

**ARTICLES/ARTÍCULOS**

# Judgement, Common Sense and Discernment: Contributions from Humanistic Thinking to the Social Professions

Juicio, sentido común y discernimiento: contribuciones del pensamiento humanista a las profesiones sociales

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## ABSTRACT

This paper reviews definitions and usage of judgement and common sense as time-tested criteria in decision-making. It looks at how scholars in different disciplines and professions have approached judgement and professional wisdom, (to include tacit knowledge and common sense). It advocates teaching, reflecting and dialoguing on ethical principles and the incorporation of the classical virtues in discussions to increase social workers and other professionals' full understanding of the complex meaning of these terms. These terms have often been viewed mistakenly only from a narrow political perspective or even an anti-science perspective. Such misunderstandings have precluded the acknowledgement of good judgement as a tenet worth discussing in decision-making in professional practice. The paper does not advocate any single approach to decision-making and acknowledges the quandaries of professionals. Neither does this paper delve into the very old tension between science and social work, which has been amply documented before. However, the paper builds the case that practitioners and academics can use good judgement to enhance, not abandon, their commitment to fairness and justice. Professionals, in the sense of those who belong to a discourse tradition (MacIntyre, 1984), can successfully overcome prejudicial assumptions relying on discernment developed through study, reflection and lived experiences. Finally, it is acknowledged that social work policies and practice parameters are reliant on ethical and legal frameworks. Philosophic and legal reasoning discourses are discussed as offering worthwhile perspectives. The paper strives to draw on the humanistic and multidisciplinary approaches to "knowing" to enhance the wisdom upon which the all human professions build.

**KEYWORDS:** autonomy, classical virtues; moral discourse; practice wisdom; professional judgment; social professions; humanistic thinking

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## RESUMEN

En este artículo se revisan las definiciones y el uso del juicio y el sentido común como criterios aprobados en la toma de decisiones. Se analiza el modo en que los estudiosos de diferentes disciplinas y profesiones han abordado el juicio y la sabiduría profesional (incluidos el conocimiento tácito y el sentido común). Se aboga por la enseñanza, la reflexión y el diálogo sobre los principios éticos y la incorporación de las virtudes clásicas en los debates para fomentar que los trabajadores sociales y otros profesionales comprendan plenamente el complejo significado de estos términos. A menudo, estos términos se han analizado de forma errónea teniendo en cuenta únicamente una perspectiva política limitada o incluso una perspectiva empírica extrema. Estos malentendidos han impedido el reconocimiento del buen juicio como un principio que merece la pena debatir en la toma de decisiones de la práctica profesional. En el artículo no se defiende un enfoque único para la toma de decisiones y se reconocen los dilemas a los que se enfrentan los profesionales. Tampoco se profundiza en la antiquísima tensión existente entre la ciencia y el trabajo social, que ya se ha documentado ampliamente. Sin embargo, en el documento sí se plantea que los profesionales y el mundo académico pueden hacer uso del buen juicio para mejorar, no abandonar, su compromiso con la equidad y la justicia. Los profesionales, sobre todo aquellos que pertenecen a una tradición discursiva (MacIntyre, 1984), pueden superar las suposiciones prejuiciosas apoyándose en el discernimiento que han desarrollado a través del estudio, la reflexión y las experiencias vividas. Por último, se reconoce que las políticas del trabajo social y los parámetros de la práctica dependen de marcos éticos y jurídicos. Los discursos de razonamiento filosófico y jurídico se tratan como si ofrecieran perspectivas valiosas. En el documento se procura recurrir a los enfoques humanistas y multidisciplinarios del «saber» para mejorar la base sobre la que se fundamentan todas las profesiones humanas.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** autonomía; virtudes clásicas; discurso moral; sabiduría práctica; juicio profesional; profesiones sociales; pensamiento humanista.

