Chapter 9

The Role of Motivation and Wisdom in Virtues as Skills

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I. Introduction

In this paper, I discuss the roles of motivation and practical wisdom in a skill model of virtue, where the development of virtue is seen as primarily a matter of skill acquisition.[1] I start by discussing a frequent objection to this approach, which is that motivation plays a key role in our evaluations of virtue, but not of skillfulness.[2] In response, I argue that the psychological research on expertise reveals that motivation also plays a key role in achieving and maintaining expertise. Furthermore, skillful performers can be evaluated on the extent to which they are committed to achieving the ends of their skill. Thus, the kinds of motivational assessments we make with respect to virtue can be captured on the skill model.[3]

In regards to practical wisdom on the skill model of virtue, I argue that much of what is attributed to having practical wisdom can already be found in expertise. However, there is an element to practical wisdom that does not find an analogue in expertise, and this involves understanding how practices fit into an overall conception of the good life. By contrast, being an expert in a skill does not require reflection on how the ends of that skill integrates into a well-lived life. Following this, I discuss whether practical wisdom should be understood to be itself a skill. While such an argument might seem to strengthen a skill model of virtue, I argue that what remains central to practical wisdom, in terms of a broad knowledge of what is good and bad for people, does not seem to fit

the model of a skill, even if that knowledge is developed through experience. Nevertheless, while practical wisdom is not a singular skill, it can (and needs to) play a unifying role in helping us to arrive at all-things-considered judgments. Finally, this chapter considers how practical wisdom needs to be developed in a way sensitive to relations of power.

II. A question of motivation

A frequent objection to conceptualizing virtues as skills is that skills are supposed to be capacities that you have regardless of whether you are motivated to act skillfully, while virtues require that you are almost always motivated to perform well. The psychological research on expertise, however, shows that virtues cannot be contrasted with skills merely on the grounds that one requires that you be strongly motivated to act well while the other does not. It is a long and difficult path to acquire expertise, which requires that one is persistently motivated to act well and overcome challenges for extended periods of time. Expertise cannot be acquired without a serious commitment to high levels of performance.

It is well-known that acquiring a skill takes “practice, practice, practice.”[4] The amount of experience necessary to achieve expertise in any field is 10 years or 10,000 hours.[5] However, this does not suffice for achieving expertise, as people reach a certain level of acceptable performance, after which further experience does not lead to better performance. Additional experience may make performing at that level of skillfulness easier, but that is different from improving one’s performance in the sense of being able to accomplish tasks that you could not accomplish previously.

That is to say, it is not just the quantity of practice that matters, but also the quality of it. Spending time in practice merely repeating what you already know how to do will not lead to any substantial improvement. Instead you have to be striving to do things that you currently cannot do. This kind of experience is referred to as "deliberate practice," and it requires setting specific goals for improvement, rather than a more general goal of "perform better next time." There need to be specific aspects of your performance that you plan about how to improve, and this structures the deliberate practice. During deliberate practice, you look for feedback on your performance, whether from others or your own self-monitoring, in order to know what you are getting right and what still needs work. Once you have reached your goal through practice, then it is time to set out a new goal to tackle.

This kind of self-regulating behavior is crucial to skill acquisition because feedback cannot come only from others, as there will not always be a coach around when you are practicing. Furthermore, you need to learn how to provide yourself feedback on your performance in order to adapt your behavior to novel situations.[6] Therefore, it is important for deliberate practice that you are able to monitor your own behavior during such sessions.[7]

All this experience and practice is what ultimately allows experts to make reliable intuitive judgments about how to act in particular situations. Intuitive judgment develops as you recognize cues from similar past experiences and the outcome of actions that were taken in response. When you recognize that you have been in this situation before, and you have acted successfully in past situations like this one, then you do not need to stop and deliberate about what to do next. This lack of deliberation is supported by the

recognition-primed decision (RPD) model, which was developed with extensive research on the decision making of fireground commanders.[8] As Darcia Narvaez and Daniel Lapsley point out, all of that practice and experience shapes experts such that

> Because they have more and better organized knowledge in a domain, experts perceive things differently than do novices. They perceive different affordances. Perception of affordances is highly influenced by the amount of experience that one has with similar situations.[9]

Experience not only changes how experts view a situation, it also enables them to efficiently and effectively respond to the situation. A skilled chess player can know which moves to make because of her experiences in playing the game: being in a variety of situations, seeing the possible moves, and knowing which moves worked and which did not. Part of what follows from this, though, is that unfamiliar or unusual situations will require the expert to deliberate to some extent about what to do, because the expert recognizes that the current situation doesn't easily map onto a previous situation. Because of this, experts need to monitor not only their own behavior but also the environment that they are working in for changes, so as to adjust their performance.[10]

Finally, once expertise has been acquired, the same kind of deliberate practice and self-monitoring behavior is necessary to retain it, otherwise one's level of skill degrades over time. The psychological research on age and expertise shows that maintaining one's level of skill requires consistent effort.[11]

One of the most important factors for determining whether someone can attain and maintain expertise is motivation.[12] Nobody can acquire expertise by accident, and only those who dedicate themselves to excellence in performance can reach that level of

skill development. Insofar as deliberate practice requires setting up challenges to overcome, it requires being strongly motivated to perform well, and a high level of motivation is required to maintain that level of performance. Like our expectations for acquiring virtue, achieving expertise requires being consistently motivated to achieve high standards that one sets for oneself. Julia Annas makes a similar point, putting it in terms of "the drive to aspire" which she argues is fundamental to both skill and virtue.[13] Annas argues that "aspiration leads the learner to strive to *improve*, to do what he is doing better," and that "Virtue is not a state you achieve and then sit back, with nothing further to do."[14] The possession of both skill and virtue is a matter of degree, and so there is always room for improvement.

