Wisdom and the Origins of Moral Knowledge

Randall Curren

This is an unpublished conference paper for the 5th Annual Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues conference at Oriel College, Oxford University, Thursday 5th – Saturday 7th January 2017.

Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues

University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 2TT United Kingdom

T: +44 (0) 121 414 3602 F: +44 (0) 121 414 4865

E: jubileecentre@contacts.bham.ac.uk W: www.jubileecentre.ac.uk

Wisdom and the Origins of Moral Knowledge

Randall Curren

> Far best is he who knows all things himself;
> Good, he that hearkens when men counsel right;
> But he who neither knows, nor lays to heart
> Another's wisdom, is a useless wight.[1]

Eudaimonism in the Socratic tradition is predicated on the idea that there are natural *truths* about what is essential to living well – truths about what is good and bad for human beings, arising from defining aspects of a common species nature. Understanding these truths and living by them is the better part of wisdom in this tradition that encompasses Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and their many descendants. Yet, wisdom itself requires not just understanding but *knowing*, and in this Socratic tradition the relevant form of ethical knowledge is *epistêmê* or grasping a systematically interconnected structure of truths about the good for human beings.

Plato may have been optimistic that such knowledge could be widely attainable when he composed the *Laws*, and it is in this work that his endorsement of a Socratic ethic of respect for reason is most systematically evident in views on the manner, aim, and substance of governance (Curren, 2000). The function of law in this work is to communicate truths about living well, and its theory of legislating is that laws must be prefaced with explanatory 'preludes' and a general preamble. These are to explain the derivation of legal duties or natural moral requirements for living well from a conception of human nature and the good for human beings. The public

[1] Hesiod, *Works and Days* 293-7; quoted by Aristotle in *NE* I.4 1095a10-12.

education proposed in this work would aim to make students rationally self-governing and would do so in part by engaging them in the very kinds of philosophical inquiry about justice, law, and the good for human beings that the dialogue itself exemplifies. It is not clear whether Plato truly believed moral knowledge could be widespread in such a city, but it is a city designed to promote a widespread grasp of the entire axiomatic structure of the human good and derived principles of natural moral law. Moreover, it is only by being such a city that it can do justice to the best or divine element in human nature, the intellect around which human well-being revolves, because *wisdom* or the fulfillment of this divine element is the highest good for human beings and a city's proper aim (*Laws* I 630, 631c-e, V 743c; cf. *Crito* 44d, 29e-30a; *Euthydemus* 279c-d, 281e; *Gorgias* 504d-e; *Theaetetus* 176c-e; *Phaedrus* 248a ff.; *Timaeus* 90b-c).

There are many traces of Plato's *Laws* in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*, not least in the latter's views on the axiomatic structure of moral knowledge, the function of law, and the nature of the best life for human beings. A notable difference with respect to the possession of moral knowledge is that there is little indication of Aristotle intellectualizing the administration of law or moral education of children to the extent Plato advocated. The discussion of public education in *Politics* VIII breaks off in such a way as to leave considerable doubt as to how far its instruction in ethics would have advanced, but the extant portion is primarily concerned with the cultivation of judgment generally and education in musical performance that contributes to moral development by imitating good character and inspiring delight in its apprehension. Moral facts and starting points for serious moral inquiry would be acquired, but there is no suggestion that the combination of common schooling and good laws would come close to providing knowledge of the axiomatic structure of ethics. Higher education in ethics will evidently be essential to the acquisition of ethical *epistêmê*, and it is significant that

what we know of Aristotle's thoughts on this can only be gleaned from what is known of the operations of his Peripatetic school and the *NE* itself. The ideal aristocracy he presents as the best possible constitution is a partnership of people who are truly virtuous and able to live the best kind of life – a life that makes theoretical contemplation its highest end – and it is hard to avoid the conclusion that he envisioned a school much like his own playing a central role. As an informal community of 'friends' (*philoi*) freely engaged in collaborative research, instruction, and learning, his *Peripatos* may have been the very model of the true political communities he conceived as partnerships in living the best kind of life (Curren, 2014a).

