Aristotle on Practical Knowledge

In this essay I shall be recommending a re-orientation of our thought about Aristotle’s discussion of practical knowledge (*phronesis*). My suggestion is that we should re-orientate our thought on this fascinating subject in two dimensions.

First we ought to recognise a wider range of theoretical options on what practical knowledge is. I shall be arguing for a ‘third-way’ account of practical knowledge, distinct from the two classical views that have dominated this discussion since Hume. On one view, practical knowledge consists basically in some form of purely intellectual grasp of what is good for a human to do. Desires (suitably guided and controlled) are needed to implement what the intellect grasps. On the alternative, practical knowledge consists basically in desiring what is good for a human to do. Intellect is needed to find ways to achieve what is desired. In both accounts there are two separate components: intellect and desire, defined independently of each other. In the first intellect directs the desires of the practically wise. In the second, desire is the director and the role of intellect is to work out how best to satisfy the good desires the practically wise possess. They differ as to which of these two (definitionally) separate components is the controlling one. I think that practical knowledge (in Aristotle’s account) is not properly understood in either of these ways. Indeed we gain by seeing practical knowledge as a distinctive type of state not reducible to these two definitionally separate components.

The second re-orientation that I recommend is that we see Aristotle’s remarks on practical knowledge as strongly analogous with his detailed study of theoretical knowledge in the *Analytics*. Although the type of states involved differ, Aristotle envisages (or so I shall argue) the good state of the practical intellect as being importantly analogous with theoretical wisdom
(sophia), which involves both coming to grasp correct principles and being able to demonstrate on their basis. I shall argue that some of his most interesting and controversial claims about practical knowledge become clearer if one see them as ‘mirroring’ views he argues for (in considerable detail) about theoretical knowledge in the Analytics. 1

These two proposals serve to illuminate (or so I shall suggest) the nature of Aristotle’s ethical realism, his views on the fundamental source of value and his account of how we come to have practical knowledge of value. They enable us to understand what is distinctive about his approach to ethics (in the Nicomachean Ethics including the Common Books). While I shall make a few remarks in this direction in this essay, much more remains to be said.

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Aristotle says in chapter two of Book VI, the good condition of the practical intellect is truth in agreement with right desire (1139a29-31). The starting point for action (praxis) is preferential choice (prohairesis), where the process begins, not why it occurs (1139a31). The starting point for preferential choice is desire and goal-directed reason (or argument). 2 This is why preferential choice does not occur without nous, intellect (dianoia) or ethical character (1139a31-4). On this basis, Aristotle concludes preferential choice is either desiderative nous or intellectual desire (1139b4-5)

These remarks in VI.2 on the practical intellect, eupraxia and preferential choice provide the background for N.E.V1. In V1. 3-11, Aristotle separates practical wisdom (phronesis) from other states in which the soul hits the truth, such as intellectual knowledge (episteme), skill, wisdom (sophia) and nous, developing a comparison between practical wisdom and his account of knowledge in the Analytics. In V1.12-13, he considers a problem, an aporia, asking what practical wisdom adds to some relevant lower level states. In these chapters, he makes two
important claims, to which we will return: one is that full virtue requires practical wisdom (1144b16, 30-1), the other is that you cannot be practically wise without ethical virtue (1144b31-2).

Nearly all commentators in the Analytical tradition, writing on these topics, have thought in what I have called a two component way. In addressing the question, how are desire and intellect connected in *N.E* VI.2 (1139a31-b5), one group (whom I shall call intellectualists) suggest that reason or thought grasps what is good and that desire (in all or in certain circumstances) is controlled by that intellectual grasp. For some, grasp of the good is based on reasoning (as in the rationalist interpretation favoured by, for example, John Cooper or John Ackrill). For others, it is grasped by moral perception (as in the intuitionist account developed by David Ross and John McDowell). In all versions the basic starting point is to see or intellectually grasp what is good or to implement what is seen as good. But the crucial thing is to see (or intellectually grasp) what is true (where such seeing or grasping are defined independently of desire) and on that basis desire correctly.

The alternative version of the two component account is what I shall call the desire-based account. Here, what you desire fixes (in some way or other) what your goals are. Intellect can work out the means to achieve what one desires. It may even allow you to see more clearly what you desire. But what we find good, and what we preferentially choose, is basically determined by our desires.

Both exegetical alternatives share a common assumption: that for Aristotle, preferential choice involves two separate components, intellect and desire (where intellect, at least, is defined independently of desire). They differ only as to which of these two components they think the more important.
I shall suggest an alternative way of thinking which denies the assumption common to all forms of two component views: that intellect and desire are definitionally separate components. In particular, I shall propose the following: to have a good preferential choice is to see what is good to do where the relevant type of seeing is one in which one is attracted to doing what's good. It's not that intellectual judgement leads to desire: rather to see something as the good thing to do is to desire it. While I shall call this suggestion the ‘third way’ account, I am fully aware that this term has often been associated with mistake, even disaster (when coined, for example, Lenin or Tony Blair, Mussolini or Henrico Berlinguer). Recognition of this fact alone should inspire us to proceed with caution and humility. There may, after all, remain a fourth way to be discovered!

