

Conceptions of genuine knowledge in Wang Yangming*

Harvey Lederman

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Abstract

This paper studies one aspect of the great Ming dynasty philosopher Wang Yangming's (王陽明 1472-1529) celebrated doctrine of the unity of knowledge and action (*zhi xing he yi* 知行合一). Wang states that his doctrine does not apply to all knowledge, but only to an elevated form of knowledge, which he sometimes calls "genuine knowledge" (*zhen zhi* 真知). But what is "genuine knowledge"? I develop and compare four different interpretations of this notion: the perceptual, practical, normative and introspective models. The main aim of the paper is to develop these models in more detail than has been done before. But at the end of the paper I argue that the introspective model is to be preferred over the alternatives.

Keywords: unity of knowledge and action, liangzhi, conscience, Wang Yangming, Neo-Confucianism, Chinese Philosophy

1 Introduction

Wang Shouren (王守仁, Yangming 陽明 1472-1529) is widely recognized as the most influential philosopher of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) and one of the most important philosophers in the whole tradition now called "Confucian". Some of Wang's most celebrated doctrines concern the relationship between knowledge and virtuous action. Wang claimed that his Song dynasty predecessors had held that a person can act virtuously only if they first determine that their action will be virtuous by applying their knowledge of general moral laws to their predicament. Since on this picture, knowledge of moral laws must precede virtuous action, the view was associated with the slogan that knowledge comes first, and action later.

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Wang rejected this picture. According to him, virtuous action does require an important cognitive achievement, but this cognitive achievement – which he sometimes called “genuine knowledge” (*zhen zhi* 真知) – does not precede action. Where his predecessors were associated with the slogan that knowledge comes first and action later, Wang described his own view as centered on “the unity of knowledge and action” (知行合一).

A key component of Wang’s radical reconceptualization of the relationship between knowledge and virtuous action was a distinctive understanding of the cognitive achievement associated with virtuous action, that is, of “genuine knowledge”. The last five centuries of extensive scholarly discussion of Wang’s doctrine – first in China, Korea, and Japan, and now all over the world – has produced a vast array of different proposals about how to understand this important notion. But we lack a systematic assessment of these different interpretations, and the absence of such an assessment makes it hard to distinguish what is well-understood from what is not, and thus to determine what counts as progress in the interpretation of Wang Yangming. In this paper, I take some first steps toward providing such an assessment. I identify and develop four different interpretations of genuine knowledge: the perceptual model, the practical model, the normative model, and the introspective model. The main aim of the paper is to present these four views in more detail than has been done before, and to clarify some costs and benefits of each of them. But at the end of the paper, I suggest that the balance of considerations favors my own introspective model.

In slightly more detail, the plan of the paper is as follows. Section 2 presents some background which is key to the rest of the paper. Section 3 considers what is arguably the most prominent position in the Anglophone scholarship on Wang, the *perceptual model*, according to which genuine knowledge sometimes has perception of the environment as a part of it. On this view, the unity of knowledge and action is taken to concern in part how a virtuous person will perceive ethically significant facts in their environment, and seamlessly respond on the basis of this perception with appropriate demeanor and affect (Nivison (1973), Cua (1982) Angle (2005, 2009), Ivanhoe (2002, 2009, 2011)). I present some passages in support of this view and consider a simple, natural way of developing it. But I argue that this simple development is incorrect. My argument against this particular development of the perceptual model is not a direct argument against that model itself – and I later consider a more sophisticated version of that model which escapes the argument – but it does tell against the overarching interpretation of the unity of knowledge and action which the perceptual model has been supposed to support.

Section 4 turns to two further interpretations of genuine knowledge, the practical model and the normative model. According to the *practical model*, genuine knowledge is a form of “knowledge how”, for instance, knowing how to be filially pious. On this view, the unity of knowledge and action concerns the claim that knowing how to be virtuous is acquired through, manifested in, and even constituted by virtuous action (Chen (1991, §5.3), Yu (2014), Yu (2016), Shi (2017)). According to the *normative model*, by contrast, genuine knowledge is understood as “knowledge-to” (as in, “a good child knows to care for their parents”). The unity of knowledge and action is taken to concern the claim that if a person knows to do something, then they will do it in the appropriate circumstances (Huang (2016b), Huang (2017) cf. Huang (2013, 2016a)). I argue that the simplest view of the metaphysics of genuine knowledge which makes good on these two ideas does not sit well with the texts. Wang often emphasizes introspective knowledge as a key aspect of the knowledge a fully virtuous person has, and the simplest versions of the practical and normative models cannot explain why he would emphasize introspection in this way.¹ In response to this argument, I present a more sophisticated view of the metaphysics of genuine knowledge, which does accommodate Wang’s remarks about introspection. But, I argue, even such a sophisticated view cannot escape a deeper problem for the practical and normative models. Since a person’s knowing how to do something or knowing to do it often precedes their doing it, both models struggle to make sense of Wang’s repeated, strenuous insistence that the form of knowledge which interests him does not precede action.