Wisdom would require higher learning, but Aristotle's extant works leave much doubt as to how fully he worked out an account of practical wisdom and its educational basis (Curren, 2014a, 2014 c, 2015). Moral knowledge is clearly among the 'universals' that must be brought together with discernment of the 'particulars' of situations in practical wisdom, but wisdom in managing complex human affairs would evidently require a collation of both moral knowledge and an array of other forms of knowledge embodied in theoretical, practical, and productive sciences. The educational prerequisites for practical wisdom are accordingly quite extensive, and would evidently expand as advances in learning enable societies to create ever more complex built environments and systems for us to navigate (Curren, 2014c). Aristotle holds that to be educated is to be able to form a sound judgment of an investigation or exposition, and that a person of 'universal' education is able to do this in all or nearly all domains of knowledge (*Parts of Animals* 639a1-15). One might object that a more complete education would offer guidance on forming practical judgments to which multiple domains of knowledge are relevant.

The starting points of moral knowledge

Clearly, there are many questions about Aristotle's understanding of wisdom that might be pursued, but I will confine myself in what follows to one foundational aspect of Aristotle's conception of the moral knowledge presupposed by practical wisdom – its presumed source in perception, experience, and induction. Can people *perceive* what is good and bad for them, and if so what form do such perceptions take? Are there *natural signs* of flourishing and failure to flourish present to us in our experience of attempts to live well? If there are such signs, do they ever constitute evidence sufficient to qualify ethical beliefs as knowledge? If such signs exist but never provide sufficient evidence for ethical knowledge in their own right, might they play epistemically important roles in a *science* of what is good and bad for human beings?

This paper will pursue these questions of moral epistemology against the background of recent scholarship on the relationship between Aristotle's science and ethics (Henry and Nielsen, 2015) and in the context of a psychologically grounded neo-Aristotelianism (Curren, 2010, 2013, 2014b, 2014c, 2015; Curren and Metzger, 2017; Ryan, Curren, and Deci, 2013). Aristotle presents his ethics as a science, but the scholarly literature has been slow to embrace this and thoroughly investigate his moral epistemology. Investigating it in connection with the character and foundations of his conception of *eudaimonia* is essential to understanding his views on the experiential starting points of moral knowledge. Redeeming an actionable version of the resulting view would be a further project in itself, requiring an updating of the psychological foundations of Aristotle's conceptions of human nature and living well. All told, this is a project that could easily span a book, so what I will present in what follows will be highly programmatic.

I have argued elsewhere that a viable neo-Aristotelian eudaimonism must confront an empirical thesis at the heart of Aristotle's conception of eudaimonia: his doctrine that "the

pleasure of the best man is the best, and springs from the noblest sources" (*Pol.* VIII.3 1338a8-12). This implies a convergence between what is most admirable in the sphere of human activity and what is most pleasant and satisfying, and thereby an internal psychic connection between virtue and happiness. On what empirical basis might this convergence hypothesis be vindicated? I have suggested that we look to eudaimonistic psychology and specifically to self-determination theory's triad of basic psychological needs linked to the fulfillment of categories of human potential foundational to living well (Ryan, Curren, and Deci, 2013; Curren 2013). The satisfaction and frustration of these needs is registered in positive and negative affect, and these affective states would clearly mediate the relationship between fulfilling our potential well and experiencing happiness. This much I have addressed, but not the epistemic significance of these states of need satisfaction and frustration, which would seem to qualify as psychic markers of things that are naturally good and bad for us. People may or may not accurately interpret these need-related affective states as *signs* of what is good and bad for them and how they should act, but the pain of humiliation and other affective markers of need frustration and satisfaction may nevertheless qualify as sources of ethically relevant information. It is reasonable to hypothesize that they may play a foundational role in the moral knowledge that is ultimately essential to practical wisdom. The nature of this role is at present far from clear, however. A larger aim toward which this paper is only a small step would be to develop an empirically viable view of ethical knowledge and practical reason that preserves aspects of Aristotelian moral realism and naturalism about the good.