III. Evaluating performances and performers

While motivation plays a key role in expertise, doubts may linger about whether motivation plays a role in evaluating skilled performances in quite the same way it would for virtue. When evaluating one's level of skill, the only thing that matters is whether one is able to act effectively when one chooses to do so. But when evaluating one's level of virtue, it also matters to what extent a person is motivated to act effectively. For example, Gary Watson argues that

> Indifference in a performance doesn't count against one's skill, whereas a less than wholehearted effort to save someone's life does impugn my moral character. Talent and skill are fully displayed only in wholehearted performances, whereas the aretaic perspective is also concerned with the "will," that is, with one's purposes, ends, choices, concerns, cares, attachments, and commitments.[15]

So when we evaluate someone's skillfulness, we are looking at what the person can do when giving a "wholehearted performance," and not on the extent to which one is motivated to give such performances. A failure to achieve the end of a skill does not necessarily count against one being skilled, at least when one is not giving a wholehearted performance.[16] But the same is not true of our evaluations of the possession of virtue. Halfhearted attempts at kindness, or not even attempting to be kind at times, indicate some failure to fully possess the virtue.

However, the mistake in this putative disanalogy is that we can make similar evaluations with skillfulness. If we switch our evaluations from the performance to the performer, then we can evaluate performers in regards to their motivational commitments. Watson suggests in an example of a tennis player giving half-hearted performances, that:

> it might bear negatively on me as a tennis player. One can be "good at" playing tennis without being overall a good tennis player. A good tennis player, overall, possesses not only a high level of skill but, among other things, a commitment to the game, a responsibility to its distinctive demands.[17]

Like with virtues, we can evaluate performers according to their motivational commitment to the ends of the skill. So a failure of motivation in the case of skill can count against one being a good performer. Notice too that we can also evaluate actions as being what a virtuous person would do, like treating someone fairly in a business deal, without bringing in an evaluation of that person's motivations. Inquiring into that person's motivations might reveal, for example, that the person is being fair only because

he considers it to be “good business” rather than having an inherent commitment to fairness. But even that case the other person in the deal has still been treated fairly. In short, we should reject both viewing skills as mere capacities to produce valued outcomes, as well as viewing virtues as merely motivational states. Virtue requires both knowing how to act well and being motivated to do so. This can be captured on the skill model of virtue, since the ends of a practice can be used to evaluate both the skillfulness of a performance, as well as the commitment of the performer. We do not need to look beyond the acquisition of skills and expertise to incorporate a concern for the motivational commitments of the performer.

The incorporation of motivational commitment into an account of expertise is also reflected in the approach Narvaez takes in arguing that moral behavior should be understood as skilled behavior. The view of expertise that she is working with includes the idea of an expert being committed to the ends of her practice. As she points out, “an expert desires excellence in the domain. Similarly, the virtuous person desires excellence in virtue, so much so that the desire is reflected not only in behavior but in preferences and choices, it is what the person likes to do.”[18] As mentioned earlier, to develop expertise in a domain requires a strong commitment to achieving high levels of performance and a perseverance to engage in a long and difficult acquisition process. This shapes people in ways often overlooked when skills are thought of as mere capacities. As Narvaez goes on to explain:

> Learning the skill means changing oneself to be the kind of person who fully embodies the skill, consciously and intuitively. The skill flavors and modifies one’s perceptions, attention, desires, and intuitions, as well as

> semantic, procedural, and conditional knowledge. The skills are simultaneously process focused and content rich and are refined throughout one's life.[19]

In this sense, expertise does capture the motivational aspects of virtue that gave rise to the putative disanalogy between virtues and skills in the case of halfhearted performances.

IV. The overlap between practical Wisdom and expertise

While I have argued that concerns about one's motivations when acting can be incorporated into a view of virtues as skills, this approach also needs to accommodate the idea that all the virtues involve practical wisdom, and this is a lot trickier to do. Part of the reason is due to practical wisdom being a rather unwieldy concept, with a variety of elements associated with it. As I will argue, most of these elements are explicable on a skill model, but one crucial element is not. Thus, I will first explore the ways in which expertise already captures many elements that are traditionally associated with practical wisdom. These elements are well-described in Rosalind Hursthouse's "mundane" account of practical wisdom, where she details the more general knowledge and capacities necessary to be practically wise.[20] She discusses some of the comparisons and contrasts that come out in Aristotle's distinction between *techne* (expertise) and *phronesis* (practical wisdom).

