

Ethics Consultation and Autonomy

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Abstract Services of ethics consultants are nowadays commonly used in such various spheres of life as engineering, public administration, business, law, health care, journalism, and scientific research. It has however been maintained that use of ethics consultants is incompatible with personal autonomy; in moral matters individuals should be allowed to make their own decisions. The problem this criticism refers to can be conceived of as a conflict between the professional autonomy of ethics experts and the autonomy of the persons they serve. This paper addresses this conflict and maintains that when the nature of both ethics consultation and individual autonomy is properly understood, the professional autonomy of ethics experts is compatible with the autonomy of the persons they assist.

Keywords Ethics consultation · Ethical expertise · Individual autonomy · Professional autonomy · Moral problems

Introduction

Services of ethics consultants are nowadays commonly used in such various spheres of life as engineering, public administration, business, law, health care, journalism, and scientific research. It is taken that as they have expertise in ethics, ethics consultants can have valuable contributions to make in solving practical moral problems. This idea has however also faced strong opposition. One of the main lines of criticism against it is that use of ethics consultants is incompatible with individual autonomy; in moral matters individuals should be allowed to make their own decisions [1–3]. The problem this criticism refers to can be conceived of as a conflict between the professional autonomy of ethics experts and the autonomy of

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the persons they serve. On the one hand, the claim that autonomous persons should be allowed to make their own moral decisions is appealing and, consequently, the prospect of ethics consultations' unduly restricting persons' autonomy is worrying [4–7]. On the other hand, the stance that in practice ethical experts' views should always succumb to those of laymen is almost as unappealing as the claim that, say, a physics professor's views on questions of physics should always give way to those of her students or that a physician's expert judgment should always yield to the views of her patients.¹ If certain persons have expertise in ethics and we want our moral decisions to be as well-founded as possible, why should we not give weight to ethical experts' autonomous views in our moral decision-making? In this paper, I address this conflict between the professional autonomy of ethical experts and the autonomy of the persons they serve. I argue that when the nature of both ethics consultation and individual autonomy is properly understood, the professional autonomy of ethics experts is compatible with the autonomy of their clients.

The Nature of Ethical Expertise and Autonomy

Criticisms of ethical expertise sometimes suggest that ethical experts should be persons who are able to present uncontroversial answers to all fundamental moral problems or individuals with some kind of special insight into moral matters far exceeding the moral competence possessed by any normal persons [2, 8]. These conceptions of the nature of ethical expertise would seem to be straw men rather than accurate descriptions of the kind of ethical expertise the proponents of ethical expertise have claimed to possess [9–12]. In any case,² my conception about the nature of ethical expertise is much more modest.³ Adequate assessment of difficult moral questions gives rise to a vast amount of factual, philosophical, and logical questions. Accordingly, surveying all the relevant considerations, clarifying the concepts, detecting the theoretical commitments and practical implications of different moral views, and considering them in the light of a wide array of relevant judgments is a laborious and difficult task that laymen are usually incapable of engaging in, for lack of time if not for other reasons. Therefore, persons who have had the time to get well acquainted with the various issues that through assessment of moral problems involves and who are able to apply their knowledge to concrete moral questions are usually able to at least clarify, systematize, and extend the moral views lay persons hold. Even though ethics experts are not able to present

¹ Of course, informed consent procedures allowing autonomous patients to make their own decisions concerning their treatment are widely used in the Western world, but the reason for the adoption of these procedures is not that patients would have more expertise in questions of medicine than physicians but that of securing that patients are treated in ways that accord with their own values.

² Admittedly, some philosophers claim to be able to present answers to all fundamental moral problems or at least to have procedures for determining what they are [13].

³ By 'expert' I mean, roughly, a person with special knowledge and skills that give her legitimate claim to epistemic authority within a domain (Cf. 12(pp. 62–63)). 'Ethics' is here understood in a wide sense in which it concerns all considerations pertaining to the moral value of human conduct and to the moral reasons, rules, and principles that ought to govern it.

uncontroversial answers to all fundamental moral problems and do not possess any divine insight into moral matters, they are often more knowledgeable about the issues relevant to assessing moral questions and more skilful in distinguishing good moral arguments from bad ones than laymen.⁴ It is this sense of ethical expertise I refer to when I speak about experts in ethics.⁵

