage for it? Maybe he expects a breakthrough shortly, maybe he knows that he will save many lives if he continues his research. As long as Sarah does not know these things, it is reasonable to withhold judgment and to be morally modest, even if she does not doubt the overall possibility of moral knowledge or expertise.¹²

Suppose that Sarah has all the information and knowledge she may possibly want about Alex's case and that she does not doubt that moral expertise is possible. What reasons could she have not to judge? She may simply think that, although there are morally competent people, she herself is not. She may think that she lacks moral knowledge, understanding or insight, in general or only in this particular case. The purported lack can have to do with who she is or how she feels: maybe previous experiences have shown her that she is a bad advisor when it comes to moral matters, maybe she feels bad today, or she is drunk. The more interesting situation for our purposes, however, is one in which she takes not herself, but the particular case to be the problem: even with perfect knowledge of that case, of Alex and his situation, the case is too difficult. It poses a dilemma, and Sarah is not able to solve it by working out a moral judgment. The third category of reasons not to judge concerns a *lack of moral competence*. Both a lack of knowledge and a lack of moral competence can be reasons not to express judgment as well as reasons not to form it.

The three categories of reasons for moral modesty I have discussed have something in common: the adviser withholds judgment because she thinks that, if she were to judge, there would be something wrong with the judgment. It would not be of value for Alex, either because it would not apply to his situation or to him or because it would not be a good judgment. The adviser cannot come to an appropriate or correct moral judgment which holds for Alex as well as for her and therefore refrains from judging. But even if she thinks that she can come to a correct judgment, there may be reasons not to judge, reasons neither to form nor to express a moral judgment. What is central in this fourth category of reasons for moral modesty is not the value of the judgment, but the moral value of the advisee. Sarah may think that, out of respect for Alex's dignity and autonomy, she should not judge, not so much because she cannot come to an appropriate or correct judgment, but because she has no right to judge. Suppose that she knows Alex fairly well, that they are friends. He has asked her for advice before, both in moral and non-moral matters. Whenever she told him that this or that was the right thing to do, he immediately did it. He has always been acting strictly, almost slavishly, on her judgment, which

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has been like a law for him. Sarah knows that, if she judges, Alex will do what she says. In that case, she may think that it is better not to judge. To judge would be to take the decision for him, and Alex not only has the right, but also the moral duty to decide for himself. His duty to decide autonomously seems to be in conflict with Sarah's duty to help him.

It can be objected here that Alex *has* taken the autonomous decision to ask Sarah for advice, so that his autonomy or dignity would not be threatened if Sarah were to judge that he should leave his wife and if he would act immediately upon that judgment.¹³ The point, however, is not that Alex has to take all his decisions for himself, but that he should take *this* particular, highly important, moral decision autonomously, namely the decision either to leave his wife or to abandon his research. In moral cases such as Alex's, we do not want people simply to defer to our judgment as if we made the decision for them.¹⁴ As Raimond Gaita formulates it, Alex's moral decision is 'non-accidentally and inescapably his' and 'it is sometimes presumptuous even to *think* that another person ought to do something, even though we are quite sure what we ought to do if we were in their situation'.¹⁵ Suppose, by contrast, that Alex asks Sarah for non-moral advice, for example concerning insulation materials for his house. He has always diligently acquitted himself of his tasks as a researcher and, consequently, does not know anything of insulation materials, whereas he considers Sarah to be an expert. If he asks for her judgment, Sarah may have reasons not to judge: she may think that she lacks relevant information or competence, but she will probably not refrain from judging out of respect for his dignity and autonomy, because the latter do not seem at stake here. Even if Sarah has been advising him about countless practical matters, and even if Alex has always slavishly followed her advice, there is little chance that she will force Alex, of whom she knows that he is completely ignorant about insulation materials, to decide for himself here, although he has of course the right to. She wants to help him, because he is her friend. In this non-moral case, his being her friend is a reason to judge, to tell him what he should do, while in moral cases it can be a reason not to do so: because he is her friend, she considers him to be her moral equal, deserving of respect for his moral autonomy.

I have not wanted to say that respect for moral autonomy and dignity is always, in every moral case, a reason to withhold judgment. There are certainly moral cases in which it would be outright paternalistic or arrogant not to judge when asked for advice, and there are non-moral cases in which a concern for autonomy can be a reason not to judge.¹⁶ Suppose, for example, that Alex always asks Sarah for advice whenever he has to take a decision. In that case, Sarah

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may think it reasonable not to judge even in non-moral cases, because, out of concern for his autonomy and dignity, Alex has to learn to take decisions. The difference between moral and non-moral cases is not that the former always ask for autonomous decisions and the latter never do, but that we expect from others that they are able and willing to take a decision for themselves in *every* important moral case and that we want them to have the opportunity to do so, whereas deference in important non-moral cases is not always problematic. Hence, if Sarah thinks that to judge would be to take the decision for Alex, because he always immediately acts upon her judgment, respect for his autonomy and dignity may be a reason not to judge.

Four categories of reasons not to morally judge when asked for, to be morally modest, have been discussed: meta-ethical reasons, a lack of relevant knowledge or moral competence, and respect for the advisee's autonomy and dignity. In many cases, one or more of these reasons are applicable. Thus it may seem that not many possibilities for moral advice are left. That is at least what Wittgenstein suggests.

II. Wittgenstein and moral modesty

The topic of moral modesty has only seldom been dealt with by moral philosophers. The reasons for moral modesty discussed here, however, can all be found at several places in Wittgenstein's work. That may be surprising, because Wittgenstein has not written much about moral philosophy, but I will show how, nevertheless, Wittgenstein points at the need for moral modesty.