## 1. Introduction: rationale and parameters

This paper suggests that judgement and common sense have been time-tested criteria in decision-making. It looks at how scholars in different disciplines and professions have approached judgement and professional wisdom, (to include tacit knowledge and common sense). It offers definitions of key terms that are involved in any discussion of judgement as used in the professions. It advocates reflecting and dialoguing on ethical principles and the acknowledgement of the classical virtues to increase professionals' capacity to achieve good judgement in their decisions. Terms such as judgement, autonomy, discretion, common sense and even the "virtues" have frequently been viewed mistakenly or only from narrow political perspectives. In the next few pages, they are fully discussed and clarified to avoid misunderstandings and provide some historical context.

Much humanistic and philosophic knowledge came into disuse in the professions on the erroneous view that it gravitated against science. There has been a plethora of literature on this conflict<sup>1</sup>. While this paper does not delve into the longtime tension between science and social work, for example, it recognizes that such misunderstandings have precluded the acknowledgement of good judgement as a tenet worth discussing in decision-making in all professional practice. This paper does not suggest any single approach to decision-making and acknowledges the quandaries of professionals. However, the paper builds the case that practitioners and academics can use good judgement to enhance, not abandon, their commitment to humanistic values, fairness and justice.

Professionals, in the sense of those who belong to a discourse tradition (MacIntyre, 1984), can successfully overcome prejudicial assumptions relying on discernment developed through study, reflection and lived experiences. The classical (Socratic or Aristotelian) virtues, particularly justice, prudence and courage, play a role in making wise decisions. Additionally, tacit knowledge plays a role in decision-making in practice, not only in the human professions but in aviation and other professions when time is of the essence.

Finally, the parameters of policies and practices of social work (and other service professions) are reliant on ethical and legal frameworks as well as resource considerations. Philosophic and legal reasoning discourses are not a panacea but offer additional worthwhile perspectives. The paper strives to draw on the humanistic and multidisciplinary approaches to “knowing” to enhance the wisdom upon which all the human service professions build and are trained.

## 2. Judgement and good judgement

Judgement, discretion, common sense, professional wisdom, though often unclear, all are viewed as important concepts in the social care professions. Muller (2018) suggests that professionals have artificially narrowed their scope of action, passively accepting the disappearance of wise-judgement from decision-making. In social work and beyond, these terms appear to have joined a list of words often misunderstood primarily because they seem to threaten the empirical gains of the profession. Furthermore, “professional judgement” has been misused to justify lack of knowledge, prejudice and arbitrariness, including a disregard for fairness and justice. However, nothing could be farther from good judgement. Let us attempt to clarify the meaning of essential terms.

Ancient and modern philosophers debated the nature of knowledge. Etymologically, the word judgement comes from *judicamentum*, or the act of judging in deciding a question of law or rights. For the classics, questions of law appear very early as being part of the concept of judgement. In classical philosophy, particularly for Aristotle, making a judgement also includes comparison of concepts, which always involves truth and falsity (New Catholic Encyclopedia, 2003).

In social work, for example, judgement is embedded in moral philosophy and values. At the onset of the profession, Aristotelian philosophy was often followed because ‘its aim is essentially practical’ (McGhee, 1998, p. 38) and was useful in professional decision-making. Aristotelian thinking is based on the cardinal virtues; it is a doctrine of Prudence and equanimity in actions. The aim is always to achieve a balanced personality to arrive at happiness. Unfortunately, as Houston (2003) suggests, happiness for one might not be happiness for another, so professionals must look further. Writers in social work acknowledge that often hurt can be avoided through the application of standards, rules and moral principles (Juarvi, et al, p. 68). Here is where *codes* that regulate actions become involved, be they legal or professional codes (Preston-Shoot, 2013).

“What emerges strongly from this analysis is the foregrounding of accountability to service users, to law and to social work expertise ...” (Preston-Shoot, 2013, p. 42). For example, a social worker whose judgement is questioned is accountable to the legal codes under which he/she practices, to supervisors, to professional associations of peers and ultimately to the law.