Autonomy means self-government. It is commonly accepted that a person is not autonomous if she is being coerced, manipulated, heavily pressured, or in some other way controlled by other persons in ways that makes it impossible for her to decide and act according to her own values and desires. When, for example, a patient's decision to accept a treatment proposed to her is ultimately based on her being pressured to comply with the expressed values of her political party, it does not reflect her autonomous values and desires. Similarly, if a person's decision to accept a land use plan subjected to public discretion is based on his being threatened by representatives of a construction firm, that decision is not autonomous. These intuitions are, or at least should be, common ground between competing theories of autonomy. But philosophers disagree over what else in addition to being free of these kinds of external obstacles being autonomous presupposes. Most importantly, philosophical theories of individual autonomy differ from each other with respect to the kind of requirements of rationality they see autonomy as presupposing, if any, and in terms of whether or not they hold that there are certain substantive views that autonomous persons necessarily accept [4, 15–19].

The substantive theories of autonomy are unappealing as they face the overwhelming difficulty of explaining exactly what substantive views qualify as autonomous and why. In connection with many questions of value at least, uncontroversial answers to that question have proven to be extremely difficult to find. In terms of rationality, although the extreme rationalistic theories of autonomy are unattractive,⁶ the intuition that autonomy presupposes that at least some requirements of rationality are fulfilled derives support from examples in which, say, a person who is offered a glass of poisonous liquid wants to drink it as she thinks it is pure water. Let us assume that this person would not want to drink the liquid offered to her if she knew what it really is. Then it is intuitively plausible that

⁴ I present further elucidation of the kind of ethical expertise I consider possible and legitimate below.

⁵ One line of criticism against the possibility of ethical expertise refers to an alleged disparity between science and ethics. It is maintained that while science focuses on factual matters about which it is possible to have objective knowledge, ethics concerns values which depend for their existence on persons' desires and attitudes and about which there is no objective knowledge to be had. The possibility of ethical expertise thus presupposes that ethics is factual and objective like science and because it is not, this line of thinking proceeds, there cannot be expertise in ethics [2, 8]. As I have addressed this criticism of the possibility of ethical expertise elsewhere [14], I will not go into it here.

⁶ A strict Kantian theory of autonomy could maintain that autonomous persons are individuals whose actions are determined by impartial and abstract principles of reason alone; autonomous persons do not give weight to the values, desires, and wishes they have as individual persons. As their concentration is on abstract principles of rationality, it is arguable that the purely rationalistic theories of autonomy aim to explicate a different idea of autonomy than the one that is considered to be relevant in contemporary applied ethics. When it refers to autonomous persons' decisions and actions, contemporary applied ethics is interested in the ways that persons behave as the persons that they are, or after they have been provided with information considered relevant to their making certain decisions, not in the manner that beings with no personal values, desires, and wishes would behave in certain kind of ideal circumstances.

the person's wish to drink the glass of poison is not autonomous.⁷ Similarly, if the person knew that she is being offered poison but thought that it is perfectly safe for her to drink it, it is intuitively plausible that she is not autonomous with respect to the matter, when other things are being equal. As the person does not want to be poisoned but still wants to drink the poison, she has failed to reason consistently on the basis of her autonomous values and desires and, consequently, her desire to drink the poison does not reflect what she autonomously wants.

There are different conceptions about exactly how the requirements of rationality that autonomy presupposes should be formulated, but as the above examples suggest it is arguable that all plausible theories of individual autonomy accept at least the following criterion. If a person's beliefs concerning some matter are false, inconsistent with each other, or she is uninformed about that matter without her realizing and accepting it,⁸ then she is not autonomous with respect to that matter. It can then be said that a person's views and choices are autonomous, roughly, when they reflect what she herself thinks about the matters in question when she is sufficiently informed and reasons correctly.

Ethics Experts' Professional Autonomy

For the purposes of this paper, the cases ethics consultants address can be divided into three classes. First, in some cases the commonly accepted moral views usually relied on in everyday life are not applicable, although the cases involve enough morally salient features to suggest that they are morally problematic. For example, scientific and technological development can facilitate the performance of medical procedures previously unheard of and about which the commonly accepted moral views do not produce any verdict. But as performing the procedures could involve, say, gene transfer, it can be taken that they involve morally problematic issues. Second, there are cases about which commonly accepted moral views produce conflicting conclusions. For example, the moral views that we should be beneficent and not cause pain are widely shared, but in some cases benefiting persons can involve causing pain to them or to other beings. Or there can be different conceptions about exactly what would amount to inflicting unjustified pain in a given case, and an ethics consultant needs to find a morally acceptable solution to that problem. Third, sometimes ethics consultants are merely expected to make sure that certain activities are undertaken according to moral requirements commonly accepted in society. That happens, for example, when a research plan is examined so as to secure that the proposed research project does not involve inflicting unnecessary pain to any of the research subjects and the concerned parties agree on what causing unnecessary pain means.