The first category of reasons for moral modesty are the meta-ethical ones. They have to do with disbelief in the overall possibility of moral knowledge and/or moral expertise. Moral judgments are personal judgments in the first place, and their value for others is not clear. That is what Wittgenstein points at when he says, in a conversation with members of the Vienna Circle recorded by Friedrich Waismann: 'At the end of my lecture on ethics, I spoke in the first person. I believe that is quite essential. Here nothing more can be established, I can only appear as a person speaking for myself.'¹⁷ In ethics, nothing more than speaking for oneself is possible. Wittgenstein notes in one of his diaries that 'an ethical sentence is a personal action. Not a statement of fact. Like an exclamation of admiration.'¹⁸ Because ethical sentences are inherently personal for Wittgenstein, he emphasizes at several occasions that 'the ethical cannot be taught'.¹⁹ Reporting on a conversation with Wittgenstein, Oets Bouwsma writes: 'On the

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way up he [Wittgenstein] began talking about teaching ethics. Impossible! He regards ethics as telling someone what he should do. But how can anyone counsel another?²⁰

It should not be concluded from these quotations that Wittgenstein was a meta-ethical relativist or an emotivist. Because Wittgenstein only rarely wrote or spoke about ethics, because his remarks on ethics stem from different periods and often seem to contradict each other, many different meta-ethical positions have been ascribed to him, and one may wonder whether it is possible or desirable to try to derive a consistent meta-ethical position from his work. What is important for our purposes is that Wittgenstein clearly accepts meta-ethical reasons for moral modesty: because a moral judgment is personal, its value for someone else is not immediately clear, and a certain restraint in judging morally is appropriate. That squares with the fact that Wittgenstein himself shows such restraint in his work: *if* he discusses ethics at all, he does so not so much in his philosophical work (apart from a few passages in the *Notebooks* and the *Tractatus*), but rather in personal documents (letters, diaries) and conversations.

The second category of reasons not to judge relate to a lack of knowledge. Rhees writes:

When I suggested the question whether Brutus' stabbing Caesar was a noble action (as Plutarch thought) or a particularly evil one (as Dante thought), Wittgenstein said this was not even something you could discuss. 'You would not know for your life what went on in his mind before he decided to kill Caesar. What would he have had to feel in order that you should say that killing his friend was noble?' Wittgenstein mentioned the question of one of Kierkegaard's essays: 'Has a man a right to let himself be put to death for the truth?' and he said, 'For me this is not even a problem. I don't know what it would be *like* to let oneself be put to death for the truth. I don't know how such a man would have to feel, what state of mind he would be in, and so forth.'²¹

Wittgenstein suggests here that we cannot form a moral judgment on the question of whether Brutus's action was noble or on the question discussed by Kierkegaard, because we lack knowledge: we do not know what went on in Brutus's head or what it would be like to let oneself be put to death for the truth. Not only do we not know these things, Wittgenstein also doubts whether it is possible for us to know them:

Imagine someone advising another who was in love and about to marry, and pointing out to him all the things he cannot do if he marries. The idiot! How can one know how these things are in another man's life?²²

It can safely be concluded that Wittgenstein considers a lack of knowledge to be a reason not to judge.

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Third, a lack of moral competence or the problem being too difficult may be a reason not to judge. We may lack moral competence even if we have all possible factual knowledge. In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein writes: ‘We feel that even if *all possible* scientific questions be answered, the problems of life have still not been touched at all.’²³ And in the ‘Lecture on Ethics’:

Suppose one of you were an omniscient person and therefore knew all the movements of all the bodies in the world dead or alive and that he also knew all the states of mind of all human beings that ever lived, and suppose this man wrote all he knew in a big book, then this book would contain the whole description of the world; and what I want to say is, that this book would contain nothing that we would call an *ethical* judgment or anything that would logically imply such a judgment. [...] there will simply be facts, facts, facts, but no Ethics.²⁴

Factual knowledge, however complete, does not automatically lead to moral knowledge, insight or competence. And even if it does, it always remains possible that, knowledge and competence notwithstanding, we cannot work out a good moral judgment and hence have to refrain from judging. This is what Wittgenstein says about Alex’s case:

It may be that he has a deep love for her. And yet he may think that if he were to give up his work he would be no husband for her. [...] Here we may say that we have all the materials of a tragedy; and we could only say: ‘Well, God help you.’²⁵

‘Well, God help you’ is not a moral judgment, and yet it is, according to Wittgenstein, the only thing we could say. The case poses a dilemma, it is too difficult to solve. We should not judge because we cannot.

The fourth category of reasons to be morally modest bears upon respect for the autonomy and dignity of the advisee. As we have seen, autonomy and dignity are preeminently at stake in moral cases and often play a much lesser role in non-moral ones. Wittgenstein’s philosophy allows to explain why that is so. Especially in his early works, he draws a sharp distinction between the empirical, factual domain (‘facts, facts, facts’) and the non-empirical domain, and hence also between empirical and non-empirical, for instance aesthetic or moral, problems.²⁶ If someone has an empirical problem, he struggles as it were with the world. A careful investigation of the empirical world, for example on the basis of experiments, can help to solve the problem. If Alex does not know how to insulate his house, a careful investigation of insulation materials may help: better knowledge of the world, of how the world is and what the facts are, paves the way to a solution. Facts are the same for everyone. When Sarah says that ‘To insulate with this material is better for this house than to insulate with that’, it holds

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for everyone. She speaks as an expert. A moral problem is of a totally different kind. Its solution does not lie in the world: ‘The sense of the world must lie outside the world. [...] *In* it there is no value.’²⁷ Someone who struggles with a moral problem does not struggle with the world, but with himself. A solution (or, as Wittgenstein would prefer, dissolution) of the problem is not to be found in the world. One does not have to change the world or some facts *in* the world, one has to change one’s attitude *towards* the world.²⁸ In ‘Wittgenstein and Ethics’, Anne-Marie Christensen writes:

