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The Human and Educational
Significance of Honesty as an
Epistemic and Moral Virtue

Professor David Carr

Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

Education and epistemology

Professor David Carr

Virtue epistemologists have claimed that appeal to the notion of epistemic virtue promises to solve major problems of knowledge justification of traditional epistemology. So, in addition to avoiding Gettier objections to the traditional 'justified-true-belief' definition of knowledge, it is held to resolve -- or side-step -- conflicts between foundationalist and coherentists, internalists and externalists, and so forth. Generally, the epistemic virtues of virtue epistemology have been liable to broad division in terms of the somewhat divergent emphases of the two main virtue epistemological camps of reliabilism and responsibilism: whereas reliabilists are inclined to regard such faculties or capacities as good memory, accurate sense perception and sound reasoning as epistemic virtues, responsibilists focus more on such character traits as honesty, open-mindedness, scholarly rigour and intellectual courage. In general, however, virtue epistemology aspires to take a leaf out of the book of Aristotelian virtue ethics: just as the radical move of virtue ethics is to explain right action or moral conduct in terms of virtuous moral character -- rather than, as in much of the ethics of late modernity, to explain goodness of character in terms of (right-making) features of actions -- so virtue epistemology aims no less radically to account for knowledge in terms of intellectual or epistemic character rather than via (the truth-supporting) properties of beliefs.

Given the rather different concerns of this paper, I cannot presently pause to consider or assess the extent to which reliabilism and responsibilism adequately address traditional epistemological questions of knowledge justification. Still, some observations on the Aristotelian provenance of these views, of possible relevance to the present focus on honesty would seem in order. First, it is clear that the inspiration for virtue epistemology -- in both its reliabilist and (especially) responsibilist forms -- is Aristotelian. The main source of such inspiration would seem to be book 6 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* in which Aristotle distinguishes five main powers or capacities apt for the acquisition of various kinds of intellectual and practical knowledge, ability or skill. One thing that seems clear about this (otherwise evasive) taxonomy is that all the particular virtues -- of scientific knowledge, artistic expertise, practical wisdom, intuitive reason and philosophic wisdom (allegedly a combination of scientific and intuitive knowledge) -- considered in this chapter are species of the wider genus of intellectual virtues. From this viewpoint, it would seem that there is an immediate issue about whether the term 'virtue' as applied more generally by Aristotle to intellectual virtues has the same sense or meaning as it has more specifically applied elsewhere in the *Nicomachean Ethics* to moral characteristics -- especially if we recall that the sense of the original Greek source of this term was much wider than the strongly moral sense of modern English usage. Given such ambiguity, one might suspect that much latter day virtue epistemology -- not least the attempts of some to model epistemic capacities of intellectual virtue on the moral virtue of the *Nicomachean Ethics* -- rests on a mistake.

It might first be noted that Aristotle's intellectual virtue of practical wisdom has a very particular remit with regard to a specific sphere of human interests and operations. It is especially concerned with the rational cultivation or refinement of the sub-rational appetitive, emotional and desiderative aspects of human life and experience to the end of so-called human flourishing: thus, Aristotelian virtues may be regarded as more or less equivalent to emotions, feelings or appetites ordered in accordance with some deliberative ideal of practical wisdom. But though such deliberations are

plainly concerned with the production of morally good, right or virtuous conduct, Aristotle's account of the relationship between practical wisdom and the appetites and emotions it orders or regulates is of a singular kind that suggests radical reversal of a common (certainly modern) philosophical intuition about the relationship of moral character to action: precisely, of the thought that since agents of good character would be those who performed morally right actions, one would need to determine the rectitude of actions in order to discern good character. Apparently, Aristotle, reverses the order of explanation: insofar as the deliberations of practical wisdom are dependent on right ordering of the sub-rational appetitive and affective dimensions of virtue, there cannot be -- especially given the particular and contextualised nature of moral agency -- good or reliable judgement as to what counts in this or that circumstance as morally right conduct on the part of those not already possessed of the disciplined emotional and appetitive state of virtuous character. Morally good or right actions may be explained or understood only as those that an agent of good or virtuous moral character would perform.