⁷ In a recent article, James Stacey Taylor argues for a different conception of autonomy [15]. As I have addressed Taylor's argument elsewhere [20], I will not go into it here.

⁸ It is arguable that at least in their self-regarding matters autonomous individuals can have false and inconsistent beliefs if they autonomously accept that. A person can, for example, autonomously consider some decision she is to make so trivial for her that she is not willing to gather the information that, other things being equal, can be considered relevant from the point of view of making it.

When faced with a situation in which the commonly accepted morality is silent but which has morally salient features that make it morally problematic, an ethics expert needs to autonomously present a solution to the moral quandary it poses. Of course, in doing that she needs to rely on some evaluative judgments or intuitions concerning what is morally right and wrong, but that does not imply that she should possess some mysterious moral faculty that allows her a privileged access into what really is morally acceptable. There are certain moral intuitions that we hold with such conviction that we use them to test moral theories and individuals' moral competence. If a moral theory implies or a person sincerely holds, for example, that, when other things are being equal, it is quite all right to make lying promises, that torturing babies for fun is acceptable, that freedom of conscience is a bad thing, etc.⁹ we can legitimately conclude that the theory needs revising at least and that the person is not morally competent.¹⁰ In her work, an ethics expert can rely on these kinds of fundamental moral intuitions and the moral judgments that can be logically derived from them [24, 25]. Furthermore, in Western moral philosophy certain formal moral principles, such as that we ought to treat morally similar cases in morally similar ways, that a person should not be blamed for some deed if she had no say in whether or not it was performed, etc. are commonly accepted.¹¹ By reference to the fundamental moral intuitions, to the judgments that can be logically derived from them, and to the formal moral principles that stand up to critical philosophical scrutiny an ethics experts can assess the situation in a non-arbitrary way and present justified and autonomous moral judgments concerning it.

In the second kinds of cases distinguished above, ethics consultants thus need to deal with a conflict between commonly accepted moral requirements. That the moral requirements are incompatible with each other suggests that at least one of them might be unacceptable after all or at least not applicable to the case at hand. Therefore, an ethics expert needs to autonomously examine the conflicting moral requirements and assess their moral acceptability and usefulness in dealing with the case in which the conflict between them occurs. In the light of her work, it may turn out that all of the moral principles should be rejected, that only one of them ought to be obeyed, or that all of them should be accepted [26]. In the last kind of case, an ethics expert needs to determine how that conflict should be solved; is it by making a compromise in which the conflicting moral requirements are only partially fulfilled, by acting in accordance with one of the requirements and compensating those harmed by the other requirements' remaining unfulfilled, etc.

⁹ For useful discussion on what kinds of fundamental moral views rational persons (should) accept see [21].

¹⁰ It could be objected that a moral particularist, a proponent of the view that the moral status of actions cannot be determined in abstract of the concrete situations in which they are, or would be, performed, can deny these moral views. However, some moral particularists do allow that there are reasons that function the same way across different cases [22], (pp.77–78) and it is difficult to see how particularists could deny, for example, that it is wrong to make false promises when other things are being equal. For criticism of moral particularism see, e.g. [23].

¹¹ These principles are formal in the sense that they do not commit one to any specific substantive morality, but not in the sense that they would be completely morally neutral.

In terms of the third kinds of cases mentioned above, that some moral values are commonly accepted within a society does not mean that they are morally justified. For example, there have been societies in which slavery was considered morally acceptable and societies in which some forms of racism are widely accepted would still seem to exist, but this does not imply that slavery and racism are morally justified. In other words, even the cases in which ethics consultants are expected to merely secure that certain activities are performed in ways that accord with commonly accepted moral values are not morally unproblematic. Therefore, an ethicist should not take the actual values accepted in her society as given, but ought to rely on her ethical expertise and subject them and their application to concrete cases into critical scrutiny. Again, in the light of the kind of critical assessment described above, an ethics expert can present justified and autonomous moral judgments concerning the moral acceptability of the values shared in her society. So, all of the three different kinds of cases subjected to the discretion of ethics consultants require autonomous ethical assessment by ethical experts.

