

## **The limits of care and phronesis in teaching and coaching: dealing with personality disorder.**

### **Abstract**

My aim in this article is to contribute to the discussion about how teachers and coaches come to act in appropriate ways given the complex nature of both practices. I focus on two specific dispositions or qualities from the philosophical literature, namely the virtue of care and the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis* (or practical wisdom), which have been put forward as possible explanations. I argue that care and *phronesis* are fundamental qualities for both good teachers and coaches. Talk of care and *phronesis* in the literature is welcome, but these concepts are themselves complex. Care and *phronesis*, like other virtues are context specific, difficult to acquire (or teach) and their particular expression depends on a host of complex factors, not least one's character and personal and professional experience. I illustrate my argument with reference to a former professional football player who exhibited symptoms of personality disorder (PD) from an early age and who presented challenges to his teachers and coaches through his disruptive behaviour. .

### **Introduction**

Bergman Drewe (2000) argues that where sport is concerned, there is an important overlap between teaching and coaching in terms of methods and goals. She argues that coaching will be the better for considering "attributes that are typically viewed as having to do with the 'educational enterprise'" and physical education teachers (hereafter teachers) will be required to teach "skills, technique and strategy (...) if physical education is to fulfil its role as an educative practice" (Bergman Drewe 2000: 79). Others (Nelson et al., 2014; Jones, 2007; and Penney, 2006) have also argued that the roles of the teacher and coach have much in common. The precise extent to which teaching and coaching are similar is not the chief concern of this paper, but rather the nature of the demands placed on teachers and coaches when undertaking their respective roles. There is widespread recognition that both the activities taught (sports) and the practices of teaching and coaching are complex. Jones (2007: 159) argues that "at the heart of coaching lies the everyday teaching and learning interface" and coaching is a "problematic, multifaceted and fundamentally intertwined with teaching and learning at the micro-interactive level". Light et al (2014:259) emphasise the complexity of decision making in team games like rugby means that teaching, coaching and learning 'decision making' involves "intellectual, emotional, affective and physical dimensions" in a given context and therefore requires a holistic player-centred approach. Given the complex nature of both teaching and coaching, one has to ask what is it that allows some teachers and coaches to be better than others. In this paper, I am not interested specifically in success at achieving certain aims to do with technical or tactical issues, but with broader issues around the interpersonal relationships and the well-being of athletes and pupils. What the ability to "get it right" (and there may be more than one way to get it right and certainly many ways to get it wrong) consists of is a question that has engaged psychologists, sociologists and educationalists interested in teaching and coaching. How a particular teacher or coach *develops* or comes to possess the ability or abilities to "get it right" is similarly vexatious particularly when the issue relates to the well-being of an individual as opposed to more instrumental decisions (perhaps about how to structure a particular lesson). One thing seems clear is that a formulaic, rule-like inflexible framework won't fit the bill<sup>1</sup>. In this paper I evaluate two philosophical concepts put forward as candidates for the important attributes which characterise good teachers and coaches. These qualities are the Aristotelian concept of *phronesis* or practical wisdom and the concept of care. In

order to illustrate my analysis, I use a specific case study of George (pseudonym) - a talented footballer who became a chronic alcoholic. The case study provides examples of difficult behaviour. Faced with such behaviour a teacher or coach has to respond in a way that best exemplifies good teaching or coaching. The concepts of *phronesis* and care which form the basis of this article come from a moral philosophical tradition in general and a virtue ethical approach in particular. Authors like Cooke and Carr (2014), Carr (2001, 2005) and Jones (2005, 2008) have argued for an account of teaching which foregrounds the virtues and character of the teacher rather than, or above the technical skills or strategies they might develop or learn through their training. Recent contributions in Coaching have seen authors like Hardman et al (2010), Jones (2007) and Standal and Hemmestad (2011) argue against a technical hegemony in coach education advocating instead a focus on the coach as a person. The shared belief is that it's the personal qualities of the coach or teacher that allows them to act and respond appropriately. Against this background two concepts have been discussed in more detail. The first is *phronesis*. Cooke and Carr (2014) and Standal and Hemmestad (2011) have argued that Aristotle's *phronesis* - or practical wisdom - is a key personal attribute which allows its possessor to choose an appropriate response, or in Aristotle's terms to choose the means which bring about a particular good or the "right" outcome. In other words, the practically wise teacher or coach is able to choose the right action/intervention/response at the right time for the right reason. The second attribute, namely the virtue of care, has been discussed by authors such as Jones (2009), Jones et al (2013) and Hoveid and Finne (2014) among others. A caring teacher or coach is motivated and able to act in the best interest of the pupil or athlete *because* they care about them. The concepts embody a clear sense of both the "ends" (what is worthwhile) and the means (the ways to bring about these ends) of both practices. In the next section I present extracts from a case study of a former professional footballer (George) who recalls presenting his teachers and coaches with numerous difficult situations. Following Plummer (2001), in examining particular aspects of the case I, aim to illustrate, illuminate and test the utility of the concepts of care and phronesis as they apply to coaching and teaching. Most philosophical discussion uses hypothetical examples or personal anecdotes to illustrate and test the veracity of certain concepts and ideas. Following the example of Jones et al (2014), however, I am using data which I had collected for a previous study for this purpose.

### **George's story – a case study**

George (pseudonym) is a recovering alcoholic with over 10 years of sobriety. He was a talented football player and was signed by a professional British club when he was 16 in the early 1990s. The brief extracts presented here are selected from over five hours of unstructured interview data. George's story in its entirety tracks his early problems with school, family, his emotional volatility and his obsessive personality through his short career as a professional footballer and the onset of alcoholism through a dark and chaotic period of chronic addiction (and all that entails) which led him to rehab in his late twenties. Following a stint of rehab, his story illustrates the ongoing daily experience of staying sober and building a new life (see [REDACTED] for an extended account of his story including the methods used, the analysis and the findings of the case study). For the purpose of this article I select specific recollections of his behaviour when being taught or coached. Even though George was a keen sportsman with a particular passion for football, his behaviour was often disruptive, aggressive and volatile. He gave his teachers and coaches numerous problems which they had to try and respond to in the best way they could.

### **Personality disorder (PD), “ism” and problematic behaviour**

George is unequivocal in his belief that he suffered from emotional problems from an early age which preceded his drinking, but which eventually played a part in using drink (as well as other substances and behaviours) to self-medicate. He refers to this as the “ism” - a frame of mind or attitude or a personality type which purportedly set him apart from his peers.

*I felt different I suppose, whether that's true or not - I can't tell that because I don't know how other people feel.*

His frustration manifested itself in various forms of anti-social behaviour such as aggression (throwing things in class and walking out), anger, rebelliousness and mischievousness often directed at teachers and coaches. In sharp contrast there was also a desperate desire to please or be liked by teachers and coaches which was counterproductive.

*I was trying to please people and I would swing between being very moody or doing too much and pissing people off, there was no balance there. I think sometimes people don't understand why a person reacts that way and rather than trying to nurture that, I think the games teacher - I don't think he liked me a great deal because of my self-seeking, trying to get him to like me and I think he saw that as a weakness...*

The key idea here is that George's personality was different because it was disordered. In other words he had various emotional and behavioural problems symptomatic of a personality disorder<sup>2</sup>. According to Pickard (2011a: 181) personality disorder occurs:

...when the set of characteristics or traits that make a person the kind of person they are causes severe psychological distress and impairment in social, occupational, or other important contexts: the ways a person is inclined to think, feel, and act do them harm, directly or via the effects they have on relationships, work, and life more generally conceived.

Personality disorders are a form of mental illness and come in a variety of different guises including cluster C types (anxious and fearful) which consist of “obsessive-compulsive, avoidant, and dependent PD” (Pickard 2011a: 182). George certainly had some of these symptoms - he recalls a catalogue of obsessive-compulsive behaviour (weight loss, training, exercise, playing football): “*I can remember doing an obsessive amount of exercise,*” “*I would train obsessively 3 times a day*” “*I have an obsessive mind*” “*obsessed with how I looked*” “*I was obsessed at that point with my weight*” “*I'd get so obsessed and so hard on myself about letting that one goal in*” “*I was obsessed as well with my hair*” [fear of going bald]; avoidant behaviour (reading in class, going to school); “*I drank to hide the way I felt, because I suppose inside I was quite shy and – although I put this arrogant front on- I had a big chip on my shoulder ...it was protection from how I was truly feeling*”; and dependent behaviours (inhaling gas, alcohol and later food, cigarettes and other drugs) “*if I put a substance in that is addictive it sets off something in me which is like I can't stop doing it, can't stop thinking about it when I'm not doing it. I have an allergy in my body that seems to respond to that substance that sets off a cycle in motion – I can't stop obsessing: my body needs it*”. For the purpose of this article, the key message from this case study is that George often behaved badly. He was cheeky, disruptive, arrogant, rude, insolent and aggressive. But this behaviour was borne of disorder, not of malice or wickedness – he couldn't help it - and there are relevant difference in terms of how we ought to evaluate such behaviour and

how we ought to deal or respond to the behaviour (person). If PD is a significant cause of bad behaviour, then this should temper our (teachers and coaches) moral evaluations and inform how we should deal/manage/approach/interact with a sufferer. Before discussing whether care and *phronesis* might help us both understand and guide the process of responding appropriately in such a case, I provide a general outline of both.

## Care

A number of scholars have employed the concept of care, or caring to frame discussions about how a coach or teacher should orientate themselves in relation to the athlete or pupil (Fry and Gano-Overway 2010, Hoveid and Finne 2014, Jones 2009, Jones et al, 2013, Noddings 2003). In other words they should care about their charges and act in ways that instantiate this attitude or commitment towards them. The concept of care, or caring can be viewed in a number of ways. For authors such as Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (2003) “care” represents a feminine moral outlook which stands in contrast to the dominant masculine rationalistic ethics of modernity. An ethics of care in these terms focuses on “moral issues in terms of emotionally involved caring for others and connection to others” (Slote 2007: 1). Here then is an attempt to articulate morality in terms of an emotional attachment or connection with another rather than impartial detachment. Care is a kind of virtue or the product of virtues which manifests itself in concerning oneself with others and treating them well, not from any sense of duty, but from inclination or *genuine* concern for the person. Loland (2011: 21) anchors coaching in ethical perfectionism and argues that “each individual has a moral obligation to develop in virtuous ways his or her natural talents and predispositions and that each individual has the obligation to stimulate and encourage similar developments in others”. Carr (2007) similarly argues that cultivating care in teachers (among other virtues) is a vital goal. We want coaches and teachers to have the dispositions and qualities of character which manifest themselves in caring attitudes and behaviour towards their pupils and athletes. We want them to listen, try to help, look after, look out for and generally act in the best interest of the pupil or athlete.

Noddings (2003: 16) argues that: “Apprehending the other’s reality, feeling what he feels as nearly as possible, is the essential part of caring from the view of the one-caring”. The coach/teacher – athlete/pupil relationship is a caring one if both parties contribute – the carer engrossed in the cared for and the cared for receptive and responsive (Noddings 2003: 16). For Frankfurt (1982: 257) questions about care are questions about “what is important or, rather, what is important to us?” We want our coaches and teachers to care in this sense too inasmuch as they care about the practice of teaching and coaching. Perhaps caring in the latter sense is a prerequisite for caring in the former sense:

A person who cares about something is, as it were, invested in it. He [*sic*] *identifies* himself with what he cares about in the sense that he makes himself vulnerable to losses and susceptible to benefits depending upon whether what he cares about is diminished or enhanced. Thus he concerns himself with what concerns it, giving particular attention to such things and directing his behaviour accordingly (Frankfurt 1982: 260).

I believe that teachers and coaches should care about their role *vis a vis* the intrinsic goals of teaching or coaching rather than for any instrumental benefit it might bring (money, prestige, security). Achieving the goals of teaching and coaching therefore also involves caring for pupils or athletes in the first sense. Fry and Gano-Overway (2010) argue that caring (providing a caring climate) is linked

to positive educational experiences and reflects the “athlete/child-centred” philosophy mentioned above. This involves:

...providing an overarching context that is characterized by engrossment (listening, accepting, and attending), motivational displacement (honouring interests, supporting and helping achieve goals, empowering), respect (trust, sensitivity) and, is consistent over time exudes a caring climate (295-296).

It is perhaps self-evident that teachers and coaches should care about what they do and about who they teach/coach. The key questions are how teachers and coaches develop the disposition to care (in both senses) and how any individual teacher or coach instantiates care at any given moment on the coal face so to speak. Carr (2001: 466) argues it would be “crass confusion to construe such improvements [becoming a (more) caring sort] or development in terms of the acquisition of loving or caring skills”. Cushion et al (2003) make a similar point in relation to the complexity of the coach’s knowledge and how it’s developed through experience, reflection and interaction over an extended period.

### ***Phronesis***

Teaching and coaching both demand flexibility, reflexivity and an ability to read and react to each unfolding situation. Neither a stock of technical or scientific knowledge nor a set of recipes or checklists can replace the far more nuanced and perhaps intuitive insight characteristic of a good teacher or coach. Standal and Hemmestad (2011) believe the concept of *phronesis* or practical knowledge, (or sometimes translated as prudence) can usefully capture and demystify, without trivialising, this important (or perhaps the most important) aspect of coaching. They argue that:

When coaches find themselves in problematic, ethically challenging situations, the coaches with *phronesis* will not appeal to predetermined, universal rules for the right actions. Instead, they will approach the situation with a sound balance between universal principles and the particular characteristics of the situation (Standal and Hemmestad 2011: 50).

In these terms *phronesis* is revealed in the coach’s ability to act correctly, not only in a technical sense, but also more importantly in a moral sense. In a similar vein Cooke and Carr (2014: 94) agree that “teachers need to acquire capacities for fine context dependent judgement”. As Standal and Hemmestad rightly recognise, *phronesis* is a complex concept and a form of rationality or knowledge distinguishable from technical and theoretical knowledge. They cite Aristotle’s definition of *phronesis*, namely: “...a reasoned and true state of capacity to act with regard to human goods” (Standal and Hemmestad 2011: 47) and following Carr (2003, 2007) guard against reducing *phronesis* to a “skill of situation-specific reasoning” (Standal and Hemmestad 2011: 49).

If we look closer at Aristotle’s account of *phronesis* we see that it plays a crucial role in his overall theory of living a good life. The good life for Aristotle is a life of virtue whereby the exercise of virtues like honesty and courage are not mere instruments to the good life (*eudaimonia*), but constitutive of it. Each virtue is a mean between two vices, for example courage is the mean between cowardice and recklessness. What counts as virtuous action is to hit the mean in any given *particular* situation so as to do the right thing, at the right time, in the right way with the right feeling. Deciding in each particular case where the mean lies is where *phronesis* plays a part. “The mean is what prudence [phronesis]

determines to be the mean (...) it decides what is the virtuous thing to do here and now” (Simpson 1997: 248). When George behaved badly in the class the teacher had to weight up George’s best interest, the interests of the rest of the class, the school and a plethora of other considerations and attempt to act in a good way. Simpson (1997: 248-249) argues that *phronesis* is not a matter of reasoning or reflection, but of perception “judging the here and now is the work of perception” or in Aristotle’s words; “...these particulars need to be perceived; and this perception is intuition” (Aristotle 2004: 161). So *phronesis* according to Simpson does not reason about what virtue requires in this particular case, but intuits it<sup>3</sup>. For Aristotle “...the full performance of a man’s function [eudaimonia] depends upon a combination of prudence and moral virtue; virtue ensures the correctness of the end at which we aim, and prudence that of the means towards it” so choice, decision or action “cannot be correct in default either of prudence or of goodness” (Aristotle 2004: 163).

*Phronesis* therefore is not a quality or set of attributes that can be taught or acquired independently of a particular virtue or constellation of virtues. A prudent coach or teacher (with *phronesis*) is a virtuous coach or teacher, or as Dunne (1993: 277) argues, “in *phronesis* virtue is already present”. So when advocating that a coach and teacher have *phronesis* we are saying that the teacher and coach should be good in a moral sense (Cooke and Carr 2014). For Carr (2003: 261)

Thus, good teachers need to have acquired some mettle or firmness of purpose, to exhibit self-control in some degree of patience and control of temper, to weigh fairness to all against concern for the shortcomings and vulnerabilities of particular individuals, to be trustworthy and caring, to possess a fair measure of humility – tempered perhaps by a readiness not to take oneself too seriously - as well as, it goes without saying, the kind of knowledge of and passion and enthusiasm for what is taught that can trigger such interest in others.

Many of the qualities described above feature in Aristotle’s catalogue of virtues. Such a catalogue could be expanded, but the key virtues of care, trust, fairness, patience, even-temper and humility are crucial. The good teacher or coach whose character is defined by these virtues *will* act rightly because they *also* have *phronesis*. Given that *phronesis* is part of virtue, the key question is how teachers and coaches acquire virtue. According to Simpson (1997: 250), Aristotle argued that we become good through our nature, habit and teaching. We have no control over our nature, but we can be taught *if* we first have developed virtuous dispositions through habituation or training. Alderman (1997: 156) argues that “one learns to be virtuous the same way one learns to cook, dance, play football and so forth and that is imitating people who are good at those sorts of things”. Exposure to numerous learning opportunities and personal and role-related experience is crucial (Cushion et al 2003).

### **The caring teacher and coach**

Caring involves countless fine-grained, individual, particular, context sensitive virtuous acts. In order to get this right (the right thing, at the right time, in the right way with the right feeling – hitting the mean) the teacher/coach must have *phronesis* (or prudence/practical wisdom)<sup>4</sup>. The general frameworks offered by these concepts are particularly promising. They appear to provide at least a partial explanation for the non-technical qualities needed by coaches and teachers to act and respond when executing their roles. They also tell us something about the goals of the teacher and coach, namely the “good” of the athlete or pupil. There are, however a number of potential complexities that need to be considered. I will outline two particular problems (partly psychological, partly philosophical) in the ‘abstract’ to begin with, before going on to illustrate the difficulties in relation to

the case study (Plummer 2001). The first relates to the nature of care *qua* virtue. Is “care” a single virtue or does a person who cares have a range of other virtues such as compassion, honesty, integrity, empathy, humility, sensitivity whose combined effect is “caring”? Aristotle claimed that a person cannot have some moral virtues and not others but critics including Telfer (1990) and Flanagan (1991) have argued that this is implausible because achieving this level of moral excellence seems beyond the psychological reach of ordinary teachers and coaches (or any human agent for that matter). Flanagan (1991: 10) argues that a more plausible idea is that moral excellence is embodied in the possession of a small set of essential virtues accompanied by other non-essential virtues. Such a picture is better suited to our discussion of teachers and coaches, but the question remains about whether care is a single virtue or a collection of virtues. If the former, is it a standard ‘universal’ quality or does it differ from person to person? If the latter, are there essential constituent qualities or do everyone have their own “bag”?<sup>5</sup>

The second complexity relates to the context sensitivity, universality or ‘globality’ of virtues (Flanagan 1991: 279). Do those who care do so in all situations? A teacher might care deeply for children who are keen, bright and engaging, but not for children who are difficult or disengaged. A coach might care for *this* athlete’s performance, but not their education or for *this* athlete’s skill but not their mental health. One might display faultless honesty in terms of financial matters, but display little or none at all on the football field. According to Flanagan (1991: 15) accounts of virtue and virtuous action are often “...insufficiently aware of the degree to which the virtues and vices are interest-relative constructs with high degrees of situation sensitivity”. To describe a person (teacher or coach) as caring ‘across the board’ is to misunderstand the psychology of virtue. Flanagan’s concerns are well placed and point to the difficulties associated with both the scope and cultivation of virtues (and thereby *phronesis*) in relation to teaching and coaching<sup>6</sup>. In particular they reinforce the idea that caring is neither a general-purpose skill nor a general purpose disposition that can be easily taught or acquired.

### **Caring for George**

George presented his teachers and coaches with problematic and disruptive behaviour. Given the discussion above good teachers and coaches should aim to care for George despite, or perhaps more so because of his problems. But how does talk of care in general translate to George’s experiences in particular. For a start, it would not have been easy for his teachers and coaches to care because he was not receptive or responsive to being cared for. He was a difficult to manage.

*I remember getting constantly told off and done for my behaviour, but that wasn't necessarily always alcohol based stuff, but more with my arrogant sort of cocky way of being. And I would get punished for that.*

*I can remember the manager at that particular point saying to me “make me a cup of tea, the tea's in there, I want sugar as well”, all this stuff and I remember saying to him “well do you want me to fucking drink it for you as well” and he sent me out on the track and made me run round the track for hours*

Anti-social or “bad” behaviour is routinely met with some form of censure, punishment or discipline usually delivered with a “sting” of displeasure or condemnation. Punishment (or some form of discipline) has always been a crucial strategy in shaping and cultivating character and is a “kind of cure” for wrong doing (Aristotle 1980: 32)<sup>7</sup>. The use and benefit of punishment (especially harsh

punishment), however, is controversial, particularly in an educational setting and more so if the offender has difficulties like PD. Caring and punishing are not necessarily incompatible; however, a caring teacher or coach should look to understand the motive or reasons behind the offending in order to help the offender.

The teacher may therefore be in a dilemma; for he [sic] may insist on punishing an individual as a deterrent or (e.g. when he sends him out of the room) as a preventative measure; but he may know this will do no good to the individual punished. He therefore has to tackle the problem on two fronts. He has to implement the threatened sanction without partiality; but he also has to do all he can to get to know and understand the individual offender (Peters 1971: 274).

If the offending is driven by an underlying personality disorder the right response is neither obvious nor easy to discern (as George testifies above). Can a caring coach who exercises *phronesis* discern correctly - whatever that may mean? Pickard (2011b) argues that even trained clinicians find it difficult to empathise with service users with PD because they often behave in aggressive, manipulative and harmful ways. The natural reaction is to resent, punish and blame the service users. Such a response, however, is counterproductive and incompatible with the overarching non-judgmental philosophy of counselling and psychotherapy. Pickard (2011b) argues that clinicians aim to treat individuals firmly, but fairly and avoid any negative judgmental attitudes. A goal of therapy is to help PDs learn a different way of acting. Effective treatment demands hitting a mean or striking “a fine balance: responsibility without blame” (Pickard 2011b: 209). Striking this balance is difficult for clinicians despite extensive training and experience. It involves responding to the problematic behaviour fairly by holding the individual to account (perhaps following through with a pre-determined sanction [punishment]), but recognising that it is difficult for the individual not to act in that way and help them to develop alternative behaviour (get better). Coaches and teachers are not clinicians and will not normally have the same training or experience with PD. Neither are they engaged in a therapeutic context where one expects to find, or is presented with an individual with symptoms. Moreover, they may have other pupils or athletes in their care and have finite time and resources. Nevertheless in their role they are likely to engage with individuals with problems such as George and have a duty to do what they can to help them flourish or excel<sup>8</sup>. Good coaches and teachers are able to make a difference; even to individuals like George, but only if they have the requisite context sensitive dispositions to do so. It is difficult to stipulate what should be done because each situation is unique (which is why authors are talking about care and *phronesis* in the first place), but perhaps a gesture or a kind word, being prepared to listen, offering support are good starting points. The situation might also require further action like looking for other avenues of expertise that might help the athlete or pupil.

### ***Seeing the problem***

Leaving aside what action or response is best there are prior difficulties related to “seeing” the problem. A difficulty with recognising personality disorder is that it is a psychiatric condition whose symptoms include anti-social behaviour. In fact certain PDs are diagnosed “via characteristics or traits that count as failures of morality or virtue and thus impair social, occupational, or other areas of interpersonal functioning” (Pickard 2011a: 183). A key issue for those dealing with individuals such as George therefore is seeing through the overt “bad” behaviour to the troubled mind beneath, but this

is not easy. Below I discuss two particular difficulties which militate against sensitivity of perception. The first is philosophical; the second is cultural.

### *Other minds*

As mentioned above, in order for care to get off the ground, the teacher and coach must first see that *this* particular situation is one where the pupil or athlete is troubled rather than spiteful or malicious (or spiteful and malicious *because* they are troubled). The problem for teachers and coaches is summarised by George: “*I didn’t have a head that was a greenhouse that they could look into me*”. Without this perception (seeing) stage there is no chance of caring action. For Aristotle, this seeing element is implicated in any given virtue and is at least partly definitive of *phronesis* (above). The caring teacher or coach, therefore, is one who first sees a situation as an opportunity for caring action and along with *phronesis* they will be disposed to (and succeed) in acting in a caring way. George’s “greenhouse” observation above is simple yet profound and it gets to the heart of the problem of care (and other virtues). Accessing or apprehending “other minds”, knowing or understanding what it “feels” like to be *you* rather than *me*, is crucial for care and empathy. According to Slote (2007: 13) empathy “involves having the feelings of another (involuntary) aroused in ourselves, as when we see another in pain.” For Noddings (2003:16) caring involves “Apprehending the other’s reality, feeling what he feels as nearly as possible”. This disposition to apprehend is a crucial aspect of virtue in general and the virtue of care in particular and is included in the concept of *phronesis*. How any given individual comes to manifest the disposition in any concrete instance is a further example of the challenges discussed throughout this paper. The challenge is also an example of the problem of “other minds” or “subjective experience” widely discussed by philosophers. Perhaps the most well-known discussion is found in Thomas Nagel’s (1979) influential essay “what’s it like to be a bat?” Nagel tackles the problem of consciousness arguing that organisms have conscious mental states “if and only if there is something that it is like to be that organism – something it is like for the organism” (Nagel 1979: 166). The extent to which another individual (teacher or coach) can know or apprehend “what it’s like for us” depends on how much subjects have in common with each other. Nagel (1979: 172) argued that:

There is a sense in which phenomenological facts are perfectly objective: one person can know or say of another what the quality of the other’s experience is. They are subjective; however, in the sense that even this objective ascription of experience is possible only for someone sufficiently similar to the object of ascription to be able to adopt his point of view – to understand the ascription in the first person as well as in the third, so to speak.

Care is predicated on the ability to see or feel another’s pain, distress or emotional state. This in turn seems to depend on the relative similarity between two subjects, in this case the teacher and pupil or coach and athlete. Those not suffering from (or perhaps affected by) personality disorders might be perplexed or irritated by the seemingly irrational and selfish behaviour which George described. ‘We’ non-sufferers (coaches, teachers, family, friends, journalists, academics and even therapists and psychiatrists) do not share the disorder and therefore cannot readily empathise with the mental experience and inner turmoil of people like George (of course some teachers and coaches may have experienced it and this has important implications which I discuss below). Without apprehending another’s pain, there can be no genuine empathy and without empathy – seeing the situation as it is - there can be no care.

## Culture

The inability to apprehend the plight of individuals like George might be influenced by cultural ambivalence and confusion surrounding mental illness, particularly in the sporting context. Frank Bruno, the former world heavyweight boxing champion's bi-polar illness was treated in characteristically insensitive fashion by elements of the British tabloid media with the Sun headline reading "Bonkers Bruno Locked Up"<sup>9</sup>. Nevertheless, there has been a welcome focus on mental health issues in general and in sport in particular. The Professional Football Association in the UK for example have raised the profile of mental health issues among football players and tried to break the stigma associated with conditions like bi-polar, anxiety, stress, depressive disorders and addiction. The suicides of Robert Enke (German Goalkeeper) in 2009 and Gary speed the manager of Wales in 2011 brought the issue into sharp focus in football, and Marcus Trescothick and Joe Root's struggles with depression and stress have made the headlines in cricket over the last few years. Increased recognition and acceptance of the importance of mental health is further evidenced by the presence of psychologists and counsellors among the doctors, physiologists, physiotherapists and performance analysts surrounding modern professional athletes. George reflects on his time as a young professional:

*...it wasn't the same as it is now- they have therapist, they have life coaches, they have all these different things because people are aware of the pressures that come with all these different things on that level, but I didn't play at that level*

England took psychiatrist Dr Steve Peters to the football world cup in Brazil (2014)<sup>10</sup>. His presence was largely designed to help success on the field, but there is recognition that to maximise performance, the athlete's state of mind should be right. Individual teachers and coaches may have been exposed to a culture (in their everyday lives and through their roles) which is insensitive to or dismissive of mental health issues or individuals with mental health problems. Such difficulties may be exacerbated by the behaviour of the individual. PDs can be aggressive and obstinate, even in the face of kindness which further galvanises a suspicion or contempt for sufferers. ..

*No I think, they [Coaches] didn't realise that was a problem ... because I didn't tell them that, I just would be arrogant or I would be this sort of way- um cocky or bolshy or whatever word you'd want to use- quiet, moody - I would not allow others to get near me in that respect.*

When faced with an individual who is suffering from a personality disorder whose symptoms include behaving badly, the compassionate thing to do is to look to help the individual rather than condemn and blame. Coaches and teachers may understand this in theory, but as I have argued may find difficulty in doing so in practice. They may not be able to see or recognise the behaviour for what it is because they haven't come across it before and/or they may have preconceptions about PD which makes it difficult for them to see the problem. Furthermore, even if they do see the behaviour for what it is, there is no guarantee that they can respond appropriately.

### **What can be done?**

Care and *phronesis* are attributes, or more precisely dispositions that facilitate appropriate responses, but as I have shown the *type* of care which allows a teacher or coach to *see* that a pupil or athlete is suffering from disorder and *respond* in a way that promotes their well-being is complex (like any other

virtue). A crucial requirement it seems is experience - either the same or similar experiences oneself, or experience with individuals who have had difficulties (in life before or outside teaching or coaching and/or in one's role as teacher or coach). Experience of working with or seeing others responding successfully is also crucial. It is through experience that one develops virtue and it is through experience with PD (or any other *relevant* factor ) that a teacher or coach predisposed to caring hones the "PD sensitive" virtue of care and develops "PD *phronesis*" in relation to individuals with behavioural problems... According to Dunne (1993: 292) experience plays a crucial role in both virtue and *phronesis*.

...when a person is experienced we might say that the virtue through which he or she exploits that experience or puts what has been learned from it to work – and in the process learns more and so further develops and refines his or her experience – is *phronesis*. *Phronesis* is what enables experience to be self-correcting and to avoid settling into routine. If experience is an accumulated capital, we might say, then *phronesis* is this capital wisely invested.

Just having experience of PD is not enough because it may be bad experience. The experience has to have been a positive one where sensitivity and understanding was exemplified. But such experience without reflection or learning is not sufficient, however it is necessary in cultivating context sensitive virtue (and, by association – *phronesis*). Accumulated encounters with different types of pupils and athletes in different situations, one's own life story and experiences, one's personality and character in addition to training, education and knowledge come together in a context sensitive disposition to care (the same process goes for any other virtue like honesty or integrity).. The virtuous practically wise coach and teacher, therefore, become so through a particular kind of experience and in turn that experience provides the "stuff" or the "capital" to care in "this case". A focus on care and *phronesis* is vital, but I have shown that reference to these concepts in the abstract are no panacea for explaining how good teachers and coaches acquire them in concrete and are able to act and respond effectively in practice. Care and *phronesis* are labels for complex context specific psychological mechanisms which develop through habit, reflection and perhaps most importantly experience. To reiterate, neither care nor *phronesis* are "skills" or techniques that can be acquired easily and we may not be able to 'teach' them to coaches or teachers in any conventional sense. Although my aim has not been to comment directly on the implications for teacher and coach education, the foregoing discussion fits with the views of Carr (2003) Cushion *et al*, (2003) and Jones (2007) among others about the need for a non-reductive, non-technical approach.

## **Conclusion**

The virtue of care and the concept of *phronesis* have been put forward as important candidates for capturing the character or personality of good teachers and coaches. I have argued that care and *phronesis* are indeed crucial, but there are theoretical and practical difficulties with these concepts that need working through. Using insights from an empirical case study of an individual suffering from mental health issues (PD), I have tried to illustrate some of these difficulties. I have argued that teachers and coaches might find it difficult to care for all pupils and athletes equally, particularly if an individual is behaving badly. Yet care demands that they attempt to do the best for each individual (of course this does not mean that they treat everyone the same). Caring requires that we understand the person we care for, that we apprehend their reality and by caring we demonstrate that we do understand and apprehend their reality. This might be difficult if their reality is very different to ours

and/or if we have had little or no experience. Talk of care and *phronesis* in the literature is welcome, but we must not understate their complexity. Care, like other virtues are context specific, difficult to acquire (or teach) and their particular expression depends on a host of complex factors not least character and personal and professional experience.

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<sup>1</sup> McNamee (2011) provides a detailed discussion about the limitations of frameworks/rules or codes in relation to coaching and codes of conduct. My argument here echoes some of the key points he makes in relation to the character of a coach.

<sup>2</sup> George came to understand his early behaviour in terms of a personality disorder during his spell at the Sporting Chance rehabilitation clinic. <http://www.sportingchanceclinic.com/>

<sup>3</sup> Simpson (1997: 249) like many other critics of Aristotle point out the circularity in the definition of *phronesis* or prudence: "If we ask who the virtuous are we are told they are those who have right intuition; if we ask who those with right intuition are, we are told they are the virtuous".

<sup>4</sup> See Jones (2008) for an extended discussion about the nature of the virtues

<sup>5</sup> The "bag of virtues" idea comes from Kohlberg (1981) and was a phrase used to criticise the moral authority of a virtue theoretical approach to moral goodness. See Jones and McNamee (2000, 2003) and McNamee et al. (2003) for a rebuttal of this criticism.

<sup>6</sup> For further discussion about such issues, see Blum (1994) Chapter 3.

<sup>7</sup> Peters (1971) questions whether punishment has the positive role in the cultivation of character attributed to it by Aristotle.

<sup>8</sup> According to "Young Minds" a UK based mental health charity for young people, 1 in 10 children and young people aged 5-16 suffer from diagnosable mental health disorder, there is a 68% increase in self-harm hospital admissions in this age group in the last ten years and more than half of all adults with mental health problems were diagnosed in childhood with only half of this group receiving appropriate treatment.

[http://www.youngminds.org.uk/training\\_services/policy/mental\\_health\\_statistics](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/training_services/policy/mental_health_statistics) accessed 19/11/2014.

<sup>9</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank\\_Bruno](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frank_Bruno) accessed July 15th 20014

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/0/football/27669031> accessed July 15th 20014