On this view, however, it would seem that Aristotle -- though clearly a moral naturalist for whom there can be objectively better or worse moral judgements or decisions -- is not a moral realist in the sense of believing that there are 'external' moral truths apt for discovery by some independent moral reason. As he clearly insists in the early pages of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, it is not the job of practical wisdom to discern some Platonic form of the good, but to make us (practically) good or morally effective agents. That said, Aristotle is no less evidently a realist in the realms of epistemic, theoretical or scientific enquiry -- explicitly defending a version of the correspondence theory of truth. But this also seems to spoil any plausible analogy between morally virtuous deliberation and action on the one hand and (virtuous or other) scientific or other theoretical enquiry and sound knowledge on the other. In short, the practical moral virtues of courage, temperance or justice would seem to have a different direction of fit from intellectual virtues. In sum, while we may reasonably consider morally right or appropriate action to be that which a virtuous agent would perform, what counts as knowledge or justified true belief could hardly depend in the same way on epistemic ability or virtue: on the contrary, epistemic virtue could only be that which secures knowledge.

At all events, any such broadly Aristotelian distinction between epistemic virtues as reliable capacities for disclosing truth and moral virtues as qualities of ordered affect and appetite engenders some uncertainty about the virtue-ethical status of honesty: namely, about whether honesty is best regarded as an epistemic or as a moral virtue. On the one hand, the logical object or 'target' of honesty would seem to be truth -- so that honesty has the belief-to-world direction of fit -- and some general epistemic commitment to truth would seem to be characteristic of the honest agent. Further, though one might hold agents epistemically defective by dint of failure to seek the truth on this or that matter, it is not so obvious that we should regard them as morally dishonest on this account. On the other hand, if honesty is taken to mean a commitment to truthfulness, it is no less clear that we do morally blame agents for lying or concealing the truth. That said, although we clearly do blame agents for lying, it is not quite so obvious that we praise them for telling the truth in the same way that we readily praise them for being self-controlled, brave or generous. Again, as the idea of excess of honesty seems to make little sense -- there is no obvious Aristotelian mean here as in the case of these other virtues. (To be sure, we might say that agents have been too honest when they blurt out truths that hurt others' feelings: but the moral defect here would not be dishonesty or excess of honesty but lack of tact or sympathy.) In fact, Aristotle devotes relatively

little space to truthfulness in the Nicomachean Ethics and it is not obvious that Aristotle's characterization of it there as a mean between boastfulness and undue modesty has much to do with what we should ordinarily conceive as honesty or fidelity to the truth -- since an agent might well be either boastful or modest whilst completely truthful, or be neither boastful nor modest in blind or careless unconcern for truth. Hence, Aristotle's truthfulness seems more about some kind of social comportment -- a willingness or reluctance to crow about one's virtues or achievements -- than about whether agents care for what is thus and so as such.