Let me begin with a few considerations in favour of this view based on Aristotle’s remarks in *De Anima*. It is tempting to say that to see something as pleasant, or to experience it as pleasant, is to desire it. When you see a pleasant sight, it's not just that you judge (or think) that it is pleasant and then (as a distinct step) take pleasure in it. Rather to see (or experience it) as pleasant is to take pleasure in it, be attracted to it. That's the kind of seeing that seeing something as pleasant is. Aristotle, I have argued elsewhere, favours precisely this view of sensual desire in *De Anima* III.7 (431a5-7): to sensually desire A is the same as perceiving, in a certain way, that A is pleasant. For example, you see a cool drink on a hot day. It seems pleasant to you. There is not a further step taken when you are attracted to it (or desire it). Rather to experience it as pleasant in this way is to be attracted to it. That is the type of experiencing that experiencing something as pleasant is.

An extension of this model is suggested in *De Anima*: to see the goodness of a goal is to be attracted to acting on it. To act on the basis of reasoning about how to achieve this goal is to act on the basis of a desire to achieve it and to do what is required to do so. Indeed, to act in a way which is sensitive to what is good to do one is to act in a way which is sensitive to the
attractiveness of so acting. Aristotle, or so I have argued elsewhere, thinks in this way in De Anima III.10-11. This point can be made vivid by reflecting on one of his favoured pieces of terminology in the Ethics where he often talks of the goal as fine (kalon: see, for example, 1115b20-22). This is a striking remark: to see something as fine (kalon) with its aesthetic dimension, is not merely to notice, that a fine view or a fine picture: it is rather a way of seeing that view, picture or person that essentially involves taking pleasure in it, being attracted to it. 6 (See, for example, the second definition of the fine in Rhetoric 1366a33-4 as ‘what in being good is pleasant in that it is good’.) Being fine is a distinctively pleasure-involving way of being good. There are not two definitionally separable components: seeing something as pleasant (or fine) and being attracted to it. Rather the kind of seeing involved is one in which you are attracted to what is fine (a pleasure-involving type of goodness).

Aristotle’s remarks in De Anima suggest an alternative to the two component account, which in varying ways has dominated the analytical tradition of theorising about these matters. There are, it should be noted, some remarks in Heidegger which suggest a view like the one which I am attributing to Aristotle. In Being and Time, he makes the following intriguing comments: one shouldn't allow affects and feelings ‘to sink to the level of accompanying phenomena’ (section 139) and ‘to be affected by the unserviceable or the resistant, or the threatening character of that which is really to hand becomes ontologically possible only insofar as being-in as such, has been determined beforehand in such a way that what it encounters can matter to it’ (section 137). These comments, together with other remarks on Aristotle’s account of practical wisdom in his Plato’s Sophist may point in the direction I am travelling (some people tell me that they do), suggesting, for example, that to fear something just is to see (or experience) something as frightening. However, even if they do, the final destination needs to be described in more detail and more clearly than in Heidegger’s brief and elusive sketch. (Perhaps what he said was ‘true but not clear.’ However, from my viewpoint, what two component analytical philosophers have said was clear but not true! )
In this essay, I shall present a number of considerations in favour of taking Aristotle’s discussion of practical knowledge in the *Ethics* as expressing the ‘third way’ conception (as detected in *De Anima*) and comment on its distinctive commitments. My claim is that this *De Anima*-based conception offers the best explanation of certain of Aristotle’s remarks on practical wisdom in the *Ethics*. Let’s begin with two introductory considerations in favour of this option.

Aristotle, as is well known, talks about our grasp of goals in two different ways. Sometimes he talks about a rational desire (*boulesis*) for the goal as in *Book III* (1111b26ff). Sometimes in *Book VI* he talks about an intellectual grasp of some kind on the goal, as when he talks of practical wisdom as a correct grasp on the goal and of what leads to it (1142b32-3). How are wish (a desire of some kind) and the relevant type of intellectual grasp (*hypolepsis*) connected? This problem, much discussed by earlier commentators since Loening, is clearly set out by Terry Irwin. 7 For intellectualist interpreters, the answer is to say that a grasp on the goal leads to desire. In desire-based accounts, the answer is to say the desire leads to the grasp of the goal. However, Aristotle does not spell out the mechanisms required to link intellectual grasp and desire. 8 Given this major lacuna, the simplest answer is to say that the relevant kind of grasping, where you wish for something as a good goal just is to be attracted to it, to desire it. Aristotle, it should be noted, talks indifferently of a type of intellectual grasp on the goal and of a rational desire for that goal. The simplest hypothesis, given there’s no explication of the complicated causal or rational connections required in any version of the two-component account, is just this: to take something as a goal, to have this as the goal, just is to desire it in a certain way: to rationally desire it. This would make this state similar to preferential choice as described in the third way account.