As things currently are in moral philosophy, this assessment will not produce single right answers to all of the moral questions dealt with, but it can at least rule out some possible moral views as unacceptable and thereby determine limits to what is morally permissible. Within those limits there thus usually are different options, and presumably an ethics expert can autonomously accept one possible answer to a moral problem instead of another. Assuming that they are within the limits of what can be considered as morally permissible in the light of the kind of moral considerations described above, she can, for example, favor a deontological approach to moral questions; she may hold that only sentient beings belong to the moral community; she may accept voluntary euthanasia, etc. But in her role of an ethics expert in public service, she should not advocate only the moral views she adopts from among those that in the light of the kind of moral considerations described above are morally permissible. Insofar as none of the morally permissible options is uncontroversially better than the others in moral terms, there is no sufficient moral reason to advocate one of them instead of, or more enthusiastically than, the others.

To sum up, an ethics expert should be allowed to be professionally autonomous in the sense that she ought to always autonomously assess the moral questions subjected to her consideration, but when there are optional equally morally acceptable, or equally controversial, answers to a moral problem and she autonomously favors one of them, she should not be partial to that option in her work as an ethics consultant.

Personal Autonomy and Using Ethics Expertise

Would allowing ethics experts this kind of autonomy be incompatible with the autonomy of the persons they serve? When ethics consultation is used to determine, for example, what would be a morally acceptable way of proceeding with a road construction project that threatens a valued natural environment, there are several different groups of persons the ethics expert can be taken to serve, such as the

developer and her employees, persons who live in the area, persons who work there, persons who use the area for recreational purposes, etc.¹² I however take it that from the moral point of view the persons whose autonomy could be taken to be threatened by the use of ethical experts can be treated as a unified group, so that the alleged conflict of autonomy now at issue would exist between the professional autonomy of ethics experts and the personal autonomy of these persons. In other words, I assume that, for example, the professional autonomy of the construction engineers who would be engaged in the project does not give rise to a further conflict of autonomy. The professional autonomy of these engineers concerns the domain in which they should be allowed to make autonomous decisions because they have expertise in technical matters concerning road construction. That sphere is limited and also regulated by moral considerations falling into the domain of ethical experts. Consequently, I take it that the fundamental issue relating to autonomy here pertains to the personal autonomy of these professionals and the other concerned persons and the ways in which their acting in accordance with the ethical expert's advice would be incompatible with their autonomy as persons.

As was explained above, when an ethics expert determines an answer, or several possible answers, to a moral problem, she relies on certain fundamental moral intuitions and uses her philosophical and logical skills to clarify, systematize, and extend them. These moral intuitions must be such that all morally competent persons can accept them. The same holds for the philosophical tools an ethics expert uses in her work;¹³ these tools and the way they are used must stand up to critical philosophical scrutiny and be such that morally competent persons with sufficient time to consider them can accept them. Assuming that they want to be moral,¹⁴ were the persons ethics experts are helping able to get sufficiently familiar with them, they should accept the same fundamental moral intuitions, principles of rationality and formal moral principles, and conclusions derived on their basis that ethics experts accept.

¹² For discussion on the issue of who should be counted as concerned parties in these kinds of cases see, e.g., [27]. I now abstract from the question of how different kinds of non-autonomous morally relevant beings should be accounted for in cases like this.

¹³ By the philosophical tools an ethics expert uses in her work I mean the philosophical methods by which the expert arrives at certain moral conclusions. In analytic moral philosophy, that means conceptual analysis and commonly the use of the method of wide reflexive equilibrium. In using that method, roughly, our strongly held and justifiable moral and prudential intuitions, factual knowledge concerning ourselves and our environment, and the requirements of logic are brought into a coherent whole in answering the moral problem faced [28–30]. See also the discussion on the nature of ethical expertise above.

¹⁴ It is of course controversial whether all autonomous persons are also moral persons, and it might be taken that adopting the kind of procedural conception of autonomy accepted here commits one to accepting that autonomous persons need not want to be moral. However, I assume that those maintaining that we should reject ethics consultation because autonomous persons should be allowed to make their own moral decisions are not suggesting that in practice we morally should allow persons to reject morality altogether if that is what they autonomously want. I thus take it that the question here is not that of whether or not we ought to be moral, but that what would be a morally justified way of making moral decisions. For an argument that it would be rational to be moral formulated in terms of formal requirements of rationality see [31–33].