Honesty as a virtue

In light of such considerations, it would seem that honesty as truthfulness occupies a rather uncertain or ambivalent position between epistemic and moral virtue. In turn, such considerations would seem to have implications for the question of how -- if we believe that honesty is of moral or other value and importance -- it might be apt for educational promotion or cultivation. In this regard, it might here be useful to return to some of the classical sources of thought about the nature of virtue. First, of the four cardinal virtues of antiquity, Socrates appears to have regarded wisdom as the master virtue insofar as one could not properly be said to possess the other virtues of courage, temperance and justice without it. It also seems that Socrates credits wisdom with much the same moral role -- of distinguishing truth from (self-imposed or other) lies and falsehood -- as we have ascribed to honesty as a virtue. Again, whereas there seems to be a significant sense in which justice is the paradigm virtue for Plato, it is no less clear that justice depends for him on the rule of the passions and appetites by mind or intellect defined in terms of much the same commitment to clear meaning and truth -- especially with regard to self-knowledge -- that Socrates identifies with wisdom and we have here associated with honesty. That said, there are well-rehearsed philosophical difficulties about the apparent cognitive 'externalism' of Socrates' conception of wisdom and Plato's intellectualist view of both virtue and justice that have continued to bedevil later moral theory, not least those highly influential latter day cognitive developmental theories of moral education that have claimed some descent from Plato. Perhaps the most pressing of such difficulties -- which Plato's tripartite theory of the soul clearly tries, but fails, to solve -- is the motivational problem of the sufficiency of moral wisdom, knowledge or honesty for practical virtue. For may not agents fully recognise the moral dubiety of a given course of action and yet be compelled to follow it? Can I not honestly comprehend the moral deficiency of my life and yet still fail to change it? In which case, what could be the moral value of any such honesty?

What the time-honoured criticisms of Socrates and Plato suggest is precisely that wisdom as a moral virtue cannot be only an epistemic virtue modelled exclusively as a capacity to recognise truth. This is clearly appreciated by Aristotle in the early pages of the Nicomachean Ethics where he distinguishes the practical aims of moral wisdom -- to form character and conduct -- from the epistemic aims of theoretical enquiry. At the same time, moral wisdom is yet regarded by Aristotle as an intellectual virtue in the sixth chapter of that book. In this light, however, if it is proper to regard honesty, like Socratic wisdom, as a kind of liberation from falsehood and delusion, it might feature as an Aristotelian intellectual virtue in two separate senses. Thus, in one (perhaps narrower) sense, it would be an epistemic attitude of open-ness to the truth that serves to reinforce faculties of accurate sense-perception and capacities for sound enquiry; but in another (perhaps broader) sense, it would be a source of truths from which rational principles or criteria for the moral ordering of human feelings, passions and appetites as prescribed elsewhere in Nicomachean Ethics might be

derived. This might also lend support to the idea -- also prominent in Socrates and Plato -- that wisdom has a rather different logical status from other moral virtues: so, for example, whilst such other Nicomachean character traits as courage, temperance or generosity might be undermined by affective defects or excesses, one may less easily suppose that there could be any such excess honesty in wisdom. However, there may now seem to be at least two obstacles to understanding honesty in this second moral sense as significantly constitutive of or contributory to Aristotelian practical wisdom. The first of these seems to be exegetical since, though Aristotle does characterise practical wisdom as intellectual, he seems to deny that such wisdom serves any epistemic or truth-seeking role. A second problem -- which rather compounds the first -- is that if Aristotelian practical wisdom ultimately does have some such grounding in the truth-seeking of honesty, then it may not be so clear how Aristotle's view that moral deliberation is essentially practical differs from or avoids collapse into the more theoretical conceptions of moral wisdom of Socrates and Plato. In that case, the difficulty that agents might have theoretical knowledge of what is true and worth pursuing, yet lack effective moral motivation, resurfaces.

However, the second of these issues seems easily addressed -- and it has a clear bearing on the first. The clear difference between Aristotle and his predecessors is that for Socrates and Plato the relationship of wisdom to other virtues is both top-down and (to compound metaphors) a one-way-street. For Socrates and Plato, wisdom dictates the form that courage, temperance or justice should take and the role of such virtues is secondary and subservient. Aristotle, on the other hand claims that moral wisdom and moral virtues are mutually presupposed: what, for Aristotle, distinguishes moral wisdom from the mere 'cleverness' of other more instrumental forms of practical reasoning is precisely that it is informed by other aspects of virtuous character which are required -- apart from anything else -- as objects upon which moral wisdom might reflect. So, though it may be agreed with Aristotle that the main aim of practical wisdom is to produce morally virtuous character and conduct, it is not at all clear how this could be done without some reasonable idea -- expressible in terms of something like knowledge or true belief -- of what such character and conduct actually is. Moreover, while Aristotle is also keen to emphasise that insofar as practical judgement is highly contextualised and particular, what counts as virtuous character and conduct is not readily susceptible of expression in the form of general (scientific) rules, he nevertheless provides a rough template of such virtuous character and conduct in the form of the doctrine of the mean. In this regard, it is the task of the virtuous agent to judge -- in the light of the best so far available moral experience -- what is the right moral response in this or that circumstance that avoids unnecessary extremes of affective or appetitive deficit or excess.