Good judgement is based on experience and, experience is not just the passage of time. Experience requires the overhauling of one’s cognitive and affective structures and adding new dimensions to a given situation. In other words, good judgement must confront prejudice and in Aristotelian thinking, it must move from *techne* (skill) to *phronesis*, which is good judgement applied to practice. Good judgement is the *raison d’etre* of judges, philosophers and scholars and pairs with discretion and common sense in professional decision-making. As Banks (2006) acknowledges, “Frequently in the social work literature, values are distinguished from knowledge and ethical/moral issues from legal and technical matters” (Banks, 206, p. 11). This is not possible because every responsible professional decision involves a struggle of values and often a conflict. While philosophy and personal values may influence decisions in clinical practice, external codes such as legal codes, complex bureaucracies and resources also enter into these decisions. The professional, like the lawyer, uses discovery and confirmation as facts in all decisions. But is also committed to Justice as the ultimate goal.

### 3. Autonomy, Discretion and discernment

“Professionals are workers who are authorized to act with a degree of freedom from external control” (Evans, 2013: 739), that is, autonomy. In social work, the values of the experienced workers play a key role in achieving independent good judgement (Payne, 2007). Discretion and discernment are components of autonomy because the exercise of good judgement requires comparisons of alternatives and prudence. Autonomy calls for a measured balance of interests, mandates, often legal but more often bureaucratic, if not political, and resources. Historically, discussions involving judgement and discretion were ubiquitous in the early social work literature: after all, social work grew close to the ministry and developed as a separate discipline because of the pressures of industrialization in the Western world, primarily the English speaking world.

In the U.S., in 1915 and 1925 Flexner blamed not only medicine for lacking enough scientific bases. He also accused social work of being a “semi-profession” because in his opinion, both practices lacked the knowledge building approaches he found in the hard sciences, which were the model of the time. Social workers went through a very lengthy debate where science and art were compared and contrasted often in very bitter ways<sup>1</sup>. This quarrel of paradigms transcended the national borders of U.S., since many countries, including Spain, began modeling their educational requirements following the English speaking world and continued such tendency to present days (Martinez-Brawley and Vazquez-

Aguado, 2008). In the case of Spain, the movement towards the “scientific” also coincided with the moving away from religious sponsored schools or institutes to lay universities in the 1960s. The advent of broader social welfare measures after the new Spanish Constitution of 1978 gave impulse to various movements of professionalization with the development of various bodies residing in the new “Autonomias” (Gil Parejo, 2004). The tension between the science paradigm and the humanistic perspective continued to be debated.

Since the development of the science-humanities philosophic schism, social workers and other social scientists have debated the value of judgement and discretion vis-a-vis science in knowledge building (Martinez-Brawley and Zorita, 2016; Martinez-Brawley, 2001). More recently, the prevalence of large data driven work appears to have taken over the social work and social science literature. The academy has found it hard to accept that philosophic analysis, reflection, good judgement and discernment, reliance on values and the classical virtues play an important part in knowledge building, because balanced decisions today have to do with ethics and justice. Lash (2000), drawing on Kant (1952), differentiates between *determinate and reflexive* judgement. Reflexive judgment is what lies at the core of the fluid, risk taking decisions professional have to make today, while determinate judgement, closer to physics and mathematics, aims for objective validity, which have been the appeal of many professionals recently. Quoting Parton (2007),

It is thus much more appropriate to see that what is required in the contemporary contexts of social work is the encouragement of this reflexive judgement as opposed to the determinate judgement. The increasing complexity and fluid nature of the world means that the world is less predictable, therefore less regularized. This is not to say that the practitioner is likely to be in control of these situations. It is to suggest, however, that there is far more room for maneuvering that may at first appear. (Parton, N., 2007, p. 145)

As I am writing today, the political debates across the academies in the U.S. have sprung calls for “reasonableness” and “the exercise of judgment where reasonable people would disagree” (Henley, 2022). Across continents, what the controversies over Justice as a consequence of slavery, human exploitation, imperialism and many other political theories which are not exempt from injustice rage rampant. In a review of a book by Marks (2021), Henley tentatively suggests that academics may have been guided by the “model of mathematics and science” —my point here— “even when “different subject matters have different levels of certainty available to them” (Henley, 2022) and to be exact, different times and places challenge professional actions differently. Ethical principles and values remain a useful guides of professional behavior.