Secondly, all who have worked on Aristotle’s discussion of *akrasia* will be aware of the very acute problem raised in the 19th century by Cook Wilson. He pointed out that sometimes in talking about *akrasia*, Aristotle talks about failure of knowledge as when he suggests that the
acritic person, like the young students or the drunk, fails in knowledge in some way (1147b11-12, 1147a19-21). However, in immediately adjoining lines he talks about a conflict of desires, of desire as pulling one way against what reason suggests (1147b1-4). Cook Wilson's question was: how could he do both? The first comment looks like the intellectualist, the second the desire based account. The simplest solution, which I have argued for elsewhere, is to suggest that the kind of failure of knowledge of the weak akrates consists in his (or her) not being properly attracted to the good action.\textsuperscript{9} These acratic are not rationally convinced that this is the right thing to do but their failure of rational conviction just is their not being attracted to doing it. They do not see the relevant action as attractive, when the time comes to act (or abstain). Like the person who is (tipsy) drunk, they can say that it is the best thing to do without being rationally convinced that this is so. Their lack of rational conviction is the same as their not really being attracted to acting in this way, their not really finding it pleasant to do so. So for the third way interpreter, there's no problem in Aristotle talking about \textit{akrasia} both as a failure of intellect and as a failure of desire. The failure of intellect in question is a failure in desire. It is a failure in a kind of intellect which is also a form of (intellectual) desire.

In this paper I shall develop a further consideration in favour of the third way reading based on \textit{Book VI}, beginning with Aristotle’s striking remark in chapter 12 that the goal doesn't appear, except to the virtuous (1144 a34). This is why, he says, it is impossible to be practically wise without being good. This remark should puzzle us. Even akratic people have some grasp on the goal against which they act. So do the self-controlled: those who abstains from sensual pleasures even though they would enjoy indulging in them against their better judgement (1151b35-1152a3). So what does it mean to say that the goal only \textit{appears} to the good? Why cannot one grasp the goal correctly without being ethically virtuous?

Let’s consider three different explanations of this claim, beginning with the intellectualist account, in its rationalistic form. A good condition of desires is required, in this view, if one is to
reason well and thus see clearly what is good. Having good desires is an enabling, causally necessary, condition required if one is to reason well towards what is good to do. It is as if having good desires frees one from prejudice, takes the ‘blinders’ off, allowing one’s reasoning faculty to function without let or hindrance so that one sees or reasons correctly. Conversely, if you have bad desires you won’t be able to reason correctly about what is best to do. They’ll distort \textit{(diastrephei: 1144a34)} or twist your reasoning and, because your reasoning faculty is not operating well, you’ll be mistaken about what goals you should have.

This is one aspect of the intellectualist account. It has a further feature: if your desires are in a good condition and allow you to reason freely, they will also be (if all goes well) responsive to your rational judgement (or reasoned perception) of what to do. Indeed, if one is already (e.g.) naturally ethically virtuous, one’s desires (as a whole, including sensual desires) will be responsive to one’s reason. The only thing needed to take the step from having good desires to full virtue is the addition of a reasoned intellectual grasp on good goals. If one’s desires allow one to reason properly about (and so see correctly) the good they will be sufficiently responsive to the results of one’s reasoning to meet the further necessary condition for being fully virtuous. They will fall in line with one’s reason-based perception of the goal.

The intellectualist account is a neat package. It seems to explain both why one cannot be practically wise (and have good goals) without having good desires and why (if one has desires of this type) all that is required for full virtue is the presence of correct thinking about the goal. However, it has several substantial disadvantages. First, Aristotle says that virtue makes the goal correct (1144a8: see 1145a5-6). This looks to be a claim about what makes ones goals good ones, what determines the content of one’s goals not about what enables one to see them. Virtue fixes which goals one has. Indeed he suggests that ‘natural or trained virtue’ is what teaches one which goals to have (1151a18-19). Since (on the intellectualist view now under consideration), the possession of natural or trained virtue consists in having good desires and
taking pleasure in the right objects (without the involvement of the rational faculty required to grasp good goals), Aristotle must take the view that good desires teach us what goals we should have: a claim considerably stronger claim than that offered by the enabling condition offered by the (rationalist) intellectualist (as sketched above).

So that's one problem. While it may not generate a knock down argument, it should motivate us to look for a better explanation of Aristotle’s claims. Here is another difficulty. the causally necessary condition (or enabling) view doesn't account for the distinctive way in which the goal appears to the practically wise (1144a34) but not to the akratic or the self-controlled (both of whom must have some grasp on a good goal). Indeed, if it is a necessary (or enabling condition) for reasoning towards good goals that you have good desires, the self-controlled and the akratic must also have good desires, since in some sense they have good goals. This account does not explain, in Intellectual terms, why the self-controlled and the akratic fail to reason properly towards the good goal. Equally, the Intellectualist interpreter needs to explain why (for Aristotle) good desires are required for one to reason well about what is good to do. It is not obvious why they should be needed. Why, in Aristotle’s view, must reason (with its considerable powers) be confined in its operation in its operation in this way? There seems to be a major gap at precisely the point where an explanation is most needed. (At best, Aristotle, as understood by this type of Intellectualist interpreter is relying on an unargued, non-obvious, piece of ‘folk psychology.’)