Aristotelian ethical science

Aristotle presents his *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* as an ordered pair comprising political science (*hê politikê epistêmê*) and if he really takes ethics to be a science, its methods and structure should reflect his guidance on the nature of science in the *Posterior Analytics*. The methods and structure of his ethics should resemble that of geometry and zoology. A proper science is defined in Book I of the *APo* as having an axiomatic structure, consisting of *theorems* derived from *first principles* by means of *demonstrative deductions* that reveal the causes of the necessary facts derived as theorems (*APo*. 1.2.71b9-16, 1.13, 1.33.8830-34). A deduction is demonstrative if it "proceeds from what is necessary" (i.e., from necessary truths), so a science's first principles must be "incapable of being otherwise" (1.33.88b30-32). These consist of *axioms* common to all sciences and *posits* consisting of (1) 'suppositions' or claims that the *natural kinds* that are the objects of the specific science exist, and (2) *definitions* that identify the essence of those natural kinds. Being first principles, these posits must be grasped or understood rather than demonstrated. Understanding (*nous*) of first principles would begin in perception of particular cases, proceed through a unification of memories to general or universal suppositions about similar objects, and conclude with reflection that seeks to explain the particulars experienced through definitions of species essences or the nature of natural kinds. Once established, these definitions can serve as the basis for demonstrative theorems. Scientific knowledge or understanding involves grasping this entire axiomatic or inferential structure, and Aristotle conceives it as enabling one to understand the causes of things in the domain.

Recent scholarship on the interface of Aristotle's ethics and science has overcome several grounds for not taking Aristotle's framing of the *NE* as a science at face value. Reviewing all the arguments would take us too far afield, so I will focus on three matters that are especially relevant to our concern with the sources of moral knowledge. The first is Aristotle's references

in *NE* I to the starting points with which students of political science must be equipped, and how these references are consistent with an inductive basis for ethical first principles. The second is the identity and defense of the first principles that must be inductively established, if Aristotle's ethics is to qualify as a science. The third is the matter of what would constitute the theorems of Aristotle's ethical science. What kind of derived propositions are supposed to rest on the first principles established through induction? In what sense are these derived ethical truths action-guiding? The consideration of these basic aspects of Aristotle's conception of ethical science will facilitate an epistemically-focused reframing of the psychologically-grounded neo-Aristotelian eudaimonism I have presented elsewhere. On that basis, I will conclude with some brief remarks on the dual role of basic psychological needs as natural signs and causal-explanatory posits.

Habituation, facts, and starting points

Aristotle writes in *NE* I.4 that:

> We must begin with things familiar to *us*. Hence anyone who is to listen intelligently to lectures about what is noble and just and, generally, about the subjects of political science must have been brought up in good habits. For the facts (*to hoti*) are the starting point, and if they are sufficiently plain to him, and he will not need the reason as well; and the man who has been brought up well has or can easily get the starting points (1095a3-8).

We must begin with what is familiar to us, but things familiar to us that are facts (*to hoti*) or truths, not just things said (*ta legomena*) or believed (*endoxa*). A method of inquiry based on *endoxa* as such would be dialectical, and not the method of a science, but *endoxa* may contain partial truths that serve to guide a scientific inquiry "by providing an initial, though not unproblematic, conception of the subject of investigation" (Karbowski, 2015: 119). Returning to these facts that are the starting points, Aristotle writes in *NE* I.7 that "the fact (*to hoti*) is the first thing and a starting point (*archê*). Of starting points (*archai*), some are grasped by induction, some by perception, some by a sort of habituation, and others in other ways" (1098b2-4).

Joseph Karbowski suggests on the basis of these passages that Aristotle views habituation "of a sort" as "a truth-establishing mechanism that yields knowledge (*gnôsis*) of ethical matters" (Karbowski, 2015: 126). Aristotle's claim is that sound habituation provides a grasp of ethical facts or truths that serve as starting points for ethical inquiry, so if there is knowledge involved it is not the moral *epistêmê* that consists of grasping the whole axiomatic structure of ethical science. It is natural to suppose that these starting points include or could be easily acquired through truths about particular kinds of acts and people, and Karbowski argues that they would consist of or include claims that Aristotle relies on to test *endoxa*, such as that "*eudaimonia* is not something that is essentially dependent upon other people's opinions" (2015: 121-122). However, it is conceivable that Aristotle means not simply starting points (*archai*) of inquiry that yields the first principles (*archai*) of ethical science, but some of those first principles themselves. It is not plausible that this would include definitions or axioms common to all sciences, but it might conceivably include suppositions of moral ontology – the existence of natural kinds of acts, lives, or both.