## 4. Fairness, Justice and Common Sense

Many philosophers advocate dialogue and reflection on ethical principles and the incorporation of the classical virtues in practical ethical discourse (Houston, 2003). MacIntyre (1984), suggested that in Aristotle, *justice* was the first virtue in political life, but that unfortunately, our society has not been able to agree even on “the relative importance of the virtue concepts within a moral scheme” (p. 244). Banks (2006) identified two ethic discourses in social work. One representing an ethic of care and one an ethic of justice (p. 59). Both co-exist and struggle within the philosophic framework not only of social work but of other service professions, be it law, medicine, housing, etc. Certainly, the philosophic discourse can help members of all social professions arrive at a fuller understanding of the complex meaning of soundness and impartiality in judgement. Value theory can contribute to enlighten social professions’ grounding on fairness, equality justice and utility (MacIntyre, 1984, Ch. 17). Sound professional judgement, in the sense of judgement arrived at by those who belong to a discourse tradition, must overcome prejudicial assumptions.

For those who worry about the interference of “political persuasions” in making judgements, political orientations have always been present in micro and macro discussions and seasoned practitioners must rely on the wisdom of the collective and on the virtues of the profession. The wisdom of the collective was highlighted recently by Professor of Constitutional Law and U.S.

Senator Jamie Raskin who, quoting Thomas Paine, suggested that “common sense is also the sense we have all in common as a community” (February, 2021). But these matters are highly contested not only in social work but in law and all social professions where different stances can co-exist and practical wise decisions are required.

A useful discussion of the role of social work in discretionary decision-making in relation to legal and professional codes can be found Preston-Shoot’s (2014). Most legal codes or statutes help social workers apply their key values of judgement and balance where knowledge is incomplete (Preston-Shoot, 2014). Other authors, looking for collaboration models between law and social work have discussed the often-conflicting obligations of the two professions. For example, Deck (2020) recognizes that there can be conflicting ethical demands between law and social work, for example, in setting the limits of advocacy in regards to a client’s desires, or on the level of public responsibility. Nevertheless, she still highlights the possibility of collaboration (Deck, 2020). It becomes clear, in exploring such possibilities, that the two professions can learn from each other because they share many basic commitments to principles based on a common philosophy of justice and fairness. Clark (2012) further submits that by considering various options, workers can achieve a standard of impartiality in arriving at better judgement. But “even if the Codes [legal codes or statutes] cannot guarantee ethical behavior, reference to the principles of reasonableness and rationality may help identify poor practice.” (Preston-Schoot, 2014, p. 43).

In other words, as Raskin (2021) suggested, the use of common sense is always needed in arriving at if not the right, the reasonable answer.

## 5. Rationality and Common Sense in Judgement. Using Tacit Knowledge

In emphasizing rationality —in contrast to whim— a word must be offered on intuition, which is also called *tacit knowledge* in professional thinking (Polyani, 1964 & 1967, Martinez-Brawley and Zorita, 2007; Shaw, 2016 & 2014). Are the two concepts in opposition to each other?

Apparently not, if by rationality we mean in depth consideration of all factors involved in a situation. Payne summarized it best:

Humanistic social work incorporates both stances. Central to its position is the human capacity for rational use of scientific evidence and through this, human control of our environment. But humanistic practice is not limited to rigid 'evidence-based' practice, which relies on only some forms of understanding. Humanistic practice wants to use *all* the knowledge, *all* the skills, and *all* the creativity that human beings have achieved. (Payne, 2011, p. ix)

Experience demonstrates that judgement is the ability of making decisions when one does not have all the facts, but professionals have a great deal of knowledge that is deeply ingrained in their cognitive and emotional structures. For example, most decisions made in battle or when facing enormous immediate perils are made by experienced leaders relying not on protocols but on intuition informed by a lifetime of know-how (witness the many successful landings executed by pilots when there appeared to be no solution, or the hunches on which scientists have based very important discoveries). The problem today is that education falls short of stressing creativity and intuition in thinking beyond the rigid protocols learned and gives little recognition to tacit knowledge. A 2020 Special Report in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* corroborated the importance of teaching about intuition and experience in decision-making and suggested that this as a problem in all areas of study.