One obvious comparison is that both require experience to develop. Experience shapes our capacity to "see" a situation correctly. This capacity, Hursthouse states, is "absolutely requisite for finding out what 'the situation' is in many central cases in which action is called for."[21] Reading a situation correctly includes picking up on generic details such as what people seem to be thinking or feeling—for example, knowing when

somebody is merely "putting on a brave face. There is a need to be good at reading other people's reactions correctly, and this takes experience. Furthermore, this capacity is useful for everyone, regardless of whether their ends are morally good, neutral, or bad. Hursthouse claims that "once we recognize the fact that the *phronimos* and some of the wicked may share this perceptual capacity, we should find it unproblematic that there are other sorts of 'non-moral' details that experience will enable the *phronimos* to perceive which the inexperienced fail to perceive, and thereby blunder."[22] So much of the knowledge we need to act morally well is itself non-moral in its content, and so could also be potentially put to use in the service of immoral ends. For example, a generous person has to be able to correctly perceive people's needs, in order to know what kind of help they could most use in response. However, this is the same ability one would need in order to take advantage of these people's vulnerabilities.

It is important to note that recognition of these non-moral details can be the difference between successful action and well-intentioned but unsuccessful action. To show this, Hursthouse focuses on a case where the person with practical wisdom succeeds and the merely well-intentioned person fails. Take, for example, the case of rescuing a child from drowning in a rushing river. The difference that practical wisdom makes would not show itself if we instead compared a person willing to jump in to rescue the child to one who is unwilling, since that would just be a difference in motivation. Rather, we need a situation where two people are equally well-intentioned. In this case, the merely well-intentioned person immediately jumps in the water and starts swimming after the child, but ends up not saving the child because he cannot keep up with the speed of the current. The practically wise person by contrast, is able to save the child, because

she knows that in this situation she first needs to run along the river bank in order to get far ahead of the child before jumping in. Both people have the same goal and are equally motivated to achieve it, but the person with practical wisdom knows best how to go about actually achieving that goal.[23] The overlap between being skilled and being practically wise should be apparent, as developing skills is a process of acquiring the knowledge of how to best achieve a desired goal.

Support for these mundane aspects of moral behavior can also be found in the work of Paul Churchland, who argues that virtues should be understood as skills:

> These are the various skills of social *perception*, social *reflection*, *imagination*, and *reasoning*, and social *navigation* and *manipulation* that normal social learning produces. In childhood, one must come to appreciate the high-dimensional background structure of social space—its offices, its practices, its prohibitions, its commerce—and one must learn to recognize its local configuration swiftly and reliably. One must also learn to recognize one's own current position within it, and the often quite different positions of others. One must learn to anticipate the normal unfolding of this ongoing commerce, to recognize and help repair its occasional pathologies, and to navigate its fluid structure while avoiding social disasters, both large and small. All of this requires skill in divining the social perceptions and personal interests of others, and skill in manipulating and negotiating our collective behavior.[24]

Narvaez and Lapsley take a similar line as Churchland when they argue that an important dimension to those cultivating ethical skills is being "able to more quickly and accurately

‘read’ a situation and determine what role they might play. These experts are also better at generating usable solutions due to a greater understanding of the consequences of possible actions.”[25]

V. The difference between practical wisdom (*phronesis*) and expertise (*techne*)

If so much of what is associated with practical wisdom is already present in expertise, you may be left wondering whether practical wisdom just is a form of expertise that is specifically aimed at moral conduct. Aristotle sometimes seems to suggest as much when he describes being clever:

> which is such as to be able to put into practice the means to any proposed end in view, and to discover what those means are. Now if the end in view is a noble one, the ability is praiseworthy; but if the end in view is bad, the ability is villainy.[26]

Hursthouse raises a concern with the line being blurred between the two, when she notes that practical wisdom may seem to reduce to “expertise in ‘technical’ deliberation gained from experience, which in the virtuous happens to be directed to the right end.”[27] This same concern arises with Hubert and Stuart Dreyfus’s phenomenological account of skill acquisition,[28] since they view ethical expertise as a matter of *techne* applied to human affairs.

In response to this concern generally, and to the Dreyfus account more specifically, Bent Flyvbjerg cautions that

> Some interpretations of Aristotle’s intellectual virtues leave doubt as to whether *phronesis* and *techne* are distinct categories, or whether *phronesis*

> is just a higher form of *techne* or know-how . . . Even if both *phronesis* and *techne* involve skill and judgement, one type of intellectual virtue cannot be reduced to the other; *phronesis* is about value judgement in specific situations.[29]

What kind of value judgments does practical wisdom involve? Here it might help to reflect first on what kind of value judgments do not arise in the acquisition of expertise. With skills, the end being pursued is essentially fixed—in tennis, it is winning the game. While skills involve knowing how to achieve a desired end, it does not require making value judgments about the worth of the end being pursued, say about the value of tennis in a well-lived life. While we can evaluate an expert qua performer, being a good performer does not require practical wisdom, because it does not involve making value judgments about the worth of the end being pursued. For example, on the way to a tennis match the expert tennis player comes across the scene of an automobile accident, and decides to help the accident victims even though she knows she will miss her match. Here she is making a value judgment about the relative worth of playing tennis versus saving lives, placing that activity within broader concerns of living well, and so draws on practical wisdom.[30] Presumably, though, we would not think that makes her better qua tennis player, and so that element of practical wisdom is not part of being an expert and committed performer. Virtues, however, do require one to make value judgments about the ends being pursued in action for their exercise and possession.