Thus, while Aristotle agrees with his illustrious philosophical predecessors that agents may err by irrationally surrendering to excessive appetites or passions, he departs from them in holding that it may also be morally untoward to be too deficient in appetite or passion. So, on the classic Aristotelian account, agents may on the one hand fall morally short by lacking sufficient affect, passion or emotion -- or, on the other hand, they may err morally on account of excessive or misplaced appetite, feeling or passion. Here, by the way, it may be worth observing that the deep truth at the heart of Aristotle's doctrine of the mean is not always well served by common characterisation of these latter types of moral defect as cases of excess of affect or emotion, insofar as it may sound odd to speak of people being too compassionate, sympathetic or generous. But there surely are cases in which we should say that while agents may be excused if not actually praised for feeling compassion, sympathy or pity, such sympathy or compassion might nevertheless

be morally inappropriate or misplaced. At all events, though Aristotle is evidently doubtful about the prospect of useful epistemic expression of the appropriateness or otherwise of such moral sentiment in general (scientific) laws or rules, it seems that he does hold that we can be right or wrong in our particular judgements of what is morally desirable on this or that occasion. Such observations about the need for ordered and measured emotion of any candidate virtuous conduct suggest that, without some correct epistemic perspective, we are likely go morally wrong -- not just by taking wrong moral turns, but by failing to see why they are the wrong moral turns.

So what may help us to determine that the emotional charge or direction of any given moral or virtuous act is right or wrong on this or that occasion and what might assist agents to a realization that this virtuous response or course of action is right or wrong? Indeed, if emotions and passions are merely affective experiences, one might ask how they could be right or wrong, true or false? Here, however, it should be clear from the voluminous philosophical literature (which we cannot presently rehearse) that some version of the latter day 'cognitive' account of emotions -- which has often drawn on Aristotle -- is incontrovertible. On this view, emotions -- as distinct from mere feelings -- involve judgements which may clearly also be true or false, or right or wrong: thus, to take a well-worn example, Othello is wrong to be jealous of Desdemona's unfaithfulness because it is untrue that Desdemona is unfaithful -- and if only Othello could be persuaded that his jealousy is groundless, he would (or should) cease to be jealous. By the same token, however, it is clear that emotions invariably have not just a cognitive but an affective dimension, that such affect is deeply embedded in, or constitutive of, the pre-rational sources of human agency and that it is therefore -- in cases of pathological dysfunction -- something from which agents find it difficult to disengage themselves. In short, the affective basis of human sentiment and emotion may be a source of irrational attachments from which moral agents need to be liberated. We shall shortly examine more closely the ways and means in and by which the honesty of self-knowledge may serve to liberate agents -- in ordinary moral life, no less than in the more clinical contexts of psychotherapy -- from the darker psychic attachments that cloud or undermine effective moral deliberation.