In arguing against the practical and normative models I suggest that an adequate understanding of genuine knowledge should take account of Wang’s remarks about introspection. This suggestion raises the question: what if genuine knowledge just is a form of introspective knowledge? Section 5 develops this idea, and shows how it can accommodate some initially puzzling passages, including those which have been taken to motivate the perceptual, practical and normative models. At the end of the section, I argue that, on balance, the introspective model is to be preferred over these alternatives. A brief conclusion, section 6, takes stock, and discusses a methodological question: the extent to which we should think that Wang himself held systematic views about genuine knowledge.

A companion paper, “The Introspective Model of Genuine Knowledge in Wang Yangming” (Lederman (forthcoming)), takes a different approach to the introspective

¹Sometimes in ordinary English “introspection” describes an effortful process of directing one’s attention at one’s own mind, and considering its contents. I am not using the word in this way. Rather, I am following a standard philosophical usage according to which any knowledge of one’s own mind counts as introspective knowledge.

model. There, I motivate the introspective model directly from the primary texts, focusing on the sense in which genuine knowledge can be thought of as an elevated form of knowledge. I say little there about how the introspective model compares to others' interpretations of genuine knowledge. In the present paper, by contrast, I focus to a great extent on the viability of alternative interpretations of genuine knowledge, and argue for the introspective model primarily by comparing it to those alternatives. I largely set aside the question of how genuine knowledge might be understood to be an elevated form of knowledge. The two papers are intended to be free-standing, but the considerations they adduce in favor of the introspective model are complementary.

2 Background

In this section I introduce some key background for the remainder of the paper, starting from what are arguably Wang's most famous remarks about the unity of knowledge and action. One of Wang's students, Xu Ai (徐愛, Riren 曰仁 1487-1517), initiates a discussion of this doctrine by presenting a putative counterexample to it. Xu says: "Today everyone knows that they should be filial to their parents, and that they should be respectful to their older brothers, but they are unable to be filial, and unable to be respectful. So in this case knowledge and action are separated and are clearly two things".² Wang's response to this comment is worth quoting at some length:

- [T1] 此已被私慾隔斷，不是知行的本體了。未有知而不行者。知而不行，只是未知。聖賢教人知行，正是安復那本體，不是着你只恁的便罷。
- 故《大學》指個真知行與人看，說『如好好色，如惡惡臭』。見好色屬知，好好色屬行。只見那好色時已自好了，不是見了後又立個心去好。聞惡臭屬知，惡惡臭屬行。只聞那惡臭時已自惡了，不是聞了後別立個心去惡。如鼻塞人雖見惡臭在前，鼻中不曾聞得，便亦不甚惡，亦只是不曾知臭。
- 就如稱某人知孝、某人知弟，必是其人已曾行孝行弟，方可稱他知孝知弟，不成只是曉得說些孝弟的話，便可稱為知孝弟。又如知痛，必已自痛了方知痛，知寒，必已自寒了；知饑，必已自饑了；知行如何分得開？此便是知行的本體，不曾有私意隔斷的。聖人教人，必要是如此，方可謂之知。不然，只是不曾知。

²IPL 5, QJ 4, 如今人儘有知得父當孝、兄當弟者，却不能孝、不能弟，便是知與行分明是兩件。 Throughout the paper, I cite passages from the *Instructions for Practical Living* (hereafter, *IPL*, 傳習錄) by the section number of Chan's editions (Chan (1963), Chan (1983)), followed by a page number in Wu *et al.* (2011) (indicated by "QJ"). Passages in Wang's works outside the *IPL* are cited by the *juan* number and page number (e.g. "QJ 6.242"); I cite passages from Shu & Zha (2016) using "QJBB" and then a page number. Where available, I also cite pages in the translations of Ching (1972). Some of these texts are also translated in Ivanhoe (2009), and with some significant changes, in Tiwald & Van Norden (2014). I recommend that interested readers consult these more recent translations as well.

In this case, knowledge and action have already been divided by selfish desires; they are no longer in the original natural condition (*ben ti*) of knowledge and action.³ No one has ever known but failed to act. If one knows but does not act, one simply does not yet know. In regard to knowledge and action, the sages and worthies taught people to stabilize and restore that original natural condition; they did not order one to do any old thing and then just stop.

For this reason, the *Great Learning* points to genuine knowledge and action for people to see. It says they are “like loving lovely sights and hating hateful odors.”