NE X.9 sheds further helpful light on the nature of the starting points that properly raised students of political science will bring to the study of ethics: "the many," Aristotle says, "have not even a conception of what is noble and truly pleasant, since they have never tasted it" (1179b14-15). There is no mistaking here the identification of what is noble, *kalon*, or ethically appropriate with what is *truly pleasant* or perceived as most pleasant and satisfying by those with experience of different kinds of pleasures. The "many" are also base, without shame, live by passion, and cannot be reformed by arguments, Aristotle adds (1179b10-17), but the claim that bears on the starting points of moral *epistêmê* is this claim that they lack a conception of the *kalon* and truly pleasant because they have no experience of it. A few lines later Aristotle provides confirmation that he has in mind an experience-based *unitary* conception of a class of acts or activities as being both *kalon* and truly pleasant, when he considers whether it is by nature, habituation, or teaching that people are made good. There he says that the ground for teaching must be "cultivated by means of habits for *noble joy* and noble hatred" (1179b24-26; italics added) – habits of finding joy in what is good and hating what is vicious, we can assume.

How is such habituation supposed to work? We can suppose that it begins with a kind of passive habituation or exposure to fictional and live models of acting well and finding pleasure and joy in acting well (Curren, 2015). This would provide relevant perceptions of behavioral templates of virtue and its rewards, presumably, but the decisive experience would surely follow in the form of active habituation or personal engagement in relevant kinds of acts. What would need to happen for a "conception of the noble and truly pleasant" to be confirmed and not extinguished is surely that the engagement in admirable (*kalon*) acts is experienced without too much delay as *inherently* and not just circumstantially pleasant, gratifying, satisfying, or something of the sort. The learner's perceptions of her initial attempts at courage or moderation

may be inauspicious, so habituation that guides her toward inherently gratifying success may be crucial. It may thereby shape a cumulative experience of efforts to act well that yields an accurate conception of the relationship between the noble and the pleasant or virtue and happiness. This might count as an inductively generated supposition that would qualify as a first principle of moral science, if it is construed as affirming the existence of a natural kind of act – the admirable and gratifying acts that are constitutive of *eudaimonia* or living well.

David Charles suggests something along these lines when he writes that, "Induction, as understood in the *Analytics*, offers a model of a rational process which can be used to establish ethical goals" (Charles, 2015: 88; cf. Moss, 2011, on practical induction). On what basis can one rationally settle on a life plan, he asks, "if not from finding particular actions attractive and subsequently reflecting on them to arrive at a determinate goal to live by? . . . It is from experience of particulars that we move towards the goal ([NE]1143b4-5). The experience of fine particular actions gives one reason to take doing such actions as one's goal" (88). "What do people with practical knowledge know?" Charles asks (92). They know that acting well (*eupraxia*) is what is appropriate, and what is normally appropriate is noble or fine activity – "activity worthwhile-in-a-pleasurable-way. . . activity that is simultaneously and inexplicably [or intrinsically and inextricably] pleasant and worthwhile" (92-93).

If people can know this by induction, induction is the path to first principles proper to a science, and Aristotle thinks that sound habituation provides ethical first principles, then it is reasonable to conclude that the epistemic significance of sound habituation is that it provides a structure in which the right kind of experience and induction is likely to occur. If habituation is to provide starting points on which the possession of moral knowledge can build, it must enable children to experience what is foundational to living well for themselves. They must grasp or be

in a position to grasp the first principles of ethics in the only way Aristotle identifies as epistemically relevant in his descriptions of science – through perception, experience, and induction. If habituation does not take young people all the way to first principles, it must at least provide the accumulated perceptions or experience that reflection must engage.

First principles: Human nature and the highest good

If Aristotle's ethics is a science, what is its object of study? The announced object of study is living well (*eu zên*) or *eudaimonia*, the nominal highest end of all human beings and of the most authoritative art to which all other arts are properly subsidiary: political science (*NE* I.1-2). Aristotle's opening reference to political science as a master art and subsequent comparisons with medicine imply that political science is action-guiding and that it is an art resting on a science. Aristotle also makes it clear from the start that the political science of which ethics is a part is fundamentally concerned with enabling entire societies to live well, not just one person – a person who comes into possession of this knowledge, we can assume (I.2 1094b7-12). And just as medical science would rest in biological science, there are many indications that ethics will rest in psychology or soul science, including a definition of human nature that reveals the causes of things that fall within the science. Since the object of ethical science is living well, we might expect to see definitions of human nature and eudaimonia that support the deduction of theorems about what is and is not conducive to eudaimonia, the states of soul or virtues essential to eudaimonia, why people act as they do and succeed or fail to live well. And we should expect to see derived propositions about the contributions of leadership, legislation, and constitutional arrangements to the flourishing of a society's members.