The Intellectualist account (currently under discussion) faces a third difficulty: it needs to show how the distinctive rational grasp of goals enjoyed by the practically wise accounts for the presence of full virtue. Why should it that the results of good reasoning about what is the good thing to do guides one’s desires (even if one already has good ones)? What is about their type of intellectual grasp on the goal that has this effect. Consider Tom Jones, the hero of Fielding’s novel. He begins (let us assume) with natural virtue and acquires (as the novel progresses) through reasoning some understanding of what are good goals and good means to achieve
them. At this point, Tom could have said: ‘OK … I’m naturally virtuous, and can now see (thanks to my reasoned intellect) what is good for me to do. But so what? I am happy as I am, living in a less than ideally rational way. Why should I be affected by my new reasoned-based understanding of the goal?’ His remark challenges the authority of the good goals Tom has acquired through reasoning. But there is a more general question: how does reason-based understanding of the goal successfully influence your sensual desires or spirit? Why does this type of intellectual perception produce this result in the case of the virtuous while the self-controlled’s grasp on his (or her) goal fails to do so? Why should sensual desires be especially responsive to just one type of reasoned intellectual perception? People who hold to the (rationalist) Intellectualist view, add at this point a story about the ways in which the rational faculty controls desire. In some versions, it reins desire in or puts it on a chain (like a lion tamer). But this seems to characterise the condition of the self-controlled rather than the virtuous. In others, intellect gets desire to focus on certain aspects of the situation and urges it to take pleasure in acting in their light. But why should sensual desire be moved by these urgings or come to see the situation in the way reason advocates? Others, apparently more plausibly, represent reason as seeking to persuade desire, aiming to get it (or anger) to share reason’s view of the matter. But why should desire (or anger) be persuaded by reason’s view of what is best to do? It might rather see reason’s standpoint as an alien and unappealing imposition, not as something attractive to pursue. If Aristotle took this line, he would have needed to show why the distinctive intellectual grasp of the practically wise (whatever that may be) is more successful than that of the self-controlled in persuading sensual desire to follow reason’s line. But, once again, this interpretation exposes a major gap in Aristotle’s writings just where an explanation is most needed. We are not told why good reasoning towards the goal and well-controlled sensual desires should go together. Since this is an obvious and pressing gap in any Intellectualist theory, it is natural to think that since Aristotle does not engage with it, he did not set the issue up in the rationalist way we have been considering.
What of the alternative, desire-based, view? On this account, a good condition of one's desiderative capacity is required if one is to see what is good to do, because being ethically virtuous, a good state of one's desiderative capacity, makes it the case that the goal is correct. It is the starting point of a process which leads to the acquisition of correct goals. While this process may involve reasoning, good desire causally determines the outcome of that reasoning. Good desire explains why (perhaps through reasoning) we end up with good goals. It is a mark in favour of this view that it explains why, for Aristotle, natural and trained virtue makes the goal correct. This approach resembles, in broad outline, Hume’s take on the matter (even though the original desires, constitutive of natural virtue, need not, like Hume’s ‘original existences’ lack intentional content).

This style of account, too, has serious disadvantages. As with the earlier Intellectualist story, it fails to explain the differences between the virtuous and the self-controlled with respect of their grasp of their goals. If desire is required to give you good goals and the self-controlled have such goals, their desire must have been good enough to give them the right goals. So understood, this account does not explain why the relevant goals only appear to the virtuous. It fails to isolate what is distinctive about the grasp that the practically wise have of their goals.

Second, the desire-based account does not do justice to the idea of virtue whether natural or trained being the teacher [didaskalikos] of correct thinking about the goals (1151a19). Teaching involves giving reasons. Teachers aim to persuade by rational means. This is where they differ from indoctrinators or propagandists. However, desire, as presented in the desire-based account, is not the type of thing that can do this. While it can cause you to have certain goals, it cannot rationally ground your belief in those goals. While desires may causally generate beliefs about what is good to do, they cannot justify one in having them.
These difficulties in the (rationalistic) enabling condition and desire-based versions of the two component account should motivate us to look for a better explanation of Aristotle’s claims. Does the third way, as I have characterised it, fare any better? On this view, a good condition of one’s desiderative capacity is required if one is to see what is the good goal because it is only in a state of this type that one sees or experiences the attractiveness of (e.g.) acting well. One cannot experience the value of this goal without having good desires because to see the goal is to be attracted to it as one’s goal. The self-controlled, although they may in some way grasp the same goal will not experience the attractiveness of acting on it. They may believe that this is the best way to act because they have been told that it is. Perhaps they think that acting in this way benefits them in the future and take pleasure in that hope (EE 1224b20-2). Maybe they have convinced themselves in some way that this is the right thing to do. But, in any event, they fail to experience the attractiveness of acting well (in general and in the case at hand). Their condition may be compared with the blind-sighted person who can tell you what objects are around but still not see them. The self controlled are able to tell you what is fine but will not see the fineness of acting in this way. While they may have the same goals as the virtuous, they will not experience them in the same way. The third way account offers a plausible explanation of why Aristotle talks about the goal not appearing to anyone but the virtuous and of the ‘eye of the soul.’ The self-controlled and the akratic, even if they have the same goals as the virtuous, fail to see (or experience) them in the right way. Perhaps they just have belief rather than knowledge if practical knowledge involves seeing (or experiencing) the attractiveness of the goal for yourself. (I shall return to this issue below when considering analogies with the discussion of intellectual knowledge in the Analytics.)