Furthermore, value judgments about the relative worth in that example of playing tennis are not involved when the question before the tennis player is merely whether to give a wholehearted or halfhearted performance on the court. That would only be a

question of whether one is committed to the ends of the practice, without necessarily making any value judgments about the worth of that practice. To give another example, one might be engaged in the practice of deceptive advertising, intentionally trying to sell people products that do not actually meet their needs. One could try hard to be good at this practice, acquire expertise in it, and remain responsive to the distinctive demands of the practice, without having practical wisdom. If you added practical wisdom as part of the expert level of skill you would then realize that you ought not to be doing it all—that is, you ought not to be responsive to the distinctive demands of the practice of deceptive advertising. While practical wisdom involves making good judgments about what the proper conception of the good life consists in, one need not have it to perform well relative to a particular practice, or for that matter, a particular ethical tradition. As Bruce Weinstein points out in a discussion of moral expertise:

> We need not resolve the metaethical debate about the good life in order to recognize that certain people live better than others according to the rules and virtues of a particular moral tradition. If a singular understanding of the good could definitively be established, of course, then there would be a standard for evaluating performative expertise across traditions. In lieu of that, however, performative experts may legitimately be distinguished by the degree to which they consistently apply the moral rules and realize the moral virtues of the tradition to which they belong.[31]

There are already conceptions of the good life that one may adopt, and which guide one's moral performance, without requiring one to have ever having reflected on whether that was an appropriate conception. Mere commitment is not enough, as one could be an

exemplar with respect to an overall corrupt conception of morality, like someone trying to be the best Nazi they can be. This is why it is important to reflect on and question one's conception of morality, instead of being blindly committed to it. For that, you need to add in practical wisdom.[32] Thus, while expertise involves knowing how to act well, and we can further evaluate experts with respect to their motivational commitments to their skill domain, this still ends up falling a bit short of exhibiting practical wisdom. This is the distinctive difference that remains between virtues and skills.

However, I do not take this admission as a reason to reject the skill model of virtue, as with any skill domain there will be unique elements that are not found in other domains. This response is similar to one that Linda Zagzebski gives in response to James Wallace's argument that virtues are not skills because all virtues are valuable, but not all skills are valuable. As Zagzebski points out:

> This argument does not support the conclusion that virtues are not skills, however, but only that the class of virtues is not coextensive with the class of skills. On Wallace's reasoning it might be the case that every virtue is a skill, although not every skill is a virtue.[33]

All virtues are valuable presumably for their role in constituting a well-lived life, and likewise for the need for practical wisdom. Other skills do not necessarily play a constitutive role in living well, and so neither are they necessarily inherently valuable, nor do they require practical wisdom for their exercise. However, that does not show that virtues cannot be skills, but only that not all skills are virtues.

VI. Is Practical Wisdom Itself a Skill?

Since I take the virtues to be essentially skillful activity guided by practical wisdom, this then leads us to the question of whether practical wisdom should be understood as itself a skill. Although having expertise does not involve having practical wisdom, it may be the case that the exercise of practical wisdom is itself a skill. Jason Swartwood has recently argued that wisdom is an expert skill.[34] Such an argument might seem to strengthen a skill model of virtue, but I think that much of what he characterizes as wisdom is already captured by expertise (similar in this respect to my views about the mundane aspects of wisdom discussed by Hursthouse). Furthermore, what remains central to practical wisdom, in terms of a broad knowledge of what is good and bad for people, does not seem to fit the model of a skill, even if the knowledge is gained through experience.

Swartwood characterizes wisdom generically as a kind of understanding, specifically understanding how one should act all-things-considered. Swartwood defines "understanding" in ways familiar to what goes into expertise:

> Understanding how to conduct oneself in a domain D is (a) an ability to identify (accurately, non-accidentally, and in a wide range of situations in D) what features in a situation require what response in order to achieve the goals of D, and, when there are internal obstacles to carrying out that response, (b) an ability to identify how to overcome those internal obstacles.[35]

Expertise involves learning how to act well, and in practice requires a lot of self-regulating abilities. So here we agree at least that knowing how to act well in a domain requires these abilities, and that we should expect acting well in the moral domain to require the same abilities. However, all of this is captured already by expertise, so I

would not label this as specifically wisdom. Wisdom in the moral domain requires more than the instrumental reasoning that goes into expertise, and his characterization of "understanding" misses this distinction between virtues and skills.

