

Importance of experts opinions in search for knowledge philosophy essay



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Searching through newspapers, TV news or radio I can easily find the so called: 'opinions of experts'. Almost every article in The Economist, Guardian consists of at least two quotations of economists, sociologists or lawyers who are mainly professors of the world most famous Universities such as Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Yell or workers of the specialised institutes. All these opinions may be useful in gaining knowledge yet would it be reasonable to uncritically accept them as a definite knowledge or call it my own knowledge? To answer the question of 'how important are the opinions of experts in the search of knowledge' I will carry out an in - depth analysis of three main aspects. First of all I will try to examine who an expert is and what conditions need to be completed in order to call someone an authority in a specific field. Secondly, I will focus on the process of transforming an opinion into my own knowledge. The last aspect will set down where do experts gain their knowledge and what are the bases of their opinions. I believe that an analysis of these three dimensions, extended by an examples of my everyday life and based on specific areas of knowledge, will be, to large extent, sufficient for answering whether experts and their opinions are able to provide me with an adequate evidence to accept it as a reliable component of my knowledge.

As I was thinking of how to define an expert I ended up realizing how complex the perception of 'experts' is. I would say that there is no one, ideal definition. However as I think about it, this is a person who possess an in - depth knowledge in a specific field and relying mostly on the empirical evidence makes researches developing his/hers own understanding of a specific phenomenon. My brief definition seems to find an application in

everyday life for example professors from Universities specify only in narrow fields and by probing particular factors, they form their own proven conclusions which are further presented in magazines or books as experts' opinions. As I am most interested in economics it seems most reasonable to evoke an authority specialising in this area. Let me focus on Leszek Balcerowicz, who is considered an expert in regulating the interference of the government on the market. First of all he graduated from the economics faculty, performed in the most respected national and European posts and was an author of the famous Balcerowicz Plan which transformed Polish economy what provided him with an empirical evidence. To my mind he possesses enough knowledge to form reliable conclusions of what he observes in market. Yet we need to be aware that he is devoted to a specific 'economics school' - monetarism, therefore his opinions may be to some extent subordinate to his personal beliefs or biases. However whenever I see his opinion being expressed I know that it will for sure affect my understanding of a given case as his authority based on experience, reasoning and although inevitably emotions and personal attitude are sufficient for me to call him an authority whose opinion I base on when creating my own conclusions, point of view that I call my own. It may be claimed that I treat Balcerowicz as an expert just because I am sympathetic to his creed yet even people that have contradictory economical opinions do accept his high appointments and take his opinion into consideration at least to confront their and Balcerowicz's ideas. Therefore an authority is not only a person that people agree with and share the same opinion but rather someone who can provide us with evidence of his claims.

The process of transforming opinion into knowledge is also worth focusing. Studying in the IB programme I realized that experts' opinions are only hints that help to interpret facts more widely. The most important thing for me was realising that even if an expert does his/her best to be fair - minded a bit of subjectivity is inevitable. Yet as I became aware of it the subjectivity turned out to have its positive effects. Historical experts seem to thrive on the conflicts between their opinions about events in their search for knowledge and better understanding of the past. The same event can attract vastly different opinions, for example the causes of the First World War. Marxist historians blame the development of capitalism whether as German historian, Geiss blames the failure of diplomacy.[1] Hence being a critically thinking person the contradiction of experts' opinions makes me understand the problem in a wider way, analyse of who I trust more, whose evidence is strongly supported and hammer out a compromise.

Experts are not born specialists, they gain knowledge and due to work and understanding of specific processes they may start being perceived as authorities within the area of their interest. Yet my look concerns mainly history, natural sciences, human sciences but when it comes to ethics the knowledge that books or expertises may provide becomes less usable. For example my mother is for me the expert of husband - wife relations instead of the fact that her knowledge is based only on personal experience. Yet the evidence she can provide me with - her successful relationship with my father is at that point sufficient for me.

The evidence is in my opinion the most important thing while starting to believe in something and gaining my own understanding of a given thing
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(note that in the presented essay I am not discussing religion beliefs). First of all the opinion needs to have rational grounds. This means that if my history teacher said that the First World War started as a consequence of the assassination of Grand Duke Constantine without giving any proof or explanation I would probably doubt whether it is reliable and true. However if he supported it with opinions of other experts, primary sources (which may be for example some political documents) or other evidence the thesis would become more reliable and therefore probably accepted by me for further consideration of context.

The last aspect of my concern is the origin of the need to rely on the opinions of experts. Looking for example at arts, what do I need experts' opinions for? As it is the most subjective area of knowledge at first I almost saw no difference whether a painting was commented by an 'expert' or a 'non-expert'. The only difference that I considered worth pointing was the fact that experts may be more used to commenting on arts and therefore their language and ability to express feelings may be clearer and more focused. However, as I thought about it more I realized that there is at least one more aspect. A good example is *De Aardappeleters* (The Potato Eaters) by Vincent van Gogh which I found to create different interpretations in different context. When I showed the painting to my friends, almost all of them found it ordinary and only one person out of ten recognized the author. However when I showed them the painting once more, but prefacing it with a history of masterpiece and Van Gogh's assumptions (therefore I was acting like an expert) all of them changed their attitude towards the painting and

started to see it with a wider perspective appreciating the atmosphere and bright idea.

To my mind when it comes to history experts' opinions are one of the most important aspects in gaining knowledge for me. Even the primary sources, which seem to be most reliable and unspoiled source of knowledge, have to be interpreted as well. Therefore experts act like an interpreters. Due to their contrary opinions they create an opportunity for me to see different attitudes to the same event. This not only extends my perspective but also reminds me that looking at things from only one point of view is like not looking at them at all.

To conclude in my opinion experts' opinions are valuable in the search of knowledge. Authorities' opinions may be sometimes misleading, lack evidence but as I take them into consideration while creating my own point of view I believe that it provides me with better analysis of the subject. Each opinion is somehow true therefore, whenever an expert or a non - expert expresses an opinion I think that it expands my perspective and hence makes me think more specifically on the problem, analyse it and create my own conclusion.