The most important crux of all this is Aristotle's much-discussed ergon argument, which Christopher Shields renders as follows:

> (1) the function of any given kind x is determined by isolating what x does in a characteristic (*idion*) sort of way; (2) the characteristic (*idion*) activity of human beings is reasoning; (3) hence, the function of a human being is (or centrally involves) reasoning; (4) exercising a function is an activity (where, in living beings, this will be the actualization of some capacity of the soul); hence (5) exercising the human function is an activity of the soul in accordance with reason (Shields, 2015: 241-242; schematizing *NE* I.7 1097b22-1098a4).

What follows is the claim that (6) the function of a so-and-so and a good so-and-so are the same, and the conclusion that (7) the "human good [*eudaimonia*] turns out to be activity of *psyche* [an active life of the psychic element that has a rational principle] in conformity with excellence, and if there are more than one excellence, in conformity with the best and most complete … in a complete life" (*NE* I.7 1098a16-18).

Lines 1, 4, and 6 seem to be common axioms, and 2 is directly implied by Aristotle's definition of human beings' species essence. Line 7, Aristotle's definition of *eudaimonia* or the human good, is derived from these through one intervening step, and as the definition of the fundamental object of study it would bear much of the weight of demonstrations of theorems. Various scholars, including Richard Kraut and David Reeve, have argued that phrase "the best and most complete" excellence refers to *sophia* or theoretical wisdom, which finds its completion in intellectual activity itself. Whether this is implicit in the definition or merely

consistent with it, what follows when Aristotle returns to the nature of *eudaimonia* in *NE* X.6-8 is that the *eudaimon* or best life is identified as one that makes *theoria* or theoretical contemplation in conformity with *sophia* its highest aim. Aristotle offers a variety of arguments in X.7-8, but the ones that could be considered demonstrative appeal to formal constraints on what can qualify as a highest end.

A question that might be raised before considering what would constitute theorems in Aristotle's ethical system, is not whether the first principles relied on are *plausibly* established by induction but whether they could be empirically vindicated. Plausibility is enough to satisfy curiosity about how closely Aristotle adheres to his announced conception of ethics as a science, but if our interest is in the sources of moral knowledge in an empirically viable neo-Aristotelian eudaimonism, then empirical adequacy matters.

I have in mind line (2), the claim that the characteristic (*idion*) activity of human beings is reasoning, and whether it reflects an intellectualist prejudice that undermines the adequacy of the claims about *eudaimonia* that depend on it. The *Politics* builds on *NE* X.6-8, and we find Aristotle saying in VIII.3 that

> We should be able, not only to work well, but to use leisure well… But leisure of itself gives pleasure and happiness and enjoyment of life… *the pleasure of the best man is the best*, and springs from the noblest sources. It is clear then that there are branches of learning and education which we must study merely with a view to leisure spent in intellectual activity, and these are to be valued for their own sake (*Pol.* 1337b30-31; 1338a1-2, 8-12; italics added).

Other passages suggest that what is intended is that the most *admirable* pleasures associated with the highest virtues are also the most *satisfying*. Note the claim that there are "branches of learning" that should be "valued for their own sake," presumably because intellectual activity belonging to those branches of learning is, of all the possible uses of one's leisure, the most admirable *and* the most satisfying. These branches of learning that are to be "valued for their own sake" are evidently "branches of knowledge" or domains essential to the exercise of theoretical wisdom or *sophia*, a flourishing life being one that makes intellectual activity in accordance with that highest virtue its highest end.

What should be noted is the *comparative* assessment of the quality of pleasures and its alleged correlation with the comparative excellence of persons. This is far removed from the inductively established supposition about the admirable and gratifying acts constitutive of *eudaimonia* that we considered as a possible product of habituation in the previous section. Sound habituation would likely yield experience in the gratifying exercise of several forms of excellence, not just moral excellence, but in doing so it might also support the conclusion that there is no fixed hierarchy of gratifying fulfillments of human potential.