However, Swartwood offers a reply to those like me who object that practical wisdom differs from expertise in skills because the latter is limited to mere instrumental reasoning. In response to this objection, he draws on the RPD model mentioned earlier to argue that expertise requires reasoning about the goals being pursued:

> A good firefighter doesn't just aim at the goal of putting out fires but at various other goals as well: ensuring firefighter safety, ensuring the safety of citizens, protecting property, and so on. These are the goals that constitute the supreme end of firefighting, which we could say is to combat fires well or effectively. Some of these more specific goals compete with each other: a firefighter will sometimes have to decide, qua firefighter, between securing someone's safety and getting the fire under control. Thus expert decision makers in areas of complex choice and challenging performance (including both firefighting and all-things-considered decisions) will often have to specify which particular goal in a situation constitutes the supreme end of their domain.[36]

This response does move expertise a bit closer to practical wisdom, insofar as it can involve an attempt to balance multiple goals. However, this still does not overcome the distinction I argued for earlier between virtues and skills, as he does not show that skills do not have fixed goals, but rather that some professions have multiple fixed goals, which have to be balanced against each other in certain situations. Doing that still does not

require reflection on the ends as those worthy of pursuit. Practical wisdom requires reflection on our values, goals, and practices; not merely on how to balance a few fixed goals in particular situations.

Swartwood assumes that even with wisdom the goals are fixed. In discussing Aristotle on the difference between a wise person and a merely clever person, Swartwood endorses the interpretation rejected earlier, claiming “although a wise person and a clever person share a similar skill at deliberation, wisdom and mere cleverness are distinct, since a person who is merely clever is able to figure out what promotes the goals she happens to have, while a wise person has an ability to figure out what promotes the right goals.”[37] Here he collapses wisdom into skill directed at morally right goals, which is problematic for the reasons raised previously by Hursthouse and Flyvbjerg.

Beyond this, there is a further problem with conceptualizing wisdom as the singular skill of getting it right in the moral domain. Skills require feedback for improvement, and so there needs to be some identifiable goal to the exercise of your skill. It is difficult to see how the feedback mechanism would work if wisdom is a skill in the sense of a singular all-things-considered judgment about how to act well morally. The specific problem is that the target in that sense is very broad and vague, which will make it difficult to determine whether you are acting in such a way as to achieve success. As Daniel Jacobson points out in a discussion of the virtue as skill thesis: “The plausibility of a skill-based epistemology was earned by arguments focusing on discrete virtues such as courage and kindness.”[38] Without the ability to get accurate feedback, you can’t reliably improve.[39] So Swartwood is correct in thinking that acting well in the moral

domain requires skillfulness, but not as a singular skill and not without an evaluation of ends not found in expertise.[40]

VII. Practical wisdom and the unity of the virtues

While I have argued that there are problems in conceiving of wisdom as a singular skill, I agree with Swartwood that part of the role that practical wisdom needs to play in an account of virtue is to help us to arrive at an all-things-considered judgment. As Jacobson also points out, you run into a problem when thinking of the virtues as completely discrete, specifically in the possibility of the virtuous person falling short of a full account of moral knowledge:

> For moral knowledge requires not merely that the virtuous person sees the demands of kindness, courage, and the like, but that he can see what to do, all things considered—that is, what he has *most* reason to do. If the discrete virtues can pull in different directions, then moral knowledge requires the ability to arbitrate between them. Only then will we be able to say that the virtuous person knows what to do, on some occasion.[41]

If the virtues are discrete in the sense that there is no unity to the virtues, then individual virtues could pull us in conflicting directions. For example, honesty may require one course of action while kindness requires a different course. In which case, one could have all the virtues and still not know what to do all things considered. This would be a problematic result for virtue ethics, since virtues were all you were supposed to need to know how to act well.

If, on the other hand, there was something that unified the discrete virtues, then the virtues would not conflict in such a way as to prevent the virtuous person from

reaching a conclusion about what to do all things considered. Since the virtuous person is supposed to know what to do, all things considered, there appears to be a need to defend some version of the unity of the virtues thesis. However, this runs you into a different sort of problem. The unity thesis is often thought to have problematic implications, if it is understood as the view that in order to have any one of the virtues you have to have them all (at least to some extent). The problem is that this conflicts with the common sense view that people usually have a mix of virtues and vices.[42] If having one virtue means you have them all, then nobody could have the virtue of kindness while failing to have the virtue of courage. It seems as if, though, most of us know someone like that. It would also appear that nobody has any virtues, since having a single virtue entails having all the virtues, and it is hard to imagine that anyone has achieved that level of moral expertise. But if you deny the unity claim, because of these implications, then you are back to the problem of discrete virtues pulling you in different directions and not being able to figure out what to do.