For now, however, the point for emphasis is that honesty as a moral virtue functions rather differently from such other moral virtues as temperance, courage and justice, and -- at its core -- much more like an epistemic intellectual virtue. From this viewpoint, it has the words-to-world direction of fit of an epistemic virtue rather than the world-to-words direction of fit of practical wisdom. That said, honesty is no less clearly necessary to the successful conduct of moral life. In this regard, it would seem that honesty -- as the key to self-knowledge -- is best conceived as the indispensable epistemic component of practical wisdom. For while Aristotle often seems to conceive of practical wisdom as a form of practical reasoning or deliberation primarily concerned to identify the most effective means to the achievement of certain morally determined ends or goals, it should be clear that such deliberations must remain directionless in the absence of some clear or 'true' vision of such goals. In the case of moral deliberation -- not least insofar as this is concerned, as Aristotle himself insists, with the development of a morally defensible character -- this is quite crucially a matter of divesting ourselves of the vanities and delusions to which disordered human affect and appetite so often give rise. We may know that it is wrong to feel jealousy when we are mistaken about the grounds of such passion and we may better hit the mean between apathy and uncontrolled violence when we appreciate that this is a mere slight that demands some, but not an extreme, response.

The educational cultivation of honesty

Still, a rather finer point needs putting on all this in order to see better how the virtue of honesty might be educationally developed or cultivated. Here, we may first observe that in terms of the broad virtue epistemological distinction between reliabilism and responsibilism, the basic epistemic form of honesty as a virtue would seem to be closer to the kind of qualities more commonly associated with the latter than the former. Thus, for example, it seems fairly clear that honesty is neither a faculty of sense perception nor a necessary intellectual skill or capacity of (this or that) enquiry. On the one hand, we do not come into the world biologically equipped with honesty as we are with accurate sight or hearing: on the other, although Aristotle is (in the *Nicomachean Ethics*) given to some comparison of virtue with skill acquisition, it is not clear that we acquire honesty by practising our 'honesty skills' in the way we might become good archers by practising archery skills. Rather, honesty would appear to be more a kind of attitude or outlook in the manner of intellectual curiosity or open-mindedness than a particular faculty or skill. To be sure, it would seem that those who were completely devoid of honesty -- in the sense of some basic commitment to the value and importance of knowledge and truth -- would be seriously debarred from any epistemic achievement: indeed, it would not make much sense to regard such agents as coming by knowledge even via so-called 'epistemic luck' if they cared not a whit whether they had it or not. From this viewpoint, given the basic role of knowledge and truth in any day-to-day human functioning, it is probably safe to say that no human agent could be entirely devoid of honesty construed as some level of commitment to the basic value of some truth over some falsehood: it might therefore seem that no sane agents could ever care about getting things right rather than wrong in some or other context of human endeavour.

At the same time, there seem to be various levels of departure from concern for honesty and truth that are more or less problematic. Again, not all of these -- however worrying -- need be either epistemically or morally problematic. I might be concerned -- perhaps on her behalf -- if my child shows neither aptitude nor interest in the study of history: but, all the same, I could hardly regard such lack of interest or commitment as either an epistemic or a moral fault and certainly not as dishonesty. To be sure, when she later receives low college marks for well-intentioned but inaccurate and poorly researched sociology essays, she might then be faulted for lack of epistemic virtue -- for lacking the attention and skills required for good scholarship -- although, again, perhaps not for any moral dishonesty. Still, the case is clearly different with the student who deliberately plagiarises the work of others in a deliberate attempt to gain a high grade without the burden of honest toil: this, surely, is a failure both of epistemic and of moral virtue, since the student's evident disregard for the integrity of enquiry is here compounded by a deliberate attempt to achieve an undeserved grade by deceit. A little more complicated, however, is the case of professional researchers who rig or concoct evidence for conclusions of which they are already persuaded on other less reputable grounds -- as, for example, the British psychologist Sir Cyril Burt is alleged to have done in his work on intelligence. While such fraudulence is clearly a failure of epistemic virtue -- since professional researchers may at this level be expected to grasp that such deceit negates any and all valid enquiry -- it seems also to be a moral failure of an interestingly complex kind that takes us beyond the simple confidence tricks of the plagiarist.