If one sees and is attracted to the goal of acting well, one’s other desires can (and will) be permeated, and rationally influenced, by this perception. Aristotle notes at the end of Book III that the aim of sensual desire is the fine (to kallon: 1119b6). If sensual desire aims at what is worthily attractive, it will be rationally influenced by the experience of the goal as fine.
The influence is not a form of intellectual persuasion. Since one’s other desires are attracted to what is fine, they will be attracted to the value detected in the goal. The four square agent is ‘emotionally convinced’ of the value of this goal because his (or her) sensual desires (spirit etc) are (‘emotionally’) drawn to the fineness of acting in this way. Their being rationally sensitive to the value of this goal is their being suitably attracted to it. Aristotle has no need to fall back on the (familiar) story of the internal control of sensual desire by reason through non-rational means (as in the lion tamer model). If the goal selected is experienced as fine (worthily attractive), one’s other desires will be sensitive to this value because they too are aiming at, and are attracted to, what is fine.

In this account, it is crucial that the practically wise experience and are attracted to the fineness of acting well. Without that experience, they would lack the resources required emotionally to persuade or win over their other desires to the value of acting in the required way. If they were simply intellectually convinced by someone else that acting finely was the best thing to do, they would lack the pleasant ‘felt experience’ of acting well required to ‘persuade’ their other desires. The fact that such agents are attracted to, and take pleasure in, the value of acting finely is what is enables them to influence their other desires. Were their other desires merely to be told that acting well was a fine thing to do by reason (without the relevant experience of the attractiveness of so acting), they would be less likely to be attracted to acting in this way. Virtuous agents need to experience the attractiveness of acting well to be ‘emotionally convinced’ of the value of acting in this way. It is through the agent’s experience of the pleasure of acting finely that their sensual desires can be successfully ‘won over’ to this value. The self-controlled can, of course, contain their other desires and stand by their intellectual convictions about what is fine to do. They can even share with the virtuous the same valuation of the relative fineness of the alternatives before them. However, unless the agent experiences the attractiveness of acting finely, his (or her) other desires will remain sources of resistance, not emotionally persuaded of or fully permeated by, the value of acting well in the way the desires of
the fully virtuous are (1152a4-6).

The third way account offers a simple explanation of ethical decline. If one comes to
find non-virtuous ways of acting attractive, one will cease to take acting finely as one’s goal. The
the attractiveness of acting well will be diminished as the attractions (as one experiences them) of
acting in other ways increases. In this way, one will be ‘seduced’ by the pleasures of alternative
courses of action or ‘repelled’ by the pains of being deprived of such pleasures. In ceasing to find
acting finely attractive, one ceases to see (or experience) it as the goal (1140b12-14, 1144a35-6).
On the third way account, ceasing to find acting finely attractive just is ceasing to see (or
experience) it as one’s goal. Further, in coming to see other types of activity as attractive, one will
come to take them as one’s goal as one’s perception of value changes (is ‘distorted’).

There is, as I have indicated, a (rationalistic) two-component account of why good desires are
required if one is to see and retain one’s perception of valued goals. In such an account, good
intellectual grasp of one’s goal is attended by good desires and a decline in the quality of one’s
desires will lead to a change in one’s reasoned grasp of one’s goal. Such accounts depend on
Aristotle being committed to a complex causal (folk-psychological) story about the ways in
which (i) only a certain type of reasoned good perception (that of the practically wise and not that
of the self-controlled) is attended by good desire and (ii) the presence of bad desires affects one’s
reasoning about one’s goals. If Aristotle had held such a theory one would have expected him to
spell it out in some detail (as it is by no means obviously true) and to have given some reason to
believe it. Since he does neither, the third way explanation of the phenomenon is to be preferred
on grounds of simplicity.