Seeing a lovely sight belongs to knowledge, while loving a lovely sight belongs to action. But when someone sees a lovely sight, he already at that time automatically loves it. It is not that after seeing it he additionally makes up his mind to love it. Smelling a hateful odor belongs to knowledge, while hating a hateful odor belongs to action. When someone smells a hateful odor, he already at that time automatically hates it. It is not that after smelling it he separately makes up his mind to hate it. It’s like a person with his nose blocked: even if he sees something with a hateful smell in front of him, in his nose, he has not smelt it. So while he doesn’t really hate it, this is only because he does not yet know the odor.

The same goes for saying that someone knows filial piety or that someone knows fraternal respect. They must have at some point acted filially or acted respectfully, before they can be said to know filial piety or fraternal respect. If a person merely knows how to say some filial or respectful words, that’s not enough for it to be acceptable to say that they know filial piety or fraternal respect. Knowledge of pain is also like this. One must have been in pain oneself to know pain. One must have been cold oneself to know cold. One must have been hungry oneself to know hunger. How then can knowledge and action be separated? This then is the original natural condition of knowledge and action, which have not been divided by selfish inclinations. The sage taught people that only a person in this state can be said to know. If they are not in this state, then they do not yet know. (*IPL*, 5, *QJ*, 4)

I will use this passage to introduce four points: first, which expressions I understand to be relevant to Wang’s notion of “genuine knowledge”; second, how I understand the background for discussions of the metaphysics of genuine knowledge; third, which cases of genuine knowledge I will focus on; and fourth, how I will understand the relationship between genuine knowledge and a central notion in Wang’s moral psychology and epistemology, that of *liangzhi*.

³I will use the translation “original natural condition” for *ben ti* 本體 throughout the paper. Fortunately very little will hinge here on the exegesis of this difficult term, and the reader can largely treat this expression as a black box in what follows.

First, then, “genuine knowledge”: Wang’s opening move in his response to Xu Ai is to clarify the scope of the unity of knowledge and action. He accepts Xu’s description of the example, but denies that the example is a counterexample to his doctrine. The reason is that the people in Xu’s case do not exhibit “the original natural condition” of knowledge and action; they do not display what Wang later calls “genuine knowledge and action”. Wang uses the expression “genuine knowledge” on its own, separated from “genuine action”, in several further passages to describe a form of knowledge connected to the unity of knowledge and action.⁴ Especially in later writing, Wang begins to use the expression “extended knowledge” (*zhi zhi* 致知) in a closely related way, to describe a distinctive form of knowledge connected to the unity of knowledge and action.⁵ As I will discuss in more detail later, Wang can use the expression “extended knowledge” quite broadly to describe a condition of the mind which is not directly connected to the unity of knowledge and action. But when Wang does connect this “extended knowledge” to the unity of knowledge and action, it is natural to suppose that he is describing the same elevated form of knowledge that he describes with “genuine knowledge”. I will use “genuine knowledge” throughout as my technical term for this distinctive form of knowledge, but I take uses of “the original natural condition” of knowledge and “extended knowledge”, *when these are explicitly connected to the unity of knowledge and action* to describe the same mental state or mental event.

Second, the metaphysics of genuine knowledge: The most usual way of understanding *knowledge* is as a long-lasting state. Adults know many facts that they learned as children, even if they have not thought about them for many years. Indeed, they may know such facts even when they are asleep or unconscious. But there is some evidence that, in his more theoretical remarks on knowledge (*zhi*), Wang thought of it as more similar to a short-lived episode of apprehending or grasping, than to a long-lasting state.⁶ Officially in this paper, I will remain neutral on whether Wang thought “genuine knowledge” and related terms discussed in the previous paragraph denote a long-lasting state, whether he thought they denote a short-lived episode, or whether he could use the term to refer to states in some contexts, and episodes in other contexts.

⁴*IPL* 125 *QJ* 42 (where it is in fact used by Xu Ai, not by Wang himself); *IPL* 133 *QJ* 47-8. For further citations and discussion see Lederman (forthcoming, n. 11).

⁵*IPL* 139 *QJ* 56; *IPL* 140, *QJ* 58; *IPL* 321, *QJ* 137; *QJ* 5.211, Ching (1972, pp. 68-9); *QJ* 8.308; and *QJ* 27.1100; cf. *QJ* 6.234, Ching (1972, 106-8).

⁶In a series of passages where Wang describes the relationship between *zhi* and inclinations (*yi* 意), Wang quite clearly describes these inclinations as short-lived episodes (*IPL* 6 *QJ* 6; *IPL* 78 *QJ* 27; *IPL* 137 *QJ* 53; *IPL* 174 *QJ* 86-7; *IPL* 201 *QJ* 103). In two of these passages, Wang describes *zhi* as a property or aspect of such inclinations (*IPL* 174 *QJ* 86-7; *IPL* 201 *QJ* 103). A property of such short-lived episodes is presumably itself short-lived.