Wittgenstein thus insists on the controversial claim that we cannot account for an ethical problem by looking at a situation in isolation, because the problem is in fact the result of a discrepancy or tension between the subject’s expectations of that situation and the way in which things actually are or turn out to be. The ethically significant change therefore concerns whether the subject changes the way she relates towards the situation or the people involved, e.g. by moving from acceptance to rejection or from being involved in something to withdrawing. [...] he [Wittgenstein] thinks that any attempt to improve the situation is, in a certain sense, ethically irrelevant.²⁹

Here again, we see that a moral problem is for Wittgenstein essentially a personal problem. Hence, it is not difficult to see why it is, much more than an empirical problem, inherently tied to personal dignity and autonomy.³⁰ If Alex would make a serious mistake in an important non-moral matter, for example in insulating his house, his dignity would not be affected as it would if he were to make a serious mistake in dealing with the moral question he struggles with. If someone is ignorant or incompetent in insulation matters or does not care about them, most of us do not consider his dignity to be seriously affected by that. When it comes to moral matters, however, we think that Alex somehow has no right to be ignorant, no right not to care.³¹

To speak morally, for Wittgenstein, is to speak in the first person, which means not to speak as an expert or an authority, not to speak for someone else, not to say what another should do, but to speak only for oneself.³² This speaking for oneself is ‘quite essential’ in moral matters. It is a moral right and a moral duty. To refrain from judging when Alex asks for advice may be a sign of respect for his autonomy and dignity: Sarah sees him as someone who is able to speak for himself and whose duty to do so she should not release him from. For Wittgenstein, as well as for Gaita, Alex’s problem is inescapably his.

All categories of reasons for moral modesty can be found at several places in Wittgenstein’s work. Wittgenstein, to say the least, is sensitive to the need for moral modesty. Maybe even too sensitive. If, in ethics, one can only speak for oneself, if teaching ethics is impossible, if a moral judgment requires knowledge of what goes on in other people’s minds,

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if knowledge of how things are in another's life is impossible to acquire anyway, if even knowledge of all the facts does not lead to moral knowledge, if 'Well, God help you' is the only thing we can say when asked for advice, then moral modesty seems not just desirable in some cases, as I have been suggesting, but absolutely required in all moral cases. This leads to the paradoxical moral advice not to give moral advice. Giving moral advice becomes impossible or at least undesirable. There is nothing to be said, and 'whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent'.³³ This may be the reason why 'men to whom after long doubting the sense of life became clear, could not then say wherein this sense consisted'.³⁴

III. Moral advice without moral judgment?

The question now is: Is moral advice, from a Wittgensteinian perspective, really an impossibility, as the remarks above suggest? It is useful, in this regard, to reconstruct the story. Alex asks Sarah for moral advice, but Sarah may have reasons not to judge, to be morally modest. Wittgenstein radicalizes these reasons to such an extent that morally judging someone else becomes impossible, that the need for moral modesty becomes absolute. If it is not possible to judge, then the possibility of moral advice is threatened. What is conspicuous here is that moral advice is necessarily linked to moral judgment: Sarah cannot give advice because she cannot judge or she should not give advice because she should not judge. Apparently, there can be no moral advice without moral judgment. Where does this link between moral advice and moral judgment come from?

In the beginning of this article, I wrote that the moral philosopher, when confronted with a moral problem, tries to come to a correct or appropriate moral judgment. The remark then seemed evident, because it articulates a traditional and widely held conception of the moral philosopher's task, or at least of his implicit ideal. Alice Crary confirms this when she mentions 'the widespread, if also mostly tacit, acceptance of a view of ethics on which it is taken to be distinguished by a preoccupation with moral judgments'.³⁵ If indeed moral philosophers are typically preoccupied with moral judgments, then they will be inclined to understand the process of asking and giving moral advice as roughly a three-step process. First, someone asks for advice. Second, the adviser works out a moral judgment. Third, the adviser judges, that is, she communicates her judgment to the advisee, unless reasons to be morally modest prevent her from doing so.

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If anything is characteristic of Wittgenstein, it is his deep and lifelong suspicion of traditional and widely held conceptions of philosophy and of the philosopher's task. On moral philosophy in particular, he told Moritz Schlick that he thought it 'definitely important to put an end to all the claptrap about ethics'.³⁶ Given Wittgenstein's opposition to conventional claptrap in ethics, to point out that the link between moral advice and moral judgment goes back to a traditional conception of the moral philosopher's task is not to justify it, but rather to necessitate its being put into question. If moral advice does not necessarily go together with moral judgment, then Wittgenstein's problems with the latter do not automatically lead to the impossibility of the former. Is the link necessary? Some philosophical accounts of moral advice at least suggest that it is. Philosophers dealing with moral advice often focus on ought-statements. They thereby invite the thought that the ideal answer to a question for moral advice is an answer of the form 'You ought to do x', hence a moral judgment.³⁷ Some accounts of advice do not presuppose a link with judgment, and thereby allow to put that link into question, but they are equally vulnerable to the need for moral modesty. Eric Wiland, for example, refers to Hobbes, who 'begins his account of advice or 'counsel' by noting that the words *do this* or *do not this* are used to give advice'. Wiland, who obscures the differences between non-moral and moral advice, agrees with Hobbes and concludes that 'when one person advises another, she tells him *what to do*'.³⁸ Similarly, Uri Leibowitz writes that 'General moral advice is a statement of the following form: *perform action A if and/or only if ψ* '.³⁹ Wiland and Leibowitz thus propose a shift of the ideal answer to a question for moral advice from 'You ought to do x' to 'Do x'. But all the reasons we mentioned not to judge, not to tell Alex what he should do, are also reasons not to command, to tell him what to do. Hence, the shift does nothing to escape the problem that Wittgenstein's radicalization of these reasons poses for an account of moral advice. If moral advice is necessarily of the form 'Do x', the need for moral modesty still threatens to make it impossible.