Does the third way account offer the best explanation of how the virtuous come to see the goal
correctly? It seems that, in Aristotle’s account, the route they follow in acquiring goals is not part
of deliberation (bouleusis) but is rather a case of induction, beginning with particular actions seen
as pleasant and worthwhile. In being taught to act justly, much depends (as Aristotle notes in 1105a6ff) on whether you take pleasure in acting justly. Trained virtue can give you a reason for acting in that way because these particular actions were ones which you enjoyed doing and found worthwhile to do. From such particulars, as he says in 1143b4-5, you can move towards the goal. This will be a rational process, in that the experience of enjoyable past actions gives you reason to take doing such actions as one’s goal. In this way, you will be ‘emotionally persuaded’ of the fineness of such goals. It is not, as in the rationalist interpretation, that the possession of trained virtue frees one to reason on independent grounds about what is best to do. Nor is it that trained (or natural) virtue causally determines the outcome of one’s reasoning (as in the sophisticated desire-based interpretation). On the third way account, trained or natural virtue determines the quality of one’s goals by give one emotionally compelling reasons for taking certain activities as fine. They are, so understood, ‘teachers of correct thinking about the goal’. In this way, the third way account offers a better explanation of Aristotle’s claims about goal acquisition than its rationalist or desire-based rivals.

I shall seek next to make Aristotle’s views about the acquisition of good goals drawing on material from the Analytics, taking the third way interpretation as sufficiently established for present purposes. The relevant process of goal-acquisition in the Ethics is not deliberation towards a goal. Aristotle says that we do not deliberate about the goals (1112b11ff, b32ff). One way to understand this is the following: deliberation (bouleusia) is like demonstration (apodeixis) in the Analytics. In demonstration, you need to grasp the starting point and work out what follows from it. But it’s not by demonstration that you grasp the starting point. Aristotle says repeatedly: you can’t demonstrate the fundamental starting point. How could you? Where could you stand? What is higher than the starting point? Rather, you reach the starting points by induction and reflection not by demonstration.
As several recent commentators have suggested, the acquiring starting points in the Analytics may involve beginning with explanations and reflecting on those and moving up, but the process upwards isn't itself a stage of demonstration. It's something that arises out of demonstration. People have been mesmerised by the following binary alternatives: Scylla and Charybdis. On the one hand, there must be reasoning towards the goal in order to account for the way in which trained or natural virtue teaches you to have the right goal. There has to be some rational process involved (in contradistinction to the causal Humean model). But they assume that the only rational process can be deliberation. Against the burden of the text where Aristotle says, as clearly as he can, that we don't deliberate about goals, not just the goal but goals. From the Analytics perspective, this is relatively straightforward. The route to a grasp of first principles is a rational process based on induction and inference upwards, but is not a case of demonstration from starting points in the Analytics, or from goals in the Ethics.

Let us focus on the analogy. The practically wise can deliberate well and that requires a good grasp of the goals, but the way to the good grasp of the goals is not necessarily a deliberative one. Similarly, scientists can demonstrate from proper first principles even though their route to grasp first principles isn't part of demonstration? Induction in the Analytics, offers a model of a rational process to the goals, which isn't deliberative. In fact, this seems a more plausible route to goal acquisition than deliberation towards some further goal. After all, what would the relevant deliberation be based on? What would the starting points for deliberation be? Of course if you have some worked out life plan, you can deliberate towards that. But where does the life plan come from? On what basis have you arrived at that? Surely that comes from doing particular actions and reflecting on them and working up from them to a goal which you can live by, something you find attractive and worthwhile.
People, as we all know, can deliberate towards wellbeing and end up being as stockbrokers or university administrators or academic politicians. The real question is: what was the original basis from which their view of human well-being was derived? There is no suggestion that they began independently of what they initially found attractive and worthwhile with a worked out theory of human nature (as rational creatures with certain goals). Indeed, one should ask: what would such a theory be based on (in Aristotle’s view) other than what the individuals involved find attractive and worthwhile. Aristotle’s emphasis on the role of natural and trained virtue as the teacher of correct thinking about the goals points to his preferred account of the source for our goals: in what we initially find attractive and worthwhile.

The good state of the theoretical intellect, sophia, consists in grasping the correct starting points and the ability to work out - to demonstrate on that basis. Aristotle compares the good state of the theoretical intellect with the good state of the practical intellect. If the analogy is taken strictly, the latter will consist in grasping the correct starting points and being able to work out on that basis what to do. Those two are exactly parallel (in this respect). While both demonstration and good deliberation require a grasp on the correct starting points they are not responsible for the initial grasp on those starting points.

In Post. Analytics A.33, Aristotle describes a condition less than knowledge in which a person holds opinions about a given area but lacks a proper grasp on the definitional starting point (89a17-20). The person with opinion (doxa) will, for example, not have grasped that there is one underlying feature which both is the starting point for the explanation of a kind’s necessary properties and the basis for the definition of the kind in question. He will not have grasped its essential nature as such: as what explains why the kind is as it is and makes the kind the one it is. While nous grasps an essential nature in this way, it grasp arises out of our attempts to explain a
kind’s necessary properties and to answer the definitional ‘What is it?’ question. Without this understanding a person with opinion may have true beliefs about the kind in question but will lack knowledge. He will not have a proper grasp on the starting points as such.

This important passage suggests important parallels in the *Ethics*. Aristotle describes the person with knowledge (in certain areas) as having a correct grasp on the starting points grounded in experience (1142a19-20) and contrasts his (or her) with one who merely says what is correct without the appropriate rational confidence (*pistis*). The latter may have an opinion about the subject matter in question but lack knowledge (compare them with those who have first learned something: 1147a19ff). Aristotle often describes the self-controlled as standing by their opinions (1146a17, 1151b6-7), suggesting that they are examples of people who fail to have knowledge. If the analogy holds, they will not have the type (or degree) of rational confidence required for knowledge because they will not have the appropriate grasp on the relevant starting points. This is ‘of a piece’ with the third way account offered above: the self-controlled lack knowledge because they do not see the attractiveness of the goals they profess. While they may stick by these goals (and indeed have some confidence in them based, for example, on the authority of others: 1147a18-20), they will not see them in the way required for knowledge. What motivates the self-controlled to act is not knowledge but some distinct and less demanding state. 15

The good state of the practical intellect differs from that of the theoretical in several respects. There is, Aristotle claims, one form of *sophia* but many forms of practical intellect (concerned with what is good for various types of creature: 1141a22-33). The practical intellect is concerned with particulars as well as universals (1141b15ff) and its objects are not as valuable as those of *sophia* (1141a20-1, 33-b2). Further, the practical intellect focuses on what can be otherwise while the theoretical intellect is concerned with what is necessarily the case (1141b10ff). But the major difference, or so I have
been suggesting, is that the good state of the practical intellect essentially involves correct desire (1139a30f). In the theoretical case, the relevant truths are grasped by practical intellect which should be understood as a distinctive type of state, variously described as desiderative Nous or intellectual desire. If the arguments I have been offering are correct, practical intellect is not to be understood as a combination of two separate components (intellectual knowledge and good desire). Rather it is a distinctive type of desire-involving knowledge, equally describable as knowledge-permeated desire.\textsuperscript{16}

On the view I've been sketching, the good state of the practical intellect just is full virtue. These are two sides of the same coin. The good state of the practical intellect is grasping (in a desire involving way) what is worthwhile as attractive and being able to work out what to do on that basis. Full virtue consists in the possession of rationally suffused desiderative states: ones in which one is attracted to correct starting points and to the results of reasoning on their basis. Full virtue and practical intellect both involve the very same distinctive states, variously described as intellectual desire and desiderative intellect.

John McDowell, it should be noted, has also suggested that one should think of full virtue and the good state of the practical intellect as ‘two sides of the same coin’.\textsuperscript{17} But McDowell isn't a third way theorist but a sophisticated intellectualist, who takes belief as the basic notion and thinks of desire as attending well-founded belief or clear intellectual perception. There are important differences between the third way account I have sketched and McDowell’s sophisticated ‘intuitionist’ version of intellectualism in which (i) the clear perception of the practically wise, focussed only on what is ethically good, is attended by good desire (ii) the self-controlled have a different assessment of the alternatives (and correspondingly different desires) since (unlike the virtuous) they are intellectually aware of any appeal in acting against their judgement of what is fine. His account (as I have argued elsewhere) mistakenly represents Aristotle’s temperate and courageous person as ‘saints’ unaware while acting of the attractions of
any other course or the disadvantages of the course he (or she) has chosen. While such considerations are, in McDowell’s view, ‘silenced’, not present to the virtuous agent as reasons for acting, Aristotle allows (or so I argued) that the courageous feel fear while acting and are aware of what of value they have to lose. There are, however, more general explanatory gaps in his account: why should clear perception of the goal (of the type he attributes to the courageous) be unfailingly attended by desire? What is the basis of the persuasive power of their clear intuition? Conversely, why cannot the self-controlled have the same goals or express the same valuational judgements as the virtuous? Surely they can be intellectually convinced that the virtuous see things correctly and come to have the same beliefs as their role models? Why must their purely intellectual appreciation of the alternatives be affected by their recalcitrant desires?

The ‘third way’ account, as I have suggested, in understanding the perception of goals of the virtuous as their being attracted to the fineness of acting on them (and so not as a purely intellectual judgment attended by a consequential desire) offers answers to these questions. The virtuous (unlike the self-controlled) experience for themselves the attractiveness of acting finely and are (therein) emotionally drawn to so acting. The self-controlled, by contrast, do not experience (and are not similarly attracted to) the fineness of acting well. Even if they expressed precisely the same judgments about goals or situations as the virtuous, they would not ‘see’ their goals or the situation in the attraction-involving way which characterises the latter. This account lacks the explanatory gaps that open up in McDowell’s interesting, but distinct, proposal.

I’ve argued that the third way interpretation meets and overcomes certain problems which beset both the intellectualist and the desire based accounts of Aristotle’s practical knowledge. Indeed, it resolves these problems in a principled way, offering the best explanation of Aristotle’s theory as a whole. However, those of us who studied, as graduates, at the
feet of Davidson, Grice and Pears were taught that what leads to action are desire and belief, two distinct categories of state (or event). Intentional action, on this view, requires a combination of two distinct types of state: a desire and a belief (to which later writers such as Michael Bratman have added intention) . What I am suggesting is that Aristotle’s view is, if you like, a pre-Humean position, undercutting the categorical distinction between desire and belief. For, on his account, to see something as good just is to be attracted to it. 20

If what I have been arguing is correct, practical knowledge is the good state of the practical Intellect: one in which we grasp correct starting points as attractive and are able to work out what to do to achieve them. So what makes the claims of the person with practical knowledge true? Knowledge, after all, presupposes truth. What makes these claims true is eupraxia, doing the right thing. Claims to the effect that certain types of action are good to do are made true by such actions being good to do. But what does this say about the notion of eupraxia itself?

Eupraxia has to be worthy of preferential choice (or more generally of acceptance by practical intellect) as theoretical truth is worthy of acceptance by the theoretical intellect. What is required for something to be worthy of preferential choice or worthy of being a goal? Given what I have been arguing, something cannot be worthy of preferential choice simply in virtue of being the right thing to do, as in the Intellectualist account. It has to be attractive in the sense of making one’s life go well. It has to be linked both to what is worthwhile and to pleasure. Eupraxia on this view is not just doing the right thing (as in the Intellectualist picture) or satisfying your desires (as in the desire-based account). It must involve the same type of inter-connection between value and desire we have seen in the case of practical wisdom and preferential choice. More specifically, it will be a kind of activity which is simultaneously attractive and worthwhile. Indeed, if the analogy holds, one will not be able to define the kind of attractiveness involved
without mentioning it's worthwhileness or the type of worthwhileness involved without mentioning its attractiveness. Indeed, this is what it is for the relevant type of activity to be fine (kalon) and goalworthy (for creatures like us). One major thesis of the Ethics is that in doing what is good, you do what is good for a person to do. So eupraxia has to be something which is worthy of preferential choice, worthy of the type of intellectual desire or desiderative intellect I have been describing. It is neither desire satisfaction nor yet just doing the right thing but is rather a kind of activity which is inextricably worthwhile and attractive.

On this view, the basis of value lies not in intention, or in consequences, but in the kind of activity itself: in doing a kind of activity which is simultaneously attractive and worthwhile. This is the type of position open once one has moved away from the spectra of two component views. You can think of the source of value not as having the beliefs formed on rational principles or through seeing the Forms and their instantiations (as in Plato’s account of the matter) nor just as what leads to desire satisfaction (some end state) as in the sentimentalist tradition. The source of value lies rather in that kind of activity or action, eupraxia, which is an intrinsically worthwhile and valuable way of acting.

Virtue ethics, as we are frequently reminded, is always in danger of collapsing either into consequentialism (with virtue seen as a reliable way to produce good consequences) or as a form of Kantianism (where virtue is a hand maiden, a help mate to reason.) If Aristotle’s virtue theory is a distinctive type of ethical theory, it is in the material just noted that we should seek for its distinctive grounds. Full virtue, the realisation of the good state of the practical intellect, is expressed in acting in a certain way, in doing activity which is simultaneously worthwhile and attractive.

The possibility of the sort of position just sketched is effectively ruled out in much contemporary philosophy for two reasons. First, philosophers operating with some version of the two
component account are driven either to the ‘rigorist’ view of right action McDowell embraces or else to see it as what generates desire satisfaction. Second, because they do not think of action or activity as something which takes time to do, which unfolds, which you can get into and enjoy doing while acting but as momentary discrete actions (or events) like flipping the switch they are forced to think of the goodness of action as being grounded either in its consequences (such as desire satisfaction) or in the correctness of the ethical beliefs or intentions which generate it. However, mere rejection of this view of action is not enough to open up the possibility of a distinctive ethical theory. The process or activity involved has to be inextricably worthwhile and attractive to do. For if one divorces what is worthwhile from what is attractive, treating them as separate types of phenomenon, one will be forced to assess separately the correctness of the agent’s belief about what is worthwhile and the quality of the desire satisfaction that results). My suggestion is that the third way offers an interesting and defensible interpretation of Aristotle's discussion in *Book VI* of grasp of goals, *eupraxia* and preferential choice. It not only avoids the problems which beset two component theories (in their varying and multiform guises) but also has interesting and important consequences about the nature of Aristotle's ethics. If we liberate ourselves from the two component view, we can see that there is an approach to ethics which isn't either a version of Kantianism (no doubt sophisticated) or of desire based consequentialism (no doubt sophisticated). There is a distinctive way of looking at Aristotle’s ethical theory visible only if we are willing (and able) to drop some of the assumptions we have been all brought up to find natural.

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