On the face of it, the dishonesty of deliberate plagiarists is a fairly straightforward case of trying to get something for nothing: it may well be that such cheats know that plagiarism is wrong or against

the rules (they have been told often enough), but they are lured from the straight and narrow by considerations of easy and short-term gain. For the most part, the psychology of such misconduct may be no harder to understand than that of the opportunist crime of purloining a lost purse on the street. It may be one trouble with those who misbehave in this sort of way that they are partly or wholly lacking the early Aristotelian training in pro-social rules that serves in many other cases to discourage such behaviour, and it is also hard to see what more than extension of some such socialization backed by criminal other social sanctions or penalties might serve to impress upon such miscreants the error of their ways.

On the other hand, the problem with at least some of those who deliberately falsify findings in order to prove a conclusion to which they are drawn in the absence of evidence seems rather more psychologically complex. To be sure, it might be that such researchers -- like the plagiarists or purse thieves -- are fully aware that what they are doing is wrong, and no less driven by the material and other gains of academic reputation. But perpetrators of large-scale research frauds may be driven by a larger -- if no less culpable -- dishonesty that cannot be simply reduced to desire for the simpler material or social gains of reputation. In Burt's case, it may have been that he was personally convinced that intelligence differences are exclusively genetically determined -- that therefore there were, in a significant sense, genetically superior and inferior people -- and that any proper enquiry would show this whether or not any research had actually shown it. The dishonesty in this case seems to spring from an ingrained prejudice about how the world is -- or how it ought to be -- to which disinterested enquiry into how things actually are is either regarded as unnecessary or irrelevant. In the words of an old joke, this seems to be a case of: 'do not adjust your mind, there is a fault in reality'.

Still, while we may agree in the spirit of the joke that there is much fault in reality, the fault in the case of falsified research is clearly in the mind of the beholder and in his or her perception of reality. Insofar, some observations on the general form and possible psychological genesis of such misperception may be presently in order. Basically, first, any such misperception would appear to entail some epistemic error: it involves some failure to see the world as it is, usually exhibited in a tendency to impose characteristics on reality that reality does not in fact exhibit. Hence, such tendency seems essentially fantasist, and -- in certain cases of manic upswing -- may well have its (albeit delusional) optimistic and benign side, though it is perhaps more frequently expressed in darkly paranoid convictions that the world is out to get us. In the classic literary example, Othello's destructive -- and unfounded -- jealousy of Cassio and Desdemona -- suggests one such case of misperception. But what might be the underlying psychological cause or motive of any such fantasizing misperception? Following a line of thought suggested by Plato in the Laws and developed in modern times by Iris Murdoch and others, such misperception may well be traced to failure to 'de-centre' or detach from a primitive egocentric concerns in ways that are also liable to up- and downbeat expressions. In the downbeat manifestation, failure to move beyond the self and its own desires and fixations, leads again to the persecution obsessions of the paranoid. However, the more 'upbeat' or vainglorious swings of such ego-attachment often seem attended by delusions of grandeur -- what Rousseau once characterised as 'amour roper' -- and the conviction that the agent is far superior to others and therefore knows best what is good for them.

To be sure, while the language of obsession, delusion and paranoia here used to characterise more chronic departures from reality may seem to take us into realms of psychopathology that might also