What we are looking for, then, is a notion of moral advice freed from the ideal of a moral judgment, a notion which takes the need for moral modesty into account. So far, we have been focusing on the *answer* to a question for moral advice. A lesson to learn from Wittgenstein is that, before trying to answer, we should look carefully at the *question*. If the ideal answer to a question for moral advice is 'You ought to do x' or 'It is right to do x', or some other moral judgment, it is natural to understand the question for moral advice, for example Alex's, as 'What should I do?' or 'What ought I to do?', and that is how we have so far understood it. Moral

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philosophers usually understand that question as if the emphasis were on *what*: what matters is *what* to do, and the question could equally have been ‘What should *one* do in this situation?’ That is not to say that personal characteristics of the advisee are systematically being overlooked; on the contrary, these characteristics are mostly taken into serious account. It is to say, however, that the answer to the question, the moral judgment, is thought to be in principle transferable to similar persons in similar situations. In that sense, it is not tied to a concrete, unique person, but at most to a number of (paradoxically impersonal) personal characteristics. ‘What should I do?’, if it is equivalent to ‘What should anyone with personal characteristics relevantly similar to mine do in this situation?’, makes no sense for Wittgenstein, because moral questions are, in his view, radically personal. Thus, *I* needs to be emphasized. From a Wittgensteinian perspective, it makes sense to ask ‘What should *I* do?’, but only if someone struggling with a moral problem asks it to himself. In that case, he may be able to answer it for himself out of intimate knowledge of himself, of what goes on in his mind. He can, however, only speak in the first person (just like the men to whom after long doubting the sense of life became clear could answer the question only for themselves but not for others), because the answer cannot be taught or meaningfully handed over to others.⁴⁰ As soon as he asks the question to another person, that other person has reasons, and in Wittgenstein’s view even a duty, to be morally modest and to say, for example: ‘How do *I* know what *you* should do? How can *I* know what goes on in *your* mind? I cannot speak for you.’ As soon as the question is asked to another person, an apparently unbridgeable gap appears between advisee and adviser. Therefore, apart from the shift from ‘*What* should I do?’ to ‘What should *I* do?’, needed to do justice to the personal aspect of moral questions, a second shift is called for. That shift is needed to recognize the specificity of moral *advice*, of the fact that a question for moral advice is a question asked to a concrete other whose opinion or views on a problem the advisee desires to hear. In that respect, I propose to formulate the question for moral advice as ‘What would *you* do?’ If Alex asks Sarah for moral advice, he may not ask in the first place *what* he should do (as the question is traditionally understood), although he is of course trying to find out what he should do, nor what *he* should do, but what *Sarah* would do.

Why is it useful for our purposes to shift the question for moral advice to ‘What would you do?’ If Alex asks Sarah ‘What should I do?’, he asks Sarah for a moral judgment about what *he* should do. But if he asks ‘What would you do?’, does he then not just ask for a moral judgment about what Sarah thinks *she* should do in a similar situation, and is an answer to the

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latter question more likely to help him than an answer to the former? And if the latter question is not a question for a moral judgment, then what kind of answer does it ask for?

‘What would you do?’ is, in contrast to ‘What should I do?’, a question in the second person. It presupposes and starts from a connection with that second person, absent in the neutral ‘What should I/one do?’, a question which can be posted on an internet forum, asked to anyone who happens to want to answer it. That second person, with whom Alex starts a conversation on moral matters, is, precisely *because* he starts such a conversation with her, apparently someone he trusts enough to ask her a question that is, from a Wittgensteinian perspective, radically personal. ‘You’ is not just an ‘other person’: whereas ‘other’ creates or emphasizes a gap with ‘I’, ‘you’ points at a connection, at familiarity and intimacy. In ‘What would you do?’, it becomes clear that one does not ask just anyone for moral advice. As Stanley Cavell rightly remarks, ‘You can’t talk to everyone about everything’.⁴¹ There is undeniably a distance between ‘you’ and ‘me’, but as my second person you are the one who is closer to my first person than a faraway third ‘he’ or ‘she’, an impersonal ‘one’ or a collective ‘we’. That closeness is of crucial importance, because here moral advice is often distinguished from non-moral advice. If Alex wants to know how to insulate his house, it does not matter much whether the question is answered by someone close to him or not, as long as the adviser is an expert. If Sarah were not an expert, she could reasonably advise him to post his insulation question and all the information needed to answer it on a specialized internet forum. But if Alex would ask her for moral advice, and Sarah would answer ‘Maybe you should post your question on an internet forum’, Alex will probably not regard that as a good hint. On the contrary, he may think that her answer displays a lack of respect. He asks *her* for moral advice because he wants to know what *she* thinks about it, and he does not care much about what experts or anonymous internet users think. To ask Sarah for moral advice is to emphasize her closeness to him and to recognize the value she has for him. It is at the same time to recognize her reasons to be morally modest: Alex *knows* that Sarah does not know exactly what goes on in his mind, he knows that she is fallible in moral matters as everyone is, he knows that she may want him to take the decision himself, and still he asks her for advice. He expects her not to say straightaway what he should do, not to simply tell him what to do. Suppose he asks Sarah for advice and she answers unhesitatingly: ‘You should leave your wife for this and this reason.’ He will probably neither expect nor like such an answer, because it threatens to affect his status as her moral equal, his moral autonomy and dignity. He may have been thinking about the complex question

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for months, maybe years, and she, when asked for advice, easily comes to an unequivocal conclusion. ‘No, it’s not that simple’, he will think. Sarah has not understood what he has asked her for.