In one sense, Swartwood was right to think that wisdom needs to be understood as consisting in helping one to make all things considered judgments about how to act well. However, wisdom in this sense is too broad to be understood as a skill itself. Instead, we need to conceive of acting well as involving many virtues as skills. But to avoid the problem of conflicting virtues, there still needs to be a role for practical wisdom to play in unifying the virtues. In response, I think Susan Wolf's account of practical wisdom captures some of what Swartwood is after, and can help address this issue.[43] Like most virtue theorists, Wolf thinks having practical wisdom is a matter of having knowledge about what is valuable in life: what is good, bad, beneficial, harmful, important, trivial,

etc. This knowledge will be the same for each virtue (i.e., all the virtues are drawing on the same body of knowledge), and this is the common element that unifies the virtues. Wolf defends this unifying claim by pointing out that

> knowledge of the value of one item is necessarily knowledge of that item's value *relative to* the values of everything else. Knowing the value of physical safety means knowing what's worth fighting for and what's not; knowing the value of money means knowing when it is and when it is not worth spending it or giving it away. This suggests that perfect and complete knowledge of the importance of, say, physical safety, may require knowledge of the importance of wealth, and vice versa. For one may need to know when a certain amount of wealth is worth fighting for, or when giving money to assure another person's physical safety is appropriate.[44]

Knowing the value of the ends of a practice would require knowing its value relative to other ends that could be pursued, in the overall context of living well. As I argued earlier, this kind of a consideration of ends is not found in expertise, and is thus unique to practical wisdom. But this kind of evaluative knowledge can help resolve putative conflicts between virtues, and so helps us to arrive at all-things-considered judgments about how to act. Although it is a singular body of knowledge, possession of that knowledge (like expertise) is a matter of degree. It is knowledge that is gained incrementally through time and experience (and though it has that in common with skill acquisition, it does not make it a skill).[45]

Wolf's examples, such as of knowing when someone's safety is worth putting yourself at risk, show that her view of practical wisdom is consistent with Flyvbjerg's understanding of *phronesis* (practical wisdom) as the ability to make value judgments in specific situations. Furthermore, Flyvbjerg draws our attention to the fact that there are multiple methods for obtaining this kind of knowledge:

> Many people think that phronesis is qualitative, but it doesn't have to be. Or they think that phronesis is only about narratives and case studies. But phronesis is about what is good or bad for people, whatever it takes to know that, in your specific area of interest, be it architecture, planning or government.[46]

So while it may be a singular body of knowledge, it does not follow that there is only one way to acquire such knowledge, which also speaks against understanding practical wisdom as a singular skill.

If practical wisdom does play a unifying role for the virtues, does it then lead to implausible claims about the actual possession of virtue mentioned previously? I believe that the view advanced here does not necessarily have this problematic implication. According to Wolf, from the claims that all virtues involve knowledge of what is valuable, and the knowledge is a single comprehensive body of knowledge:

> The conclusion that follows is that *virtue is unified*, in the sense that the perfect and complete possession of one virtue requires at least the knowledge that is needed for the possession of every other . . . the argument I have presented supports the thesis that to have one virtue, one must have the knowledge required for the possession of the others, but this

> is not the same as the requirement that one possess the other virtues themselves.[47]

For example, knowing that you should risk your life for something of value does not guarantee the willingness to take such risks. So possessing one virtue does not entail the actual possession of any other virtue, even to a small degree, for they are essentially discrete skills which it takes different kinds of experience to acquire. What follows from these claims is that possessing a virtue entails possessing one necessary, but not sufficient, condition for possessing any other virtue.

One friendly amendment to make to Wolf's account comes out of Flyvbjerg's discussion of the relation between *phronesis* and power. Although *phronesis* has always been thought of in terms of making value judgments, it has been typical in the virtue literature to think too individualistically about how to answer questions of value, or when answering these questions involves consulting others (whether a putatively wise person or the standards of one's own community) it has typically ignored issues of power among those asking and answering these questions. It is not that one is merely asking questions about power alongside the questions about value, but that there are power dynamics in our own thinking about morality, what is valuable, and what the good life consists in. Flyvbjerg helpfully brings to our attention what has been left out of such discussions, stating that:

> the classical interpretation of *phronesis* is strong on values but weak on issues of power . . . practical wisdom involves not only appreciative judgements in terms of values but also an understanding of the practical

> political realities of any situation as part of an integrated judgement in terms of power.[48]

Flyvbjerg's point is that reflections on our conceptions of the good life, and the value of the activities we're engaged in, cannot be carried out in complete isolation from the social, political, legal, and economic circumstances in which we find ourselves. For example, Narvaez points out how "It is only in the West that a person is viewed as an individual who can (and should) stand on his own. In the rest of the world, typically, persons are understood only as members of communities."[49] These contexts play a role in shaping our views about our activities and the good life, and they need to be questioned from the standpoint of how power is being exercised in those contexts to shape our views. One of the few times there has been awareness of this in the virtue literature is in Nancy Snow's article on virtue and oppression. She argues that:

> Examining the historical record reveals a common flaw: misconceptions of the natures of certain groups – women and African-American slaves – led to mistaken notions of their flourishing and misidentifications of the traits that constitute the virtues of the members of those groups. These mistakes were often not innocent errors, but worked to the advantage of those who made them and to the detriment of women and blacks.[50]

This more robust form of practical wisdom is of critical importance given the social dimensions of any human life.[51]

VIII. Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the roles of motivation and practical wisdom in a skill model of virtue. Acquiring and maintaining expertise requires a strong commitment to

performing well according to the ends of the skill domain, as we would expect with virtue. However, what is missing from expertise is the need for practical wisdom, understood as involving the evaluation of the ends one is pursuing with respect to living well. Thus virtue, on the skill model, amounts to skillful behavior guided by practical wisdom. So with respect to the development of virtue, it will be a matter of acquiring moral skills and gaining the knowledge to be practically wise.

