

KILROY CAFÉ

Philosophy for the Modern Age

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KILL THE EXPERTS!

Liberate yourself from bad advice.

By GLENN CAMPBELL

The road to Hell is constructed by “experts.”

There are nutrition experts telling you what to eat, fitness experts telling you which muscles to exercise, investment experts telling you where to put your money, travel experts telling you where to go and relationship experts telling you how to get along with others.

If you follow their advice, there’s a good chance you’ll damage your health, lose your money, having a boring vacation and mess up your love life.

Why?

Because nearly every expert has a conflict of interest. He is personally invested in the field he is talking about. He tends to overestimate the value of his own knowledge while missing what may be more important in someone else’s life.

For example, it’s hard to find a real estate expert who isn’t personally invested in real estate. He is financially at risk and wants to see the market go up, but he’s also emotionally at risk, because his identity (not to mention his livelihood) depends on this field.

To him, it goes without saying that real estate is worth devoting your life to. Everyone should own a house! This is an assumption about existence he no longer seriously questions. He may offer you useful advice on which house to buy, but he is not a credible authority on when not to buy one at all.

At best, an expert’s advice is only useful within the sphere he is trained

for. A good lawyer can advise you on the law but not on your emotional life. If you listen to him, you might cover all your legal bases at the expense of the things that are really going to make you happy.

The expert obviously loves his field and he is drawn to understand it in ever-greater detail. His natural trend, therefore, is to focus on finer and finer minutia while losing perspective on the needs of the whole person.

The expert is usually no better than the rest of us at predicting the future. If the market is rising, he’ll tell you to “Buy, buy, buy!” and if it’s falling he’ll say “Sell, sell, sell!” while failing to detect the larger cycles at play. If he *did* understand the larger cycles, he’d probably be quietly making money rather than giving you advice.

Many an expert sits before you precisely because he has given up the broader skills of life in favor of a specialty. At the same time, he is driven to distort the world so his own prior investment is confirmed.

The worst are security experts. To them, there is a thief or rapist behind every tree, and these experts won’t rest until every potential risk to your safety is neutralized. Follow their advice and you’ll end up living in an antiseptic bubble that restricts your quality of life in all other areas. Ironically, their advice will probably make you less safe in the long run by limiting your understanding of others.

If an expert’s ego is tied up in security, he needs to see the threats as worse than they really are. He *needs*

crime to justify his existence, so he sees it everywhere. Likewise, most other experts are inclined to play up the risks that their advice is supposed to address.

What the experts usually fail to see is that all of life is a balance of risks, and if you obsess over any one of them you are bound to exacerbate others.

There are certainly people with knowledge and experience greater than your own in specific areas, and you would be wise to call on them when available. But you have to understand the limits of their expertise. Each expert operates on a small island, and outside it he is as clueless as you are.

The best “expert” is someone who doesn’t call himself that—who is wise enough to know how little he knows. It is nice to have someone knowledgeable explain a new system to you, answer your questions and help you quantify the risks, but then you have to weigh this information against the many factors in your own life the expert isn’t qualified to address.

Only you are qualified to say what is best for your own life, because you know it better than anyone. You are responsible for weighing all the factors, not just those the expert understands.

Outside advice is no substitute for seeking your own knowledge, investigating your own needs, then making your own well-reasoned decisions.

—G.C.

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