If indeed Alex’s question can better be understood as ‘What would you do?’ than as ‘What should I do?’, and if the former is not necessarily a question for moral judgment, then what kind of answer does it ask for? First of all, the question *can* be answered within a Wittgensteinian framework: the need for moral modesty does not threaten to make answering it impossible, as it does with ‘What should I do?’ Sarah may be a relativist or an emotivist, she may lack moral competence or relevant knowledge, but that does not prevent her from saying what she would do. ‘What would you do?’ does not lead to problems with dignity or autonomy: Sarah does not tell Alex what he should do and leaves the decision entirely to him.

A good answer to a question for moral advice, in the light of our Wittgensteinian approach, is what I will call ‘clarifying a moral perspective’ or ‘showing a moral world’. In ‘Speaking for Oneself. Wittgenstein on Ethics’, Matthew Piantalto writes in that regard:

What we are looking for is a description of the other person’s perspective on the situation. This description might include other evaluative terms, as well as a description of what this person takes to be the relevant features (i.e. facts) of the situation. We want to know what world this person is living in.⁴²

The adviser shows the advisee, from her moral world (which might be strictly personal, but will in most cases cross or overlap with the advisee’s moral world, since the advisee presupposes a certain closeness in his asking the question to the adviser), how that moral world enables her to deal with moral problems. She points at what is important and valuable in that world, where the emphases are. Johnston remarks that, in contrast to specific justifications and proofs asked for in empirical arguments, moral talk can best be understood against the background of ‘a lifetime of thought, reflection’ and ‘the entirety of the individual’s experience’.⁴³ Showing a moral world is not aiming to offer a direct solution to the advisee’s dilemma, for example in the form of a moral judgment. As Barry Stroud writes: ‘Treating a question is not the same as answering it. Answering it might be the worst thing to do with it. I believe that happens in philosophy.’⁴⁴ The ideal is not a solution, but a confrontation, not with the adviser’s capacity to solve other people’s moral problems, but with another moral world. No ready-made solutions for the advisee’s problem can be found in that world, because it is *another* world, different from the advisee’s, in which other things have other meanings. Rather, it shows *possibilities to deal with*

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moral problems. To show a moral world is to offer insight into one's moral activity, an insight that may be rather clouded than clarified by drawing general, impersonal conclusions.⁴⁵

In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein constantly plays with the idea of things which cannot be said, but can be shown.⁴⁶ In clarifying her moral perspective, the adviser does not only show or throw light upon her own moral world, trying to make it accessible or possible for the advisee, she thereby also puts the advisee's moral world, his moral self-image, into another perspective. Wittgenstein writes: 'I must be nothing more than the mirror in which my reader sees his own thinking with all its deformities & with this assistance can set it in order.'⁴⁷ In the frame of the mirror, the problem gets a new background. To place problems in new surroundings, to give them new backgrounds, to compare them to problems they have not been previously compared with in order to see new contrasts and similarities with other problems and situations is, according to Wittgenstein, exactly what we should do with philosophical problems in general.⁴⁸ In the mirror of another's moral thinking, the adviser can see his own moral thinking anew, from a distance which makes a fuller understanding possible. Someone who looks in a mirror is sometimes struck by what he sees, like someone who hears his voice on the radio or sees photographs of himself. Just like photographs can lead to someone's adapting his own self-image, a moral dialogue in which the adviser clarifies his moral world and thereby puts the advisee's in perspective, may help the latter to adjust his moral self-image.⁴⁹ The adviser's perspective does not function as a model to which the advisee's *has* to adapt his, but as, in Wittgenstein's words, an 'object of comparison', a yardstick he can put next to his problem, making it possible to assess it differently or to be confirmed in his evaluation of it.⁵⁰

IV. A Wittgensteinian approach to moral advice: advantages and examples

If we want to save the possibility of moral advice within a Wittgensteinian framework, we have to disconnect moral advice from moral judgment, and to put into question not only the third ('the adviser judges'), but also the second step in traditional accounts of moral advice, articulating the task of the moral philosopher. That step is often thought to be evident, but, as the motto of this article makes clear, Wittgenstein considers the winner of the philosophical race to be the one who can run most slowly: 'Where others go on ahead, I remain standing.'⁵¹ Making explicit a step which is often taken for granted has allowed us to shift the question for moral advice, which has mostly been understood as a self-directed 'What should I do?' or as an

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impersonal ‘What should one do?’, to the other-directed ‘What would you do?’ That question has several advantages over ‘What should I do?’. First, it can be answered when the need for moral modesty is maximally taken into account. Second, it respects the dialogical character of situations in which moral advice is asked for and invites not just an anonymous expert, but a respected and nearby other to put the advisee’s moral world into perspective.⁵² The ideal of moral advice is no longer the adviser’s judgment *on* his situation, but her clarification *of* it.