Furthermore, above I maintained that the kind of ethical assessment ethical experts should engage in will not produce single right answers to all moral questions, but that in the light of present moral philosophical knowledge there can be several morally permissible solutions to many moral problems. At this stage of moral decision-making there is thus often room for the autonomous moral choices of the persons ethics consultants assist. When there is more than one morally permissible solution to a moral problem and none of them is better in moral terms than the others, the persons whose moral problems the ethics consultant addresses should be allowed to make up their own minds in the matter of what morally permissible option is to be adopted in their case, assuming that they are autonomous.

There is thus no principled conflict between the ethics experts' professional autonomy and the autonomy of their clients; the moral views these parties would autonomously consider morally permissible and the ways in which they would reason to them should be the same for both of them, and in many cases the latter would have to exercise their autonomy in making a choice between several morally permissible solutions to a moral problem. Consequently, whether or not using ethics experts' services is incompatible with individual autonomy depends on the exact way in which ethics consultation is arranged.

No sensible, or moral, person would maintain that ethics consultants should coerce and manipulate persons and make them accept moral views that they autonomously would want to reject; that simply is not what ethics consultation is about. Neither would it be morally acceptable to maintain that it is legitimate for ethics experts to be mere public relations men or rubber stamps for institutions and interest groups with morally questionable aims. Of course, in practice there can be ethics consultants who act in morally condemnable ways, but they are not doing what ethics consultants ought to do. Most plausibly, instead of forcing certain solutions to moral problems on persons or advocating the idiosyncratic values of narrow interest groups, the purpose of ethics consultation is to facilitate moral decision-making that is free from undue outside pressures and based on sufficient information and correct reasoning. Therefore, having got sufficiently familiar with the case to be able to do that, an ethics expert should secure that the persons she is assisting understand exactly what the moral problem they face is and why it is a moral problem, what considerations are relevant to solving it, why certain possible solutions are morally unacceptable and others are not, and what follows from accepting one permissible solution to the moral problem instead of another.¹⁵

Furthermore, even if a person was not being pressured, had good judgment in general, and was acquainted with the factual and philosophical considerations relevant to the moral choice he is to make, he can be led astray by self-interested motives that make him rationalize conduct that is actually morally unacceptable. By offering a point of view unbiased by such self-serving rationalization, properly conducted ethics consultation can be useful beyond facilitating decision-making free from undue outside pressures and providing access to the information relevant

¹⁵ All uses of ethical expertise do not of course involve face-to-face contact between ethical experts and their clients. In the cases where there is no such communication, ethics consultants should provide in writing clear and understandable accounts of the reasoning that led them to advocate the moral views that they recommend.

to making autonomous decisions [10]. So, when properly conducted, ethics consultation not only is not an obstacle to autonomy but can even enhance personal autonomy by providing individuals with the decision-making environment, epistemic resources, and objective viewpoint they need so as to be able to make autonomous moral decisions.¹⁶ It is only if autonomy were conceived of in the sense in which all and only the views that persons actually hold prior to engaging in ethics consultation qualify as autonomous that properly arranged use of ethics experts would threaten individual autonomy. But when the nature of both ethics consultation and individual autonomy is understood correctly, it is clear that the former does not pose a threat to the latter.

An Example

The reader might wonder exactly how this conceptual point regarding the compatibility of the professional autonomy of ethics experts with the personal autonomy of their clients relates to the practice of ethics consultation. To elucidate the issue, let us consider an imaginary case from the sphere of medicine.¹⁷ Jill is a 65-year-old librarian who has just find out that she has fast advancing terminal cancer. She is terrified by the prospect of extreme suffering patients with that type of cancer often must endure at the end of their lives. She discusses the issue with her physician and, as it has recently been legalized within the jurisdiction in question, brings up the possibility of voluntary euthanasia. The physician however considers preservation of life as the fundamental value of his profession and, accordingly, refuses to consider that possibility and refers to the latest methods of palliative care. To an extent, Jill agrees with him on the points about value of life he presents to her, but still considers the possibility of intense suffering at the end of life dreadful and demeaning. She finds the predicament she faces quite confusing and decides to seek the advice of the hospital's ethics consultant. She is, however, a bit hesitant about doing that, as she suspects that the consultant might only try to persuade her to accept her physician's views on what would be the best thing to do in her case.