Ethical theorems and the scope of Aristotelian ethics

An Aristotelian science is an axiomatic system of truths pertaining to the nature of unchanging objects of knowledge (*NE* VI.3 1139b20-25). Aristotle took the human psyche and the best life for human beings to be such objects of knowledge, and he evidently held that given the nature of the former, the nature of the latter cannot be other than it is. Ethics takes the best life for human being as its necessary object, but it pertains more broadly to the nature, function and varieties of

the human psyche. It relies on psychology to identify the nature and corresponding function that is said to determine the nature of *eudaimonia*, and it elaborates the varieties of psyche or states of character that do and do not permit the fulfillment of that function in a flourishing life. Politics pertains similarly to the nature, function, and varieties of the polis – the varieties of political constitution that do or do not fulfill a polis's natural function. Politics relies on ethics to identify the function of a true polis, whose nature is consequently defined as a partnership in living the best life. Aristotle's typologies of healthy and unhealthy personal constitutions and political constitutions surely play important roles in the derivation of ethical and legislative theorems, but what would these theorems be?

A preliminary observation that Devin Henry and Karen Margrethe Nielsen make is that when Aristotle cautions that, "Fine and just actions , which political science investigates, exhibit much variety and fluctuation, so that they may be thought to exist only by convention and not by nature" (*NE* I.2 1094b 14-16), he may be letting his audience know that the *NE* will be nearly devoid of advice on how people should act in the particular circumstances in which they find themselves (Henry and Nielsen, 2015: 8-9). Greek ethicists writing soon after Aristotle's death divided their field into 'dogmatic" and 'parainetic' parts. The first contains the basic principles, such as an account of the good life, definition of virtue, and classification of goods, while the latter consists of action-guiding principles derived from the basic principles (8-9). Henry and Nielsen note that the *NE* would qualify as dogmatic and be exempt from the "variety and fluctuation" to which Aristotle refers. What they don't say is that the middle books of the *Politics* would qualify as parainetic, but their action-guiding principles tailored to specific circumstances are designed to guide leaders and their political scientist advisors rather than individuals in their private lives.

With this in mind, the principal theorems derived in the *NE* are or include:

1. There are true (virtuous) and deviant states of character (states of the part of the irrational soul that shares in reason).

2. The possession of the intellectual virtues, *sophia* and *phronesis*, presupposes moral virtue.

3. The highest good for human beings is a life of excellent theoretical contemplation (i.e., *theoria* in accordance with theoretical wisdom or *sophia*).

4. *Sophia* is essential to *eudaimonia*.

5. *Eudaimonia* requires moral virtue (from 2 and 4).

6. People who possess *sophia* and devote their lives to *theoria* are happiest.

7. People who possess *phronesis* and devote themselves to civic leadership are happy in a secondary degree.

8. People who lack virtue will be unhappy.

The principal theorems derived in the *Politics* would similarly include:

9. There are true (just) and deviant states of polises (political constitutions)

10. Just constitutions are conducive to citizens living well together.

11. Virtue is the chief concern of a true polis (from 5 and the nature or function of a true polis)

12. Education is a primary tool of statesmanship (given 11).

13. The perception of injustice is the most important general cause of constitutional instability.

14. Tyrants should strive to be like true kings in every way (from 10, 11, 13, etc).

15. Laws should guide citizens in acting well.

This final theorem about law is, of course, the most interesting with respect to its implications for action-guiding principles. It brings us back to where we began with Plato's *Laws* and the role of laws *qua* codification of truths about living well together. Nielsen argues

helpfully that, "Medicine, like ethics, contains true generalizations that admit of exceptions. They concern features of kinds, rather than features of particulars. . . . Thus, deliberation relies on rules that hold unqualifiedly (*haplôs*)" (Nielsen, 2015: 47). The attributes of kinds and their relationships to one another can have the stability science requires, because it is in deliberation that we must bring generalizations to bear on particulars and "be aware of a range of possible defeaters" (47).

Redefining human nature and the starting points of ethical science

If we could frame an empirically viable neo-Aristotelian eudaimonism, what would its sources of ethical knowledge be? How would its fundamental posits reflect an experiential and inductive basis? What account of human nature and flourishing would it posit?