The third advantage of a Wittgensteinian approach to moral advice is that it avoids ‘the dogmatism into which we fall so easily in doing philosophy’, which Wittgenstein so deeply resented, in two ways.⁵³ First, in clarifying the situation of the advisee without judging it, the adviser aims to help the advisee to find out and decide what he should do, but avoids the dogmatic bluntness which often goes together with a moral judgment. It thus avoids what can best be described as moralism. Stanley Cavell, Cora Diamond and Alice Crary, among others, have pointed at the risk of moralism for judgment-driven approaches of moral philosophy.⁵⁴ Second, a Wittgensteinian approach to moral advice yields a *possible* conception of moral advice, not a dogmatic definition or theory which tells us how we *must* think about it, a conception which incarnates in particular the possibility to disconnect moral advice from the ideal of a moral judgment. Such a disconnection is the kind of result that Wittgenstein expects philosophers to achieve. He compares philosophical investigations to arranging the books of a library: the books belonging together are being put together, the books not belonging together are being put on different shelves:

But some of the greatest achievements in philosophy could only be compared with taking up some books which seemed to belong together, and putting them on different shelves; nothing more being final about their positions than that they no longer lie side by side. The onlooker who doesn’t know the difficulty of the task might well think in such a case that nothing at all had been achieved.⁵⁵

There are countless ways of ordering books and, depending on the purpose of an arrangement, some books will sometimes be classified together and sometimes not. Moral advice, to be sure, *can* go together with moral judgment. What is important for Wittgenstein is to show that books which are always being put together and always being relocated together, such as moral advice and moral judgment, do not *necessarily* belong together.⁵⁶ Given the risk of moralism, putting them together is not only unnecessary, but sometimes also undesirable.

The fourth advantage of a Wittgensteinian approach to moral advice is that it highlights an important aspect of our everyday understanding of ‘advice’, an aspect which philosophical

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accounts, as far as they try to describe and understand our everyday understanding of morality, have largely overlooked.⁵⁷ The first synonym for advice proposed by the *Oxford Dictionary of English* is ‘guidance’.⁵⁸ Is a good guide, for example, necessarily someone who tells people what they should do? A travel guidebook may of course have sections like ‘Ten things you should do in Japan’, but could giving useful information, providing maps, telling stories about the history of the country, etc. not count as guidance, as advice?⁵⁹ Is a good guide not someone or something that helps someone else ‘to form an opinion or make a decision’?⁶⁰ And if it is, if what the advisee needs is ‘help in figuring out what to do’, then why would such help have to come in the form of a judgment?⁶¹ The original sense of advice was ‘way of looking at something, judgment’.⁶² The last part has often been emphasized in philosophy, the first is prominent in a Wittgensteinian conception of advice, in which the adviser shows the advisee how she looks at his problem and thereby articulates possible ways of seeing it. Edward Hinchman is one of the few philosophers who leave room for such a conception: ‘Advising is sometimes just [...] giving him strategically useful information, encouraging his flagging spirits, making vivid what he wishes to forget.’⁶³ The same holds for D. Z. Phillips, who explicitly recognizes the need for moral modesty out of respect for the other’s moral autonomy in a passage reminiscent of Wittgenstein’s answer to Rhees:

If we ask, ‘What advice *could* the bystanders give which would count as *moral* advice?’ we can see that there are *many* possibilities. Here are some which come readily to mind. [...] Bystander *H* argues: ‘I do not propose to give positive advice. A man’s life may be at stake whatever you do. I am prepared to clarify the issues involved as I see them, but you must draw your own moral conclusion.’⁶⁴

Let us, by way of conclusion, return to our example. Which good or appropriate answers to Alex’s question, excluded by a conception of moral advice as necessarily linked to moral judgment, does a Wittgensteinian conception allow for? Possibilities, in certain circumstances evidently far more delicate and appropriate than a rude ‘You should leave your wife’ are: ‘If I were you, I would leave her’ or simply ‘I would leave her’, ‘I’m terribly sorry, but I cannot help you with this, I really see no solution’, ‘Maybe you could see it like this’, Wittgenstein’s ‘Well, God help you’, ‘You will regret it if you do not leave her, but you will save many lives if you continue your research’.⁶⁵ Some will undoubtedly claim, starting from the presupposition that moral advice always comes in the form of moral judgments, that these answers may not look like moral judgments at first sight, but are concealed judgments nevertheless, ways of softening things a bit.⁶⁶ A Wittgensteinian conception of moral advice does not need such a move. It

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allows to take the answers at face value, for what they are, and thus avoids that an adviser who gives appropriate answers, recognizing the delicacy of the question, has to be seen as concealing things, as being somehow untrue to what he really wants to say. Another strategy would be to see the answers as second-best answers, illustrating that we have failed to reach an unequivocal conclusion in the form of a judgment. But suppose that Sarah tells Alex how she dealt with her parents' divorce, how she felt and what she did, thus guiding Alex through parts of her moral world. Or suppose that she redescribes his situation in such a way that he no longer feels compelled to think of it as a dilemma.⁶⁷ Could that not be exactly the kind of answer Alex is looking for? To call it a failure would be, in that case, to grossly mischaracterize it. If Sarah would answer, for example, 'I'm terribly sorry, but I really see no solution, let's talk about it again soon', her answer could mean for Alex that someone whom he values and respects recognizes his struggle, understands that his problem is to be very carefully dealt with and is prepared to suffer it with him. That *that* is often what a question for moral advice asks for, rather than a moral judgment, is something we probably all understand. Philosophical accounts of moral advice, however, have somehow overlooked or at least underemphasized it. The Wittgensteinian approach to moral advice presented here attempts to make up for that.

Notes

1 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 40.

2 Rhees, "Some Developments," 22.

3 Johnston, *The Contradictions*, 87.

4 Johnston's notion of moral modesty slightly differs from mine. He writes that 'moral modesty sees the individual as accepting that the concepts right and wrong apply to everyone but believing that she has no right to judge others since she does not know the full background of their actions' (Johnston, *The Contradictions*, 87). 'Not knowing the full background of their actions' is, for Johnston, the only reason to be morally modest, whereas I will point out that there are other reasons as well and that knowledge of the full background does not always take away the need for moral modesty. Another notion of moral modesty, different from mine and from Johnston's, can be found in Gert's work. For him, to be morally modest is to recognize that not every moral question has a unique correct answer. See Gert, "Moral Arrogance," 369-370.