As it is as simple as it is, Jill's case as here described can be understood as a conflict between the values of preservation of life and avoidance of suffering. Here the ethics expert must raise questions like 'Is preservation of any kind of life valuable?', 'If some lives are not worth preserving, does Jill's life belong to that category?', 'Is all suffering bad?', 'Could Jill's suffering be meaningful in some relevant sense?', 'Are the preservation of life and avoidance of suffering the only relevant values here?', etc. In other words, he must autonomously assess the moral

¹⁶ Of course, engaging in ethics consultation can also deepen the ethics experts' understanding of concrete moral problems, how varied these problems can be and how different kinds of points of view persons can have to them, and thereby enhance their professional competence.

¹⁷ My purpose here is not to solve the question of whether or not voluntary euthanasia is morally acceptable or to present a first-person point of view of what it is like to be an ethics expert facing the problem in practice. The point of this example is to demonstrate the practical implications of the main argument of this paper, the argument to the effect that ethics experts' professional autonomy need not be incompatible with the autonomy of their clients.

problem he and his client faces in the light of all relevant considerations. Unless he is able to solve the question about the moral acceptability of voluntary euthanasia, the ethics expert cannot provide Jill with an uncontroversial argument on behalf of, or against, accepting voluntary euthanasia.

When he is not able to give an uncontroversial answer to the problem of voluntary euthanasia, the ethics experts should not tell Jill that euthanasia is acceptable in her case, even if it were the view he happened to favor among the competing options. Instead, he should explain Jill what the morally relevant considerations in her case are, why they are morally relevant, and what kinds of conclusions can legitimately be derived on their basis. After discussing the pertinent moral considerations with her, she should allow Jill to autonomously make up her mind on how to proceed. Those, according to the main argument of this paper, are the limits that should be put on the ethics experts' professional autonomy in Jill's case.

Let us assume that the ethics consultant Jill contacts is a competent one and acts as he should. Jill's fears about getting pressured to accept her physician's views turn out to be futile. After consulting the ethics expert, Jill however rejects her desire for euthanasia. She decides that she instead wants to have palliative care so that her suffering will not be totally unbearable. She now thinks that the last few days with her family and friends make it worthwhile for her to endure whatever amount of suffering she then has to face. In terms of personal autonomy, although the ethics consultation sessions Jill attended could not provide her with a final answer concerning the moral acceptability of voluntary euthanasia, they allowed her access to knowledge about moral matters she so far did not have. After discussing with the ethics consultant, Jill was no more affected by her physician's stern refusal to consider any methods incompatible with the preservation of life nor with her earlier beliefs about the (in)significance of suffering and had the morally relevant considerations at hand. Ethics consultation allowed her to consider her future in terms of sufficient knowledge about moral matters and in an environment as unaffected by outside and inside pressures and biases as possible. It had an effect on her decision of how to proceed with her life, and now she does not need to spend her last days wondering whether or not she really considered the decision thoroughly enough. Quite clearly, the ethics consultation promoted Jill's autonomy.

The description of Jill's case is of course very simple. But all of the nuances that in real life cases can be relevant to morally assessing a case like that of Jill's could, I believe, only be captured in terms of a short story written by a competent writer of fiction. They are beyond of what I can express in a simple philosophical example. However, I believe that Jill's case shows that there need not be any conflict between the professional autonomy of ethics consultants and the personal autonomy of their clients.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have examined a conflict between the professional autonomy of ethical experts and the personal autonomy of their clients. I understood ethics

expertise to refer to, roughly, clarifying, systematizing, and extending commonly acceptable fundamental moral views, and rejected substantive and non-rationalistic conceptions of autonomy. I argued that, accepting these points of departure, we have good reason to allow ethics experts' autonomous moral views to play a role in making our moral decisions and that properly conducted ethics consultation does not threaten individual autonomy but facilitates persons' making autonomous moral decisions. In the light of the argument of this paper, the conflict between ethical experts' professional autonomy and the autonomy of the persons they serve is thus merely apparent. To the extent that that argument is correct, when worries that employing ethics experts would undermine individual autonomy arise, we should not reject ethics consultants' professional assistance (or individual autonomy) but aim to improve our methods of ethics consultation. Even though ethics experts cannot present answers to all fundamental moral problems, their assistance can allow us to achieve the best possible approximations of the correct answers to them.

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