rule out ascriptions of virtue, vice and other notions of moral responsibility, there is no reason to suppose that the misperceptions from which inmates of psychiatric wards suffer are different in epistemic kind from those from which the rest of us suffer -- and, indeed, as modern psychoanalytic theory has taught, persuading or compelling psychiatric patients to face the reality that their misperceptions avoid may often be a way of 'curing' at least some kinds or degrees of mental illness. Still, as someone relatively 'sane', I may not think that I am Napoleon, but I may think -- no less mistakenly -- that all women find me irresistibly attractive. I may not be inclined to deny that the holocaust ever happened, but I may at some level harbour a conviction -- as it is clear that all too many so-called 'sane' people do -- that people of colour or Jews are racially or otherwise inferior. I may not be driven by a divine voice that commands me to murder all unveiled girls as fallen daughters of Eve, but I may nevertheless feel in response to reports of sexual assaults on women that it must have been their fault for leading men on. From this viewpoint, it seems reasonable to suppose that the first step towards promoting the wisdom of virtue among the general run of variably deluded, paranoid and neurotic people -- which probably means most of us -- is to try to re-acquaint the disconnected ego with those realities in the absence of which any honest self-knowledge of practical wisdom is scarcely possible. The self needs to know that I am not irresistibly attractive to women (and should not, in this sense, even desire to be); that there is no scientific evidence or compelling moral reason for regarding Jews or non-white peoples as inferior; that women are often -- if not invariably -- assaulted for no fault of their own and for reasons that have more to do with the criminal lack of self-control of (some) men.

All this said, there remains the issue of how, from an educational perspective, such connections with personal moral reality might be most effectively forged. Here, again, philosophers from the ancient Greeks onwards have had much to say about how the practical aspects of virtuous or other moral agency might be fostered via processes of socialization or the promotion of various forms (deontological, utilitarian or other) of practical reasoning. But we have argued in this essay that any and all effective forms of practical moral reasoning -- or, at any rate, those forms that have as a key goal the cultivation of something like Aristotelian moral character -- need grounding in an honest knowledge of self that is thereby in some significant sense epistemic. In short, to have moral self-knowledge is to have grasped something that has not just the world-to-words direction of fit of moral rules or prescriptions, but the words-to-world fit of theoretical knowledge. In particular, would-be morally honest agents want or need to know those respects in which their characters fall short by virtue of false beliefs, assumptions or feelings. From this viewpoint, it would seem plain enough that basic socialization or mastery of practical decision procedures are unlikely in and of themselves to assist agents to such knowledge. On the contrary, it might be expected that this sort of knowledge could only come from something resembling theoretical enquiry into human moral nature as we find it. In this light, one might look to such modern 'social-scientific' disciplines as anthropology, psychology and sociology as potential sources of knowledge about what human character might or might not be. Indeed, such an approach would appear to have a philosophically hallowed provenance in the ethical naturalism of Aristotle himself for whom biological and/or anthropological considerations seem to have been a key point of departure for reflection on the proper direction of human moral life.

To be sure, one likely philosophical objection to this suggestion is that it is guilty of the so-called 'naturalistic fallacy' -- of attempting to derive an 'ought' from an 'is' or values from facts. This, however, is not the problem. To begin with it is not entirely clear that one cannot either derive

prescriptions from descriptions or (since these are not anyway the same thing) values from facts: indeed, ethical naturalists from Aristotle to the present day have insisted that reflection on the natural circumstances of human life and association is the only way of deriving intelligible and coherent moral values. The problem is rather that mere descriptions of the facts of the case are not enough to inform practical wisdom -- because, as already observed, such wisdom is as much if not more rooted in affective than cognitive states. Practical wisdom, at least on the Aristotelian account is a matter of properly ordered feeling or sentiment. Thus, on the Aristotelian view, what the morally virtuously agent (as distinct from incontinent or continent agents) needs to know is how to feel in the right way to be properly moved towards the correct virtuously measured response. In this light, to be sure, we might be moved by a historical account of the execution of Mary Queen of Scots, by stories of the holocaust or the plight of the Australian aborigine population under colonial oppression. But the prime purpose of historical records, social-scientific reports, newspaper or newsreel stories is not to move but to inform -- whether or not such accounts of worldly injustice do move reformers to reform, or people at large to acts of charity. That said, it seems no less true that such information -- especially in an age of information overload -- often fails to move those to whom it is directed to any sort of action at all. Television viewers are nightly bombarded by stories of injustice and oppression around the world often to negligible moral effect.