5 See, for instance, Campbell, "What Is Moral Judgment?," 321.

6 Crary, *Beyond Moral Judgment*, 1.

7 See, on this point, Driver: 'This reluctance to endorse moral experts could perhaps be due to the fact that some hold emotivist views about moral judgments. Ayer, for example, did not believe that moral expertise was possible, since a moral judgment was neither true nor false – it was a mere emotional response' (Driver, "Autonomy," 620). For a similar view, see McGrath, "The Puzzle," 321-322.

8 I do not claim that all emotivists fall under the characterization I have given, that being an emotivist makes it always inappropriate to judge, only that being an emotivist may be a reason not

to judge. Some emotivists may well think that expressing feelings counts as useful moral advice, for example because these feelings are the expression of a well-developed moral sensitivity.

9 Wiland argues that the institution of advice, the fact that we *do* give and take advice, supports the claims of the moral objectivist. If moral judgments cannot be true or false, as the emotivist thinks, or if they are only true within a limited framework, as the relativist thinks, our practice of giving and taking moral advice is difficult to account for. See Wiland, "Advice and Moral Objectivity," 1.
10 Again, I want to emphasize that not all relativists fall under the characterization I have given and that relativists need not doubt the possibility of giving useful moral advice.

11 Much has been written about the (im)possibility of moral expertise and the authority of moral advice and testimony. See, for instance, Anscombe, "Authority in Morals"; Driver, "Autonomy"; Gaita, *Good and Evil* (especially chapter two); Hertzberg, "Moral Escapism"; Hopkins, "What is Wrong"; Jones, "Second-hand Moral Knowledge"; McGrath, "The Puzzle"; Nickel, "Moral Testimony". I do not take a stand on the possibility or authority of moral advice here, I only want to point out that disbelief in the possibility of moral expertise may be a reason not to judge when asked for moral advice.

12 As noted in footnote 4, a lack of background knowledge is the only reason mentioned by Johnston in his definition of moral modesty.

13 See Driver, "Autonomy," 635-636. Driver discusses cases in which an advisee does not take advice because he thinks that he has to decide autonomously, that 'moral judgments require autonomy of judgment in a way that other judgments do not' (Driver, "Autonomy," 619). She rejects this autonomy argument, but it is important to note that my case is different from hers. My case deals with reasons an adviser has not to judge, hers deal with reasons an advisee has not to take advice.

14 McGrath rightly remarks that 'the attitude that pure moral deference is more problematic than non-moral deference is widespread, even if not universal, in our culture' ("The Puzzle," 323). To say that we do not want people simply to defer to our judgment in moral cases such as Alex's is neither to say that there are no non-moral cases in which we do not want people to defer to our judgment, nor is it to say that we never want people to defer to our judgment in moral cases.

15 Gaita, *Good and Evil*, 103 and 92.

16 See, on this point, Driver, "Autonomy," 623-624. I would like to thank an anonymous referee for pointing this out.

17 Waismann, "Talks with Wittgenstein," 16.

18 Wittgenstein, *Denkbewegungen*, 43-44.

19 Waismann, "Talks with Wittgenstein," 16. On the personal character of moral problems, see also Gaita, *Good and Evil*, 103-104 and 307.

20 Bouwsma, "Wittgenstein: Conversations 1949-1951," 45.

21 Rhees, "Some Developments," 22.

22 Bouwsma, "Wittgenstein: Conversations 1949-1951," 45.

23 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 6.52.

24 Wittgenstein, "Lecture on Ethics," 39-40.

25 Rhees, "Some Developments," 22-23.

26 In the *Tractatus*, he writes that 'Ethics and aesthetics are one' (Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 6.421). This helps to explain why autonomy and dignity also play an important role in the aesthetic domain: just like we have a problem with people who simply defer to our moral judgments, we have a problem with people who defer to our aesthetic ones without thinking or deciding for themselves. Suppose, for example, that someone would say: 'You are an expert in beauty. If you say that something is beautiful, then it probably *is* beautiful, even if I do not see that it is so or understand why it is'. Compare this to the insulation case: 'You are an expert in insulation materials. If you say that this material is good, then it probably *is* good, even if I do not see that it is so or understand why it is.' See, on this point, also Driver, "Autonomy," 623.

27 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 6.41.

28 'If life becomes hard to bear we think of improvements. But the most important & effective improvement, in our own attitude, hardly occurs to us, & we can decide on this only with the utmost difficulty' (Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 60).

29 Christensen, "Wittgenstein and Ethics," 799.

30 Johnston writes that Wittgenstein 'seeks to express the dignity of the human individual through a stress on the radical heterogeneity of the world and the will' (Johnston, "Wittgenstein and Moral Philosophy," 24).

31 The difference pointed at here is similar to the one Wittgenstein points at in "A Lecture on Ethics": 'Supposing that I could play tennis and one of you saw me playing and said 'Well, you play pretty badly' and suppose I answered 'I know, I'm playing badly but I don't want to play any better', all the other man could say would be 'Ah then that's all right'. But suppose I had told one of you a preposterous lie and he came up to me and said 'You're behaving like a beast' and then I were to say 'I know I behave badly, but then I don't want to behave any better', could we then say 'Ah, then that's all right'? Certainly not; he would say 'Well, you *ought* to want to behave better' (Wittgenstein, "Lecture on Ethics," 38-39).

32 Pianalto, "Speaking for Oneself," 255.

33 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 7. See, on the connection of this remark with ethics, Richter, "Nothing to be Said".

34 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 6.521.