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Performance, edited by K. A. Ericsson, pp. 705–722. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

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[1] An earlier draft of this article was presented at the Virtue and Skill workshop, Centre for the Study of Mind in Nature, University of Oslo, Norway (June 1–2, 2015). Also, the article draws on my chapter on "Virtue as a Skill" in the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of Virtue*, ed. Nancy E. Snow.

[2] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Grinnell, IA: The Peripatetic Press, 1984); L. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); G. Watson, "Two Faces of Responsibility," *Agency and Answerability*, ed. G. Watson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); 260–288.

[3] In this chapter, I will be specifically concerned with the moral virtues, though most of my claims will also apply to intellectual and other virtues.

[4] A skill can be defined as an acquired ability to achieve a desired outcome. It is important to note that a skill involves some flexibility in how one goes about achieving that outcome (to cope with changes in one's environment), as well as a broad view of the outcome (as for example in learning how to speak a language, rather than a single phrase).

[5] J. Horn and H. Masunaga, "A Merging Theory of Expertise and Intelligence," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*, ed. K. A. Ericsson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 601.

[6] "Because high levels of skill must be practiced and adapted personally to dynamic contexts, aspiring experts need to develop a self-disciplined approach to learning and practice to gain consistency." B. Zimmerman, "Development and Adaptation

of Expertise: The Role of Self-Regulatory Processes and Beliefs," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*, ed. K. A. Ericsson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 706.

[7] Some might see all the deliberate practice and self-regulating behavior that goes into acquiring expertise as a point of departure from morality, for it might be thought that one does not need to do such extensive practice to be moral. Darcia Narvaez addresses this point in an instructive way. She says: "As a result of my studies with groups differing in expertise, I believe that moral judgment is a domain that is similar to that of music. Most people have some knowledge of music. For example they can sing songs, having learned from general experience how to carry a tune. Yet general experience does not lead to expertise in music . . . Likewise, although one can learn a great deal about moral reasoning in everyday life, in order to reach the highest levels one must undergo deliberative, focused study." D. Narvaez, "The Neo-Kohlbergian Tradition and Beyond: Schemas, Expertise and Character," in *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation, Vol. 51: Moral Motivation through the Lifespan*, eds. G. Carlo & C. Pope-Edwards (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).

[8] Fireground commanders are those commanding firefighters on the scene of a fire. They have to arrive at decisions about how to coordinate the activities of the firefighters to contain the fire and keep everyone safe, based on the behavior of the fire and the skills of their firefighters (amongst other factors).

[9] D. Narvaez and D. K. Lapsley, "The Psychological Foundations of Everyday Morality and Moral Expertise," in *Character Psychology and Character Education*, eds. D.

K. Lapsley & C. Power (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005): 150–151.

[10] "This kind of monitoring prevents blind alleys, errors, and the need for extensive back-up and retraction, thus ensuring overall progress to a goal. In addition, these same kinds of monitoring behaviors are critical throughout the process of acquiring knowledge and skills on which expertise depends." P. Feltovich, M. Prietula, and K. A. Ericsson, "Studies of Expertise from Psychological Perspectives," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*, ed. K. A. Ericsson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 56.

[11] R. Krampe and N. Charness, "Aging and Expertise," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*, ed. K. A. Ericsson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 733.

[12] "Unless a person wants to pursue the difficult path that leads to the development of talent, neither innate potential nor all the knowledge in the world will suffice." M. Csikszentmihalyi, K. Rathunde, and S. Whalen, *Talented Teenagers: The Roots of Success and Failure* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993): 31–32.

[13] J. Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).<<AQ: Would you prefer to add IBT tags to this reference and use "Ibid., 25" in the next note>>

[14] Annas, *Virtue*, 25.

[15] Watson, "Two Faces," Appendix.

[16] Will our intuitions about virtues and skills then coincide in cases where people are giving wholehearted performances? Not necessarily. Consider the case of a highly skilled doctor who practices medicine primarily for the sake of wealth rather than

for the sake of healing others. It does not count against the surgeon's level of expertise if we found out that she is motivated ultimately by wealth, where improving the welfare of the patient is a mere means to an end. With virtues, though, it would count against the possession of kindness if one's kind acts were done for purely selfish reasons.

[17] Watson, "Two Faces," Appendix.

[18] D. Narvaez, "Integrative Ethical Education," in *Handbook of Moral Development*, eds. M. Killen & J. Smetana (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2006): 719.

[19] Narvaez, "Integrative," 722.

[20] R. Hursthouse, "Practical Wisdom: A Mundane Account," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 106 (2006): 285–309. Hursthouse is not claiming, though, that the mundane aspects are all there is to practical wisdom, as she also believes practical wisdom involves making value judgments.