The situation in social work is common in many other professional disciplines today. Yet, it is hard to find intuition or judgement or tacit knowledge discussed in depth in methods or research courses today<sup>2</sup>. The positivistic orientation of most current research results in the outlining of best practices that can be readily prescribed but devalue professional knowledge or wisdom and judgement (McCarthy and Rose, 2010). Formulaic thinking, often set by administrative regulations and agency management, plagues practice. Practitioners moved from describing *cases* in the old language, to offering observations of coded behaviors collected on data forms that transform people and decisions into mechanical acts. However, good social work interventions, more often than not, rest on the wisdom (judgement) of the practitioners and the level of discretion exercised by workers and managers (Evans, 2012). This does not mean that workers act in

an arbitrary or willy-nilly fashion or without understanding of the situation. On the contrary, they have been tacitly preparing for years to make such decisions. In any profession, experienced workers know that they will never be in full possession of all the facts or have all the possible legal or theoretical possibilities at their disposal, but the seasoned professional knows when he/she must act to avoid further mishaps or danger. Munro (2010) discusses judgement and balance where knowledge is incomplete. As already mentioned, it is in incompleteness that experienced professionals rely on tacit knowledge (Martinez-Brawley and Zorita (2007). Evans (2013) further emphasizes the process and quality of making decisions, the exploration of benefits and drawbacks, the full awareness of one's biases that help arrive at justice and fairness. In addition to biases, the use of intuition and tacit knowledge requires an ability to consider error. All decisions must confront the possibility of error.

## 6. Freedom, Autonomy, Common Sense

Freedom is an important component of professional judgement, because to concur or deviate from protocols and formulaic thinking, the professional must act freely. Descartes believed that a person's judgements are free acts. He proposed that when a judgement is reached because of reasoning, it is indeed a free act. Most professional judgements are *a posteriori* act, which is derived from experience. Durkheim (2004) who navigated difficult times in philosophy and psychology, stated in his Philosophy Lectures that judgement was a complex operation involving many faculties (Gross and Jones, 2004, p. 24). Durkheim indicated that "philosophy may supplement observation through consciousness in the materials, of history, broadly understood..." (Gross and Jones, 2004, p. 24).

These philosophic understandings are of relevance when looking at professional judgements in general and particularly in social work. Professional judgement is an intellectual operation which often arises from intuition. However, it also involves a conscious process of comparison of concepts in relation to truth and error filtered through observation, history, ethics and the individual's experiential base. In other words, professional judgement is not devoid of facts but it is also an ethical or value judgement. It is here that the practitioner can adjust his/her thinking to the dictates of experience. A wise professional in social work cannot ignore the specific milieu, history, desires and freedom of the recipient of a service or the cultural, linguistic and other unique dimensions in taking professional decisions (Martinez-Brawley, E., Zorita, P. and Rennie, F. 2013)<sup>3</sup>.

According to Cullity (2011), the activity of moral judgment is that of 'thinking whether something has a moral attribute' (p. 1). Moral judgements refer to 'our alleged capacity to go beyond the application of rules when we deliberate morally' (Cullity, 2011, p. 1). Moral judgement might also be called 'moral discernment' or 'moral wisdom', displayed when we exercise the judging capacity well. In law, for example, a judge may impose a sentence on the high end or the low end of



mandated parameters. Whether he/she uses one or the other depends on the judge's process of moral discernment that enhance decision-making (Bennion, 2000). The merits of good judgement are dependent not only on the facts, but on the experience, integrity and moral thinking of the judge. In making human decisions, we cannot get away from the human aspects of the decisions. What we can do is ensure that those who act professionally, have the best chances of using their moral capacities well. Fact can illuminate a decision but are never the only factor for the professional.

To illustrate the point, discussing judgements and common sense in science, Whitehead (1929) stated that

Science is rooted in what has been called the whole apparatus of common sense thought. That is the datum from which it starts and to which it must recur. You may polish up common sense, you may contradict it in detail. You may surprise it. But ultimately, your whole task is to satisfy it. Whitehead was prepared to accept commonsense as justification for accepting a conclusion. (Whitehead, 1929, p. 110)

## 7. Reliance on the Virtues and the Possibility of Change

Prudence (*phronesis*), as we have said, also enlightens many professional decisions. The mandate of do not harm in medical practice, for example, shows the application of Prudence. In clinical social work, the principle or axiom to begin where the client and the admonition of *listen to the client*, build on the same notion. In policy, courage and justice balance prudence in the professional commitment to change.