It may be true, as Aristotle posited, that the characteristic activity of human beings is in some sense reasoning, but empirical foundations would seem to be lacking for his conclusion that excellent theoretical contemplation is the most rewarding and admirable of all activities for human beings as such. Even if it were, we should want to know whether there are *other* aspects of human nature that are important to human beings living well – other 'Aristotelian necessities' besides those conducive to the fulfillment of intellectual potential in theoretical contemplation.

The view I have been constructing incrementally might be seen as reconceiving human beings as rational, social, and creative animals. Being endowed with intellectual, social, and creative potential, basic psychological needs theory posits that we also have associated innate needs for self-determination, affirming relationships, and competence. All three of these forms of potential are involved in some way every time we act, and a large and growing body of

psychological research indicates that no one in any culture or at any age experiences their lives as going well unless all three of these needs are met. Because these needs are satisfied only when agents experience themselves fulfilling their related basic forms of potential *well* (e.g., in ways that affirm the value of other people and are competent), they create and explain a convergence between acting admirably and being happy.

The experiential manifestations of these needs being satisfied are also natural signs of what is good for us – namely conditions favorable to our flourishing. The experiential manifestations of these needs being frustrated are similarly natural signs of things bad for us – namely conditions that interfere with our flourishing. To say that they are natural signs entails no more than that they are caused by the conditions in question, but they also have a positive or negative affective valence and may take the form of emotions that have an intentional content. They may be as mute as a headache or lack of energy of unknown provenance, or as pointed as the pleasure of getting something to work or anger triggered by an insult. Yet, they all have information value that can be interpreted by those who understand their characteristic patterns. They include the pleasure and joy that Aristotle associated with what is 'noble', but constitute a much wider and nuanced class of indicators of wellness and flourishing,

Concluding note on eudaimonic psychology and practical wisdom

Aristotle's political science consists of ethics and politics – the science of constitutions or legislation – and it is grounded in psychology that a legislator would need to understand in order to comprehend its central arguments (Shields, 2015). I defend a form of neo-Aristotelian eudaimonism that also rests on psychology, and I will close now with a brief acknowledgement

of the existence of a body of research in moral psychology that challenges rationalistic models of moral judgment and reasoning.

More specifically, there is an impressive response to these challenges that provides a useful contrast to the account I propose: Jonathan Dancy's conception of moral intuitions as emotions that are *practical seemings*, or *motivational presentations* that present considerations as reasons to act (Dancy, 2014). *A* feels angry when *B* treats her with disrespect, and the anger presents what has happened as a reason to respond in some way, *w*. The anger is already cognitive, Dancy says, and what it does is present a consideration as a reason that *A* may or may not endorse as a basis for doing *w*. The alteration of *A's* motivational state by the anger may be channeled in different ways in light of further thought. Dancy argues on this basis that the experimental work of Joshua Greene (2005), Shaun Nichols (2005) and others does not show that rapid emotional responses to situations and case scenarios constitute moral judgments and preclude a determinative role for moral reasoning. Dancy's view is impressively developed though conjectural in some respects that a more empirically grounded view might overcome.

One contrasting feature of the account I propose is that the affective states it considers are not just motivational but have information value. Dancy argues quite reasonably that emotions such as anger present a consideration (e.g., he hit me) as a reason for doing something (e.g., hit him back), but people who experience them may find on reflection that the reason is insufficient. I could endorse this, but I want to resist the idea that a state such as anger is *merely* practical. I want to say that is associated with our interests in a way that makes it normally a sign or marker of something not in our interest. I can't do this justice, but the idea is that anger is among the affective states associated with frustration of our basic psychological needs, and it is to that extent a natural sign of an obstacle to our flourishing.

Another feature of the account I propose is that it encompasses a wider class of motivationally significant affective states that shape action and inaction and do so in ways often more subtle than anger and other emotions that are plausibly regarded as *practical seemings.* This may allow it to accommodate a wider threat to practical reason than the one Dancy answers, because it incorporates a much richer model of the impact on conduct of motivational factors. These factors may shape action and inaction in ways that are ethically significant and operate without the agent's comprehension or rational control. They are in that sense a threat to rational self-determination or practical reason, but the background theory is favorable to defusing this threat; it affirms the psychological reality of rational self-determination and its importance to individual well-being.