35 Crary, *Beyond Moral Judgment*, 1.

36 McGuinness, *Vienna Circle*, 69.

37 See, for example, Gibbons, "Things That Make Things"; Kieseewetter, "'Ought' and the Perspective"; Thomson, *Goodness & Advice*.

38 Wiland, "Advice and Moral Objectivity," 4.

39 Leibowitz, "Moral Advice," 350.

40 See, on this point, Gaita, *Good and Evil*, 103.

41 Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 197.

42 Pianalto, "Speaking for Oneself," 260.

43 Johnston, "Wittgenstein and Moral Philosophy," 114 and 205.

44 Stroud, "What is Philosophy," 42.

45 Wittgenstein writes: 'Philosophy is not a theory but an activity. A philosophical work consists essentially of elucidations. The result of philosophy is not a number of 'philosophical propositions', but to make propositions clear' (*Tractatus*, 4.112).

46 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, 4.1212.

47 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 25.

48 Wittgenstein, *Blue and Brown Books*, 44.

49 Wittgenstein writes: 'In brief, the world must thereby become quite another. It must so to speak wax or wane as a whole. The world of the happy is quite another than that of the unhappy' (*Tractatus*, 6.43).

50 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 131.

51 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 75.

52 On the relational character of ethical reflection in Wittgenstein's thought, see Christensen, "A Glorious Sun," 209 and 222.

53 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, § 131. I agree with those who see Wittgenstein's later philosophy as an uncompromising struggle against dogmatism. See, for instance, Kuusela, *The Struggle Against Dogmatism*.

54 See Diamond, "Moral Differences and Distances" and Crary, *Beyond Moral Judgment*, especially chapter 6. According to Cavell, moralists assume 'that the goal of moral argument is agreement upon some conclusion, in particular, a conclusion concerning what ought to be done' (*The Claim of Reason*, 253-254).

55 Wittgenstein, *Blue and Brown Books*, 44-45.

56 *Ibid.*, 12.

57 I agree with Gert that ‘any moral system that is proposed by philosophers will be judged by how closely that system coincides with the moral intuitions that thoughtful people have’ (“Moral Arrogance,” 380) and with Leibowitz (although he has a notion of moral advice different from mine) that ‘If *S* is good moral advice, our moral theory should be able to explain this fact’ (“Moral Advice,” 352). Wittgenstein famously remarks that ‘When philosophers use a word [...], one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in the language in which it is at home? – What *we* do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use’ (*Philosophical Investigations*, § 116).

58 Soanes and Stevenson, *Oxford Dictionary*, 24.

59 Merriam Webster’s online dictionary has ‘input’ as a synonym for advice. See <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/advice>. Accessed April 14, 2014.

60 Soanes and Stevenson, *Oxford Dictionary*, 771. Kiesewetter recognizes this when he writes that ‘advice aims at improving the agent’s decision situation, e.g., by providing additional information’ (“‘Ought’ and the Perspective,” 10).

61 Wiland, “Advice and Moral Objectivity,” 14.

62 Soanes and Stevenson, *Oxford Dictionary*, 24.

63 Hinchman, “Advising as Inviting,” 355.

64 Phillips, “Possibilities of Moral Advice,” 39.

65 I defined what I mean by ‘moral judgment’ in the beginning of the article. I readily agree that this definition of ‘moral judgment’, although I take it to be widely (if mostly implicitly) held, is not the only possible definition. It can be understood as rather narrow, and I would like to thank an anonymous referee for pointing out that an Aristotelian understanding of ‘moral judgment’ is much broader and allows for ‘If I were you, I would leave her’ to be a moral judgment. On a broad definition or understanding of ‘moral judgment’, however, one tends to see every form of moral thought as consisting of moral judgments. Hence, the possibility of moral advice without moral judgment is excluded *a priori*. Yet, the problem for accounts of moral advice discussed in the article remains: philosophical accounts of moral advice often assume that the ideal form of moral advice is ‘You ought to do *x*’ (or ‘Do *x*’) and thereby overlook that, for example, ‘You will regret it if you do not leave her, but you will save many lives if you continue your research’ may also be a perfectly appropriate answer. I have conceptualized this difference in the article as a difference between ‘moral advice with moral judgment’ on the one hand and ‘moral advice without moral judgment’ on the other. If one takes both answers to include or be judgments, the difference has to be conceptualized differently, for example as ‘direct moral advice’ versus ‘indirect moral advice’. (I have not opted for the latter distinction, because it suggests that indirect moral advice is a roundabout way of saying something which can as well be put more directly, that it is lacking something or fails in a certain respect.) I do not object to different conceptualizations of the distinction. The important point is not so much that ‘If I were you, I would leave her’ is not a moral judgment (because what is and what is not a moral judgment is indeed not wholly clear), but rather that it may be an appropriate answer to a question for moral advice, which is something that philosophical accounts of moral advice tend to overlook, because they often presuppose that the ideal answer to such questions is of the form ‘You ought to do *x*’ or ‘Do *x*’.

66 Leibowitz admits that, although he takes the general form of moral advice to be ‘perform action *A* if and/or only if ψ ’, ‘we sometimes give/receive advice in different forms; e.g., ‘think about the consequences’, or ‘if I were you, I would do *A*’. But strictly speaking these forms of advice do not help us decide which action to perform; they could be helpful if they are understood as shorthand for something like the following: ‘think about the consequences, and perform the action that you believe would lead to the best possible consequences’; and ‘Perform action *A* if you want to perform that action that I would have performed if I were you’. So even if moral advice does not explicitly take the form: *perform* action *A* if and/or only if ψ , we should be able to restate it in this format. [...] Minimally, moral advice should have the proper form – namely, perform action *A* if and/or only if ψ ’ (“Moral Advice,” 351).

67 See, for this suggestion, Diamond, “What if *x*”.

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