In that case, is there any kind of epistemic input -- of academic or other kind -- that might assist development of affective dimension of practical wisdom? In fact, it is arguable that there is a very educationally familiar vehicle for the development of moral feeling or sentiment that has also had a time-honoured -- though often beleaguered -- place in the traditional school curriculum. For where a historical account of the first world war -- including statistical estimates of dead and maimed -- may fail to move us, it may well be that a Wilfred Owen poem or a Sebastian Faulks novel can. In fact, this is precisely what an Owen poem or Faulks novel sets out to do: not to inform us of numbers of first world war casualties, but help us experience what it might have been like -- in all its horror and brutality -- to have been there. Likewise, in order to appreciate something of the suffering and oppression of slavery in the Americas of the nineteenth century we may be better to read Isabel Allende's *Island Beneath the Sea* than read a historical record -- or again, in order to appreciate the horrors of the holocaust, to view a movie such as *Sophie's Choice*. In short, as such great romantic poets as Wordsworth and Coleridge were at pains to insist, the best place to look for cultivation of morally or otherwise significant human emotions is to imaginative literature and creative arts rather than to historical records or news reports. So, while we should recognise that this may not be the only educational value of literature, it seems clear enough that it has been one significant purpose of much western and other great art and literature -- in the west from the Greek tragic poets through Shakespeare and Marlowe to Austen, Dickens, D.H. Lawrence and other great modern novelists -- to assist some inner grasp and cultivation of the affective dimensions of moral wisdom: in short, not just to inform us about but to help us feel the human predicament.

But must not any present claim that creative literature and other art might provide the epistemic basis for critically honest appraisal of our beliefs about ourselves and the world seem surprising -- even counterintuitive -- in an age in which evidence based scientific enquiry is widely regarded as the benchmark of human knowledge? For many people nowadays it is likely to seem incredible that the fictional stories and themes of novels, plays and poetry can be any other than distractions from the serious business of educational learning -- and this view, no doubt, has played its part in the widespread side-lining of literature and other arts in latter day western school curricula. Indeed,

while Plato seems to have been the first great western philosopher to recognise the great emotional power of poetry and other arts, he was notoriously suspicious of such influence, regarding it as subversive of reason and liable -- especially through the poets' stories of the immoral antics of gods and men -- to deprave and corrupt. However, present claims about the epistemic potential of literature and arts for the honesty of self-knowledge are entirely consistent with the metaphysics, ethics and aesthetics of Aristotle who explicitly held in his *Poetics* that (poetry) is 'something more philosophic and of greater import than history', since it is addressed to matters of more 'universal' than 'particular' concern. In short, Aristotle was more appreciative than Plato, not only of the indispensable role of affect and emotion in practical wisdom -- and of the need for its moral or virtuous refinement and cultivation -- but of the power of great poetry to assist, through the process to which he refers in his *Poetics* as catharsis, such cultivation.

In this light, the point of Euripides' *Medea* is not to encourage imitation of Medea-like horrors but to move us to some sympathy towards a woman unjustly betrayed and driven to the end of her tether. Likewise, Euripides's *The Trojan Women* sets out to show the Greeks not how wonderful they are by virtue of their victory over the Trojans -- as a newsreel of the day might have done -- but how cruel and brutal (Greek or other) conquerors can be in the hour of their triumph. Thus, like much other great literature, Euripides' drama holds up a moral mirror to Greeks and others in which they are invited to examine their values and sentiments in all moral honesty. Hence for Aristotle -- as in more recent times for Alasdair MacIntyre writing in the same Aristotelian vein -- it is the emotionally revealing stories of the poets that may best serve to clarify and nourish the epistemic roots of practical wisdom in the interests of enhanced moral insight. Insofar, in the interests of any promotion of honesty as an intellectual or moral virtue, it seems high time for educationalists to reconsider and re-evaluate the moral and epistemic potential of great literature and art.



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Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues

University of Birmingham | Edgbaston | Birmingham | B15 2TT

www.jubileecentre.ac.uk