Moreover, it is a theory of well-being that can be learned and applied in ways that strengthen individual rational self-determination. Knowing the theory facilitates mindfulness, one aspect of which is the ability to interpret the significance of motivationally significant affective states. These states are *natural signs* of things good and bad for people, but often opaque to those who experience them, and the interpretive guidance the theory can provide may be invaluable in living well. The theory can be seen as a science erected in part on a kind of inductive identification of the three basic psychological needs and related forms of human potential. In this respect it is a theory of human nature and of Aristotelian necessities for living well, in which needs are *posits* that explain the affective dimensions of living well – the patterns of pleasure, satisfaction, frustration, and so on that we must learn to recognize in order to live well.

References

Charles, David (2015) “Aristotle on Practical and Theoretical Knowledge. In Henry and Nielsen, eds., *Bridging the Gap Between Aristotle’s Science and Ethics*, pp. 71-93. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Curren, R. (2000) *Aristotle on the Necessity of Public Education*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Curren, R. (2010) “Aristotle’s Educational Politics and the Aristotelian Renaissance in Philosophy of Education,” *Oxford Review of Education* 36(5): 543-559.

Curren, R. (2013) “Aristotelian Necessities,” *The Good Society* 22(2): 247-63.

Curren, R. (2014a) “Aristotle.” In Denis Phillips, ed., *Encyclopedia of Educational Theory and Philosophy*, vol. 1, pp. 55-59. Los Angeles: SAGE Reference.

Curren, R. (2014b) “Motivational Aspects of Moral Learning and Progress,” *Journal of Moral Education* 43(4): 484-499.

Curren, R. (2014c) “Judgment and the Aims of Education,” *Social Philosophy & Policy* 31(1): 36-59.

Curren, R. (2015) “Virtue Ethics and Moral Education.” In Michael Slote and Lorraine Besser-Jones, eds., *Routledge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, pp. 459-470. London: Routledge.

Curren, R. (2016) “Aristotelian versus Virtue Ethical Character Education,” *Journal of Moral Education* 45(4): 516-526.

Curren, R., and E. Metzger (2017) *Living Well Now and in the Future: Why Sustainability Matters*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Dancy, Jonathan (2014) “Intuition and Emotion,” *Ethics* 124: 787-812.

Greene, J. D. (2005) "Cognitive Neuroscience and the Structure of the Moral Mind." In P. Carruthers, S. Laurence, and S. Stitch, eds., *The Innate Mind: Structure and Content*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Henry, Devin, and Karen Margrethe Nielsen, eds. (2015) *Bridging the Gap Between Aristotle's Science and Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Karbowski, Joseph (2015) "*Endoxa*, Facts, and the Starting Points of the *Nicomachean Ethics*." In Henry and Nielsen, eds., *Bridging the Gap Between Aristotle's Science and Ethics*, pp. 113-129. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Moss, Jennifer (2011) "Virtue Makes the Goal Right: Virtue and *Phronêsis* in Aristotle's Ethics." *Phronesis* 56(4): 204-261.

Natali, Carlo (2010) "*Posterior Analytics* and the Definition of Happiness in *NE* I." *Phronesis* 55(4): 304-324.

Nichols, S. (2005) "Innateness and Moral Psychology." In P. Carruthers, S. Laurence, and S. Stitch, eds., *The Innate Mind: Structure and Content*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Nielsen, Karen Margrethe (2015) "Aristotle on Principles in Ethics: Political Science as the Science of the Human Good." In Henry and Nielsen, eds., *Bridging the Gap Between Aristotle's Science and Ethics*, pp. 29-48. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Reeve, C. D. C. (2006). Aristotle on the virtues of thought. In R. Kraut , ed., *The Blackwell guide to Aristotle's* Nicomachean Ethics, pp. 198-217. Oxford: Blackwell.

Ryan, R., Curren, R., and Deci, E. (2013) "What Humans Need: Flourishing in Aristotelian Philosophy and Self-Determination Theory." In A. S. Waterman, ed., *The Best Within Us: Positive Psychology Perspectives on Eudaimonia*, pp. 57-75. Washington, DC: APA.

Ryan, R. M., and E. L. Deci (2017) *Self-determination Theory: Basic Psychological Needs in Motivation, Development, and Wellness*. New York: Guilford Publishing.

Shields, Christopher (2015) "The Science of Soul in Aristotle's *Ethics*." In Henry and Nielsen, eds., *Bridging the Gap Between Aristotle's Science and Ethics*, pp. 232-253. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.