A concern frequently expressed by professionals is that judgements, because they reflect moral values, are relative and tend to reflect vested interests and faulty perspectives. For example, many injustices have been committed in the name of Prudence, usually against the weakest members of society, and many decision-makers have hidden behind Courage to justify lack of Prudence or frivolity. But, all judgements have the possibility of being wrong and many are often revisited because they have been solely dependent on the *Zeitgeist* (spirit of the times). Laws and judicial decisions are often modified. If we cannot accept the possibility of error, 'we would have to reject the scientific approach, for its history is fraught with contradictions among theories, and even among experimental findings' (Heider, F., 1958, pp. 5-6).

In rejecting an established course of action, the professional displays another virtue, which is courage. Courage has been referred to as the mid-point between prudence and timidity or, humorously, in political terms, a recent member of the British Parliament talked about it as between 'prudence and foolishness' (Stewart, 2019). In wise governance and policy debates, judgement, discretion and discernment have been the cornerstone of lasting practices. Great politicians whether conservative (leaning right) or liberals (leaning left) have often relied on the use of the classical virtues (Prudence, Courage, and Justice) in governance and have failed when they have ignored them. Again, socially minded Stewart (2019), often refers to 'prudence and justice' as beacons for wise decisions.

Many social workers believe that good judgement has often been equated with concurrence with the established order and hierarchies, contradicting the principles of social change inherent in the profession. But that need not be the case. In making changes, or dissenting from established practices, the professional exercises freedom to make good judgements and applies many of the virtues, particularly Courage and Justice.

When knowledge is used discriminately, the professional requires both the confidence and the freedom to exercise it. Herein lies autonomy, but also the value of professional integrity, which is one of the many crucial ingredients of professional practice. The failure of integrity in an accredited professional destroys public trust and perhaps it is understandable that a degree of skepticism is the result, and thus a resort to evidence-based practice. (McCarthy et al, 2010, p. 100)

Many of the “softer” approaches in searching for knowledge and decision-making are as popular as they are debated, particularly in countries where culture has stressed the humanistic tradition. The critiques that emerged through the decades related to the influence of beliefs and political forces in arriving at such knowledge conclusions or judgements were pointed and important. Hammond’s (1996) classic text on human judgement suggests:

A comprehensive view of judgement and decision-making must take into account not only those tasks for which analytical models may be employed to evaluate the rationality and logical defensibility of cognition but also those tasks in which analytical models cannot be employed... The fragility of analytical systems constitutes a risk, well known to all users of them but seldom considered... (Hammond, 1996, p. 156)

Hammond’s statements are also applicable to the social sciences, where analytical models based only on scientific findings may not always be available and where other type of knowledge, including experience, may be applicable. Needless to say, professional education must include preparation of these situations. The professional must also understand environmental, cultural and linguistic concerns (Martinez-Brawley, Zorita and Rennie, 2013; Martinez-Brawley and Gualda, 2010).

In searching to understand fairness and justice, in judgment Alasdair MacIntyre (1984) repeatedly stated the element of virtue as buttressing all responsible judgements. MacIntyre proposed that the good that is internal to a practice is a good that is part of the practitioners’ understanding of virtue, and in his discussion, it is not just Prudence but also Justice. He suggests that laws, Laws—whether legal or scientific, are always general. Then, he states:

Particular cases will always arise in which it is unclear how the law is to be applied and unclear what justice demands. Thus, there are bound to be occasions in which no formula is available in advance; it is on such occasions that we are to act *kata ton orthon logos* (according to the right reason). (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 152).

In essence, it is in these cases that judgement, common sense and practice wisdom become essential. Social workers would benefit from returning, in some measure at least, to the philosophic roots of their professional thinking and to the practice of virtue ethics to formulate wise solutions (Martinez-Brawley and Zorita, 2017). Examples are common when a child must be removed from

home, an emergency medical intervention must be undertaken, or an elderly person must be moved to a facility or a newly arrived immigrant family given an exception that might save or safeguard its life.

Nevertheless, social workers are still reluctant to accept judgement as a form of wise decision-making. Because judgements generally reflect the accumulated wisdom of a discipline, or any other *métier*, the fear is that the thinking will remain static and that change will suffer. The fear is that judgements invoking practice wisdom will dismiss minority, feminist and other very valuable dimensions in practice. We have already noted that empirically based decision-making alone does not always remedy the human judgement involved in professions such as social work or law. Science does not always remedy imprudent or unjust judgement. In reference to law, Posner states: 'science fails to offer law certainty and objectivity'. ... 'science offers no practical assistance, because trials are not modeled on scientific inquiry.' (Posner, in Levit, 1990-1991, p. 497). In social work, Dowie and Macnaughton (2000) offer a similar perspective. They state,

... scientific knowledge and research ... within evidence based practice can support practitioners in their decision-making; however this has limitations and cannot be totally value free: therefore it can be restrictive in enabling the practitioner to respond to every facet of their... practice. (McCarthy et al, 2010, p. 103).

## 8. Summary and Recommendations for practice and education in the social science based professions

We have reviewed a large number of terms and concepts that come into play when professionals have to make immediate decisions that do not fit into pre-studied protocols. While many might believe that those commonsensical solutions are thoughtless, or have not been mulled over, wise professionals can show that they have taken a life-time of preparation. When a practitioner has developed a culture of practice based character, wisdom, experience and knowledge, the making of just and fair decisions will be paramount and the following of bureaucratic rules will be subordinate to justice and goodness (MacIntyre, 1984)

Following are a few suggestions for the training of the applied professions akin to the social sciences, including professional social work.

1. However empirical the professional training might be, it would be remiss to abandon or minimize a solid training on ethics. The ethics courses should include exposure to understanding the virtues, knowing their use in other professions. Cases where moral principles— Prudence and Courage, and Justice and Fairness are involved must be discussed. The aim of these discussions would be to acquire the practice of ethical thinking rather than arrive at any single solution. The history of professions justifies the constant scrutiny of its narratives and traditions.
2. To engage in ethical decision-making, students should be exposed to philosophical thinking. As we have seen, students can engage in many practical aspects of

philosophy. Discussions of the moral good and the internal moral compass implicit in each professional are enlightening.

3. The history of social work as a *métier* would help broaden students' interest in the complex debate of sound decision-making. MacIntyre (1984) stated that an 'adequate sense of tradition manifests itself in a grasp of those future possibilities which the past has made available to the present' (p. 223).
4. Finally, students should discuss comparisons of how different professions that cannot fully rely on science face the current push towards exclusivity of the "scientific model." Many professions rely on a great deal of knowledge outside the hard sciences. Learners need to appreciate the breadth of being part of an ancient and valuable tradition, a tradition that can blend knowledge from many other disciplines and perspectives.

## Notes

1 The literature on the debates over approaches to research and practice is abundant in social work. It is not the purpose of this paper to delve into this debate but the reader is directed to works by Fischer, J., Heineman, M., Goldstein, H., Hartman, A., Witkins, S., Martínez-Brawley, E., Martínez-Brawley, E. and Zorita, P., Thyer, B.A., Anastas, J., Brekke, J. and many others too numerous to include.

2 Tacit knowledge, simply stated, is that which flows spontaneously from an intimate and sympathetic acquaintance with the object to be known. In this sense, knowledge is an "indwelling" or is "incarnate" in the knower (Polanyi, 1969, p. 134). Philosophers have for centuries debated the nature of tacit and codified knowledge, was Polanyi who made it central to the philosophy of knowledge. (Martínez-Brawley, E. and Zorita, P. (2007)

3 Here are a few examples of selected cultural and linguistic concerns: Martínez-Brawley, E., Zorita, P. and Rennie, F. (2013) Dual Language Contexts in Social Work Practice: The Gaelic in the *Comhairle nan Eilean Siar* region (Outer Hebrides, Scotland) and Spanish in the Southwestern United States. *European Journal of Social Work*, (2011), 16, 1-18; Martínez-Brawley, E. & Zorita, P. M-B. Immigration and social services: The perils of professionalization. (2011) *Families in Society*, 92, 2.

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