[21] <IBT>Hursthouse, "Practical Wisdom,"</IBT> 299.<<AQ: Would you prefer to move the <IBT> tags to note 20 and use "Ibid., 299" here?>>

[22] Ibid., 299–300.

[23] As Hursthouse also points out, similar thoughts apply to the actions of children, who are often well-intentioned but do not realize how best to act on those intentions. Empirical support for moral motivations developing before practical wisdom can be found in a study of moral theme comprehension in D. Narvaez, T. Gleason, and C. Mitchell, "Moral Virtue and Practical Wisdom: Theme Comprehension in Children, Youth and Adults," *Journal of Genetic Psychology* 171 (4) (2010): 1–26.

[24] P. Churchland, “Towards a Cognitive Neurobiology of the Moral Virtues,” *Topoi* 17 (1998): 88.

[25] Narvaez and Lapsley, “Psychological Foundations,” 155.

[26] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1144a24–1144a27.

[27] Hursthouse, “Practical Wisdom,” 305.

[28] H. Dreyfus and S. Dreyfus, “What Is Morality: A Phenomenological Account of the Development of Expertise,” in *Universalism vs. Communitarianism*, ed. D. Rasmussen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990); H. Dreyfus and S. Dreyfus, “Sustaining Non-rationalized Practices: Body-Mind, Power, and Situational Ethics: Interview Conducted by Bent Flyvbjerg,” *Praxis International* 11 (1991): 93–113.

[29] B. Flyvbjerg, “Phronetic Planning Research: Theoretical and Methodological Reflections,” *Planning Theory & Practice* 5 (3) (2004): 288.

[30] I will have more to say about these judgments involving a view as to the value of one thing *relative* to the value of another, in the latter section on practical wisdom and unity of the virtues.

[31] B. Weinstein, “The Possibility of Ethical Expertise,” *Theoretical Medicine* 15 (1994): 71.

[32] Furthermore, it needs to be a form of phronesis that handles questions of sociopolitical power, as I will discuss later in this chapter.

[33] Zagzebski, *Virtues*, 107.

[34] <IBT>J. Swartwood, “Wisdom as an Expert Skill,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 16 (2013):</IBT> 511–528.

[35] Ibid., 511–528.

[36] Ibid., 525.

[37] Ibid., 526 fn 26.

[38] D. Jacobson, "Seeing by Feeling," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 8 (2005): 401.

[39] One further worry is that it would be too difficult to acquire because of the possible lag in time between action and feedback. For example, compare learning how to drive cars with learning how to pilot large ships in a harbor. The latter is more difficult to learn in part because of the longer delay between actions and noticeable consequences, which leads to slower feedback on one's attempt to pilot. The delay between your actions now and how it affects your life as a whole can be very long indeed.

[40] It may be that part of practical wisdom involves figuring out what the constitutive ends are of living well (*eudaimonia*), and that these constitutive ends give us more definitive goals that are necessary to help shape the acquisition of moral skills.

[41] Jacobson, "Seeing by Feeling," 397.

[42] This is not the only form that the thesis takes, and not the only problem raised about it, but for lack of space it will be all I can consider here. Given that this particular complaint about the unity thesis is common, I think it is worth at least arguing that the view I am advancing does not have this problem.

[43] <IBT>S. Wolf, "Moral Psychology and the Unity of the Virtues," *Ratio* 20 (2) (2007):</IBT> 145–167.

[44] Ibid., 150.

[45] While a unity of the virtues thesis is commonly thought to imply that possessing a virtue necessarily means that you have all the other virtues, at least to some extent, this does not follow on her account. Wolf argues that while the core claim that the virtues are unified is plausible, it does not necessarily follow that the possession of one virtue requires possessing any other virtue. In brief, possessing practical wisdom is one necessary, but not sufficient, condition for possessing any virtue. See Wolf, “Moral Psychology,” 150 and 161.

[46] B. Flyvbjerg and I. Kirkeby, “Transferable Knowledge: An Interview with Bent Flyvbjerg,” *Architectural Research Quarterly* 15 (1) (2011): 9–14, in particular 14<<AQ: “in particular” OK?>>.

[47] Wolf, “Moral Psychology and the Unity of the Virtues,” 150 and 161.

[48] Flyvbjerg, “Phronetic Planning,” 284.

[49] D. Narvaez, “Wisdom as Mature Moral Functioning: Insights from Developmental Psychology and Neurobiology,” in *Toward Human Flourishing: Character, Practical Wisdom and Professional Formation*, eds. Mark Jones, Paul Lewis, & Kelly Reffitt (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2013).

[50] N. Snow, “Virtue and Oppression,” in *Current Controversies in Virtue Theory*, ed. M. Alfano (New York: Routledge): 49–60, in particular 56<<AQ: “in particular” OK?>>.

[51] For example, to go back to Wolf’s discussion of what is valuable, surely our own thoughts about the relative value of money and wealth are conditioned by power. As another example of the importance of thinking in terms of power, consider the social and political implications of viewing the virtuous person as literally an

ethical expert. Experts have a great deal of power, status, and influence in society. The notion of ethical expertise is especially controversial, but is a surprisingly neglected topic in virtue theory.