But I will be making two background assumptions about the metaphysics of mind associated with genuine knowledge. First, I will be assuming that there are two kinds of mental events in the vicinity of genuine knowledge: one, a longer-lasting state; and the other a short-lived episode. Second, I will be assuming that the longer-lasting state can be thought of as in part a disposition, and that the short-lived episodes are parts of the exercise of that disposition. So, for example, I assume that a person who has the longer-lasting state which is related to genuine knowledge of filial piety will be disposed to experience episodes related to genuine knowledge of filial piety in a particular array of circumstances. I will call the short-lived episodes “episodes of genuine knowledge”. This expression is intended to be neutral on the question of whether these episodes are themselves genuine knowledge or simply episodes of the exercise of genuine knowledge, understood as a disposition. Although I want to remain neutral on that question, the issues which interest me most in this paper are clearest in connection to these short-lived episodes, so I will focus on them throughout.

Third, there is some debate about whether the unity of knowledge and action is supposed to apply to all knowledge, or only to knowledge that relevant to virtuous behavior.⁷ I will not attempt to make progress on this debate here, but will focus on uncontroversial examples of genuine knowledge throughout. In [T1] Wang describes knowledge of filial piety (*xiao* 孝 hereafter “filiality”) and fraternal respect (*ti* 悌 hereafter, “respect”).⁸ In the context of his reply to Xu Ai, it is clear that Wang means to describe what he earlier called “knowledge in its original natural condition”, or “genuine knowledge”. In different passages ([T2] and [T4] below), Wang makes similar remarks about compassion (*ce yin* 惻隱), humaneness (*ren* 仁) and conscientiousness (*zhong* 忠), so it is natural to think he held that there can be genuine knowledge related to these notions as well.⁹ I will focus exclusively on interpretations of genuine knowledge in connection to these five examples: filiality, respect, conscientiousness, compassion and humaneness.

Fourth, and finally, on the relationship between genuine knowledge and *liangzhi* (良知): the *Mencius* (7A.15) uses the expression “*liangzhi*” to describe innate, ethically

⁷Cua (1982) and Yang (2009), for instance, see it as restricted to ethically relevant knowledge; Frisina (2002, Ch. 4) and Zheng (2018) argue that it applies to all knowledge.

⁸The phrase I’ve translated as “know filiality”, could instead be rendered as “know how to be filial” or “know to be filial” (and similarly for respect). I discuss this point more fully in section 4.

⁹The expression I will follow tradition in translating “compassion” here does not mean “compassion”. Unlike compassion (or empathy, or sympathy), the emotion described here is one that is directed at situations, not people, and it can even be directed at oneself, not others (see Shun (2018, p. 90) for these points). The expression might be better translated “being pained by” or “being unable to bear”. These alternative translations (and their associated interpretation) would not affect my arguments below, which will not turn on substantive claims about the content of this “compassion”.

relevant knowledge (see below [T3]).¹⁰ Wang took inspiration from this passage of the *Mencius*, but went well beyond it, elevating the notion of *liangzhi* to a central component of his moral psychology. He ascribes broad powers to *liangzhi*: it acquires introspective knowledge of the ethical qualities of mental events,¹¹ and also produces appropriate thoughts (*si* 思) and affective responses (*qing* 情) (*IPL* 169 *QJ* 81-2; *IPL* 290 *QJ* 126). In some places, Wang suggests that *liangzhi* can even be responsible for perception of the environment (*IPL* 168 *QJ* 80 cf. *QJ* 6.235, Ching (1972, p. 110)) or for divining others' future actions on the basis of their present behavior and mental states (*IPL* 171, *QJ* 83). There is a great deal of controversy about how *liangzhi* should be understood: some think of it as a body of knowledge; others think of it as a class of mental events (e.g. Angle & Tiwald (2017, p. 103-6)); and still others think of it in the first instance as a faculty with important similarities to the conscience. Though I will sometimes speak about *liangzhi* in line with this last position (which is closest to my own view), nothing of importance will essentially turn on this position: officially I will not be taking a stand on how this important issue should be resolved. I will however be taking a stand on the relationship between *liangzhi* and genuine knowledge. In particular, I believe that not all knowledge acquired by or possessed by *liangzhi* is genuine knowledge. This claim is controversial; some authors claim that genuine knowledge just is *liangzhi*. But there is in my view a very strong argument for the claim: Wang says in many places that even people who are acting viciously acquire ethically relevant knowledge by the exercise of their *liangzhi* (e.g. *IPL* 152 (*QJ* 69), *IPL* 207 (*QJ* 105), *QJ* 27.1112-1113 (Ching (1972, p. 121)); see Lederman (forthcoming, n. 21) for more citations). But as we have seen, Wang is clear that only people who act in accord with what they know have genuine knowledge. So he clearly does not hold that people who are acting viciously have genuine knowledge. Genuine knowledge and the knowledge *liangzhi* always acquires

¹⁰Wang did not begin to espouse his distinctive views about *liangzhi* until 1520-21, approximately twelve years after he first proposed the unity of knowledge and action. But he continued to discuss the unity of knowledge and action after 1521, and there is good evidence that he understood his views before 1521 to be consistent with his views after that year. (For details, see Lederman (forthcoming, n. 5).) In this paper, I will use passages after 1521 freely; the project can be thought of as aiming at an exegesis of Wang's post-1521 views of the unity of knowledge and action. I take the general idea that Wang's later views about the unity of knowledge and action were consistent with his earlier ones to be compatible with the idea that his thinking about *liangzhi* underwent important development over the course of his career, which it clearly did. For a detailed story about this development, see Kern (2010, p. 87-355), though Kern himself acknowledges that the aspects of Wang's thinking about *liangzhi* which he identifies were all still discussed in a later period (for discussion of the relationship between them, see Kern (2010, p. 344-55)).

¹¹Wang emphasizes this kind of introspection in a host of other passages as well, e.g. *IPL* 162, *QJ* 76; *IPL* 169 *QJ* 81-2; *IPL* 206, *QJ* 105; *IPL* 290 *QJ* 126; the second and third sentences of the "Four Sentence Teaching" (四句教) (*IPL* 315 *QJ* 133-4); *IPL* 318, *QJ* 135-6; *QJ* 6.242; Ching (1972, p. 114); *QJ* 8.307. Wang makes similar points in his pre-*liangzhi* period, in the 1515 "Preface to the Old Version of the Great Learning" *QJ* 7.271. Chen Jiuchuan (陳九川) also makes related points in *IPL* 201 *QJ* 102.

must therefore be distinct.¹²

These points set the stage for the development of our different interpretations of genuine knowledge, to which I now turn in earnest.

3 The perceptual model

According to arguably the most prominent interpretation of the unity of knowledge and action in the scholarship on Wang written in English, the doctrine concerns in part a rich form of perception (Nivison (1973), Cua (1982), Ivanhoe (2002, 2009, 2011), Angle (2005, 2009)). On this interpretation, Wang holds that appropriately acknowledging features of the world around one consists in part in having an appropriate affective response to them, and this appropriate affective response in turn results in an appropriate action. Proponents of this broad interpretation of the unity of knowledge and action have typically not offered a detailed analysis of genuine knowledge. But they all seem committed to what I will call the *perceptual model*, characterized by adherence to the following claim:

Perceptual Part Some episodes of genuine knowledge of filiality have episodes of perceiving the environment as a part of them.

In displayed principles like this one, I will always present only the one example of “filiality”, although I mean such principles to apply also to the other examples mentioned in the previous section: to respect, compassion, conscientiousness and humaneness. In this principle, I have used “episode of perceiving” in part to highlight the fact that I

¹²In [T1] Wang uses the expression “original natural condition of knowledge and action” (知行本體) quite clearly to describe what he then calls “genuine knowledge and action”. In IPL 165 QJ 78 Wang directly identifies *liangzhi* and *liang neng* (良能, see [T3] below) with this same “original natural condition of knowledge and action”. This pattern of usage might seem to flatly contradict my claim that genuine knowledge must be distinguished from *liangzhi*. But there is no contradiction, because the expression I translate “original natural condition” (本體) is clearly used in two different ways in these two passages. In IPL 5 ([T1]) Wang uses “the original natural condition of knowledge and action” explicitly to describe something which can be lost (失) and must be restored (復), whereas in IPL 165, when he says that *liangzhi* is the original natural condition of knowledge, he clearly means something which can never be lost, and which all people possess. Wang most often uses the expression “original natural condition” to describe the “original natural condition of the mind” (心之本體), and his usage of this expression exhibits exactly the same ambiguity we see in IPL 5 and IPL 165. Wang can describe the original natural condition of the mind both as something which can be “lost” (失, IPL 34 QJ 17, IPL 222 QJ 108-9 cf. IPL 204 QJ 104) and hence must be “restored” (復) (e.g. IPL 121 QJ 40, IPL 127 QJ 43 (性之本體); IPL 145, QJ 66 (repeated in IPL 169, QJ 81); IPL 237 QJ 112-113; QJ 5.216, cf. Ching (1972, p. 87) cf. IPL 101 QJ 34). But he can also speak of it as something which everyone has, and can only be obstructed, not lost (IPL 48, QJ 20, IPL 152 QJ 69, IPL 155 QJ 70-71, IPL 221 QJ 108, cf. QJ 7.271 (本體之知)). In IPL 76 (QJ 26-27) the two uses are especially close to the surface.

mean the word “part” quite literally. Events like parties have multiple parts: they have parts which are separated in time – the first part of the party, when only a few guests have arrived, and later parts when things are buzzing – as well as simultaneous parts – the part of the party outside where people are playing lawn games, and the part inside, where people are talking quietly. In Perceptual Part, the “episodes of perceiving”, are taken to be literally parts of the episodes of genuine knowledge, just as the playing of lawn games outside may be part of a party. Moreover, I allow the special case where the party is a part of itself, namely, the part that makes up all of it. One way of endorsing Perceptual Part – and indeed the view we will be most focused on in this section – is to hold that some episodes of genuine knowledge just are episodes of perceiving. Finally, it is worth reiterating that genuine knowledge (*zhen zhi* 真知) is not *liangzhi*. Everyone should agree that *liangzhi* is sometimes responsible for perception of the environment. Wang says as much in at least one place (*IPL* 168, *QJ* 80). The distinctive thesis of the perceptual model is a claim about the connection between perception and *genuine knowledge*, not a claim about the connection between perception and *liangzhi*.¹³

Let us start by considering the main passages which motivate the idea that genuine knowledge is closely connected to perception. [T1] is perhaps the most important. A proponent of the perceptual model will naturally take the sentence “The *Great Learning* points to genuine knowledge and action for people to see”, in the second paragraph of that passage to introduce examples of genuine knowledge and action. Just like the word “like” in English, the word I have translated “like” (*ru* 如) in the sentence from the *Great Learning* can be used to introduce either an example or a simile. A proponent of the perceptual model will naturally adopt the first of these interpretations and

¹³Philosophers often use the words “see” and “perceive” in such a way that (in their usage) a person who hallucinates a dagger does not see or perceive a dagger, but merely seems to see or perceive one, or merely experiences a perceptual seeming as of there being one. The proponents of the perceptual model cited above do not consider the distinction between perception and perceptual seemings, and do not take a stand on whether their view is best articulated in terms of perception (in this sense) or in terms of perceptual seemings. But I believe that many proponents of the position would not see an important difference between Perceptual Part and the claim that some episodes of genuine knowledge have perceptual seemings as a part of them, so I won’t consider objections which turn on this distinction in what follows.

With that said, when I speak of perception here and throughout the paper, I mean perception by the five senses, not further aspects of cognition which might metaphorically be described as “perception”. An interpretation (like those of Liu (2018, p. 253-4) or Zheng (2019, p. 1358, 1360)) which uses the word “perceive” to describe what *liangzhi* knows on the basis of introspection, taking introspection to be something like an “inner sense”, would therefore not count as an instance of the perceptual model in my terminology. As I will discuss later (see n. 45), Wang certainly thought that there were important analogies between (ordinary) sense-perception and the introspection of *liangzhi*. But I know of only a single passage where he directly uses the word “see” (見) to describe what the mind “sees” in introspection (*IPL* 96 *QJ* 30-31). Given that Wang himself does not seem particularly attracted to this metaphorical way of speaking, it is not clear to me how helpful or faithful it is to describe *liangzhi* as “perceiving” what it knows on the basis of introspection.

take these examples to be examples of genuine knowledge and action, not merely analogues of them. On this view, seeing and smelling are episodes of genuine knowledge or parts of such episodes, so genuine knowledge at least sometimes is either identical to perception or has perception as a part of it.

This conclusion does not on its own establish Perceptual Part, since that thesis concerns genuine knowledge of filiality, respect, compassion, humaneness and conscientiousness, and not other putative examples of genuine knowledge, such as of a sight or a smell. But proponents of the perceptual model who take seeing and smelling to be examples of genuine knowledge will naturally understand these examples as intended to illustrate a more general point, that the core examples of genuine knowledge can also have perception of the environment as a part of them.¹⁴ And indeed this reading of [T1] might seem to be confirmed by the following passage, which can be read as describing a more direct relationship between perception and (genuine) knowledge of ethical qualities such as filiality:

[T2] 知是心之本體，心自然會知：見父自然知孝，見兄自然知弟，見孺子入井自然知惻隱，此便是良知不假外求。若良知之發，更無私意障礙，即所謂『充其惻隱之心，而仁不可勝用矣』。然在常人不能無私意障礙，所以須用致知。……之功。……即心之良知更無障礙，得以充塞流行，便是致其知。知致則意誠。

Knowing is the original natural condition of the mind. The mind is automatically able to know. When it sees one's parents, it automatically knows filiality. When it sees one's elder brother, it automatically knows respect. When it sees a child fall into a well, it automatically knows compassion.¹⁵ This is *liangzhi*, and should not be sought outside. If *liangzhi* is aroused, and there is furthermore no obstruction of selfish inclinations, it will be like the saying "If one fulfills one's mind which is compassionate, then one's humaneness will function inexorably." But ordinary people are unable not to have the obstructions of selfish inclinations. That is why they must use the practice of the extension of knowledge (*zhi zhi* 致知) ... Then the mind's *liangzhi* will furthermore have no obstructions and will be able to operate smoothly everywhere. This then is the extension of knowledge. And if one's knowledge is extended, one's inclinations will be wholehearted. (*IPL* 8, *QJ* 7)

My criterion for determining which passages describe genuine knowledge does

¹⁴Not all proponents of the perceptual model agree that the examples in [T1] are examples of genuine knowledge. Cua (1982) for instance takes them merely to be analogous to genuine knowledge, and motivates the perceptual model primarily on the basis of our next passage, [T2].

¹⁵This passage alludes to a famous example from Mencius 2A.6. In Mencius's example, the child was on the verge of falling into the well (將入於井), and it is plausible that, although Wang says "fall into a well", he means "on the verge of" falling into a well, relying on the reader's knowledge of the original text. See above, n. 9 on the word I translate as "compassion".

not logically imply that this one does. Wang does not use the expression “genuine knowledge” here, and although he does use “extended knowledge”, he does not tie this state explicitly to the unity of knowledge and action. But everyone should agree that Wang has genuine knowledge in mind in the passage. He describes an elevated form of knowledge, since he says that ordinary people do not achieve this state, in spite of the automatic knowledge of which their mind is capable. And he implicitly ties this elevated form of knowledge to action, since he explicitly connects it to the possibility of being fully virtuous, which at least in normal circumstances requires some virtuous action. So the passage can be understood to support the idea that genuine knowledge is closely connected to perception. In particular, when Wang says that, on seeing one’s parents, seeing one’s brother, or seeing a child fall into a well, the mind “automatically knows” (自然知) filiality, respect or compassion, one might take him to mean that this automatic knowledge is identical with the perception of filiality, respect or compassion, or at least that it has some perception as a part of it.

These two passages are the primary evidence that Wang connects genuine knowledge to perception.¹⁶ But how exactly should we understand that connection? Perceptual Part is a fairly weak thesis, and it is natural to begin by considering more informative strengthenings of it. Perhaps the most obvious such strengthening is the idea that (at least sometimes) genuine knowledge just is perception:

Genuine Perception Some episodes of genuinely knowing filiality are episodes of perceiving filiality.

Genuine Perception entails Perceptual Part, but it is stronger than Perceptual Part. I will first examine this stronger thesis before considering the prospects of a weaker view which centers on Perceptual Part itself.

Genuine Perception is consistent with quite different understandings of genuine knowledge, depending on how one understands what it is to perceive qualities such as filiality. The most obvious, flatfooted way of thinking about this perception yields what I will call the *flashlight model*. On this view, properties such as filiality are instantiated in

¹⁶ A third passage not by Wang Yangming has played an important role in scholars’ understanding of what Wang himself might mean by “genuine knowledge”. In a famous passage, Cheng Yi (程頤, Yichuan 伊川, 1033-1107), is reported as saying fairly clearly that a fieldhand, who was previously harmed by a tiger, has genuine knowledge of a tiger’s ability to harm people (Wang (2004a, 2A.16) cf. also Wang (2004b, 18.188)). This passage doesn’t directly support the idea that episodes of genuine knowledge have episodes of perceiving as parts. But it does strongly suggest that Cheng held that we can have genuine knowledge of objects or facts outside our minds. If Wang agreed with Cheng on this point, then it would be natural for him to endorse the idea that perception can be a part of that knowledge.

For some further English language discussion of this passage see Huang (2015, Ch. 3). For other precedents of Wang’s ideas, see Shun (2010, p. 188), Angle (2018, p. 166).

the environment in the same straightforward way that properties like sizes or shapes are, and people perceive filiality in the environment in the same straightforward way that they perceive sizes or shapes. This flashlight model offers a simple, natural way of developing the idea that genuine knowledge is a form of perception.¹⁷ But there is an important problem with this model as an interpretation of Wang Yangming. Wang repeatedly and strenuously argues that qualities such as filiality and respect are not external to the mind; he clearly does not hold that filiality or respect are instantiated in the environment in the straightforward way that sizes or shapes are.¹⁸ So he cannot have believed that genuine knowledge of filiality or respect is identical with perception of qualities instantiated in the environment in the straightforward way that sizes or shapes are.

This argument motivates interpreting Genuine Perception using a subtler conception of what it is to perceive ethical qualities like filiality, which does not require that these qualities be instantiated in the environment in a straightforward way. On a very particular (and perhaps idiosyncratic) version of what is sometimes called “projectivism”, the mental states or events involved in perceiving qualities such as beauty or repulsiveness are not at all like the mental states or events involved in perceiving qualities such as size and shape. Instead, to perceive a quality like beauty or repulsiveness in an object just is to have an appropriate affective response to the object. Moreover, for an object to instantiate these qualities is for it to tend to cause these affective responses in those who encounter it. Our second development of Genuine Perception, the *affec-*

¹⁷A natural reading of Nivison (1973) suggests that Nivison endorses the flashlight model. He writes: “My perception of a thing as having visible and value qualities is total and unitary... Just as when I look at a tree I see not only a shape but a solid extended object with a front and a back side, so here I ‘see’ an object with a visible and a ‘value side’ ” (Nivison (1973, 132); reprinted in Nivison (1996, p. 243)). Nivison says that the things which are “seen” (in scare-quotes) have both “visible and value qualities” and (again) that the “object” which has a “value side”, *also* has a “visible” side. It is clear then that Nivison thinks that the objects which possess the “value qualities” that we “see” are objects *visible* to the person in question; they are not (for instance) the internal objects of an inner sense. So it is natural to read Nivison as committing himself to something quite close to Genuine Perception here. Moreover, earlier in the paper Nivison writes: “For Wang Yang-ming there is no effective difference between perceiving a sensible quality with a sense (for example, sight) and ‘perceiving’ a value-quality with the mind in the noninclusive sense of the mind that thinks and conceives” (Nivison (1973, 132); reprinted in Nivison (1996, p. 242-3)). This passage, together with Nivison’s use of the examples of shape in the previous quotation, strongly suggest that he has something like the flashlight model in mind. If he thought that objects’ “value qualities” are mind-dependent in a way in which qualities like shape are not, that would be an extremely important “effective difference” between Nivison’s two forms of “sight”. So these passages seem to me to commit Nivison to the flashlight model. Others may disagree with that interpretation. But however we settle these questions about the interpretation of Nivison, it seems to me that the flashlight model is worth discussing for the way it illustrates constraints on the interpretation of Wang.

¹⁸*IPL 3 QJ 2-3, IPL 101, QJ 33-4, IPL 133 QJ 48, IPL 135 QJ 50-1*; cf. *QJ 4.175*, translated in Ching (1972, p. 29-30).

tive perceptual model, takes inspiration from this idea. According to this model, what it is to perceive filiality in the environment just is to exhibit a certain affective response to it.

This new position escapes my argument against the flashlight model. If the affective perceptual model is correct, it would be natural for Wang to deny that filiality or respect are “out there in the world”, since they arise in virtue of a person’s responses to the world. Moreover, proponents of the affective perceptual model can understand Wang’s comments that ethical qualities are “in the mind” as intended to highlight that the presence of these qualities in our environment is constituted by, or at least partly grounded in, the ways in which we respond psychologically to those objects.

The affective perceptual model thus shows how a subtler conception of perception can be used to avoid the problem with the flashlight model that I described above. Other sophisticated conceptions of perception might do the trick as well. But I will now argue that the question of how they might is moot. For there is a deeper problem with Genuine Perception, which neither the affective perceptual model, nor any other sophisticated view of the perception of ethical qualities can avoid. In the case of a beautiful sight it is reasonable to say that people can see the beauty of the sight.¹⁹ But it does not make sense to say that a person sees filiality or respect in the circumstances Wang describes in [T2]. I can imagine a position according to which, when a son responds correctly to his parents, his filiality is visible on the surface; by looking at him we can just see it. I can similarly imagine a position according to which when a younger brother responds correctly to his older brother, his respectfulness is visible on the surface; by looking at him we can just see it. But these are not the circumstances Wang has in mind. He speaks of a son seeing his parents and, when he responds filially, knowing filiality. He speaks of a younger brother seeing his older brother and, when he responds respectfully, knowing respect. In these cases the son is not perceiving filiality or the younger brother perceiving respect in any natural sense. The parents may be worthy of filiality, but Wang does not tell us that the parents are themselves filial, and they might well not be. Similarly, the older brother may be worthy of respect, but Wang does not tell us that the brother himself is respectful, and he might well not be. Wang clearly says that when we see our parents or brothers we have (genuine) knowledge of filiality and respect, not that we have (genuine) knowledge of worthiness-of-filiality, or of worthiness-of-respect. So, at least in these examples Wang does not identify genuine

¹⁹In [T1] Wang in fact says only that the person sees the beautiful sight, not its beauty, but we may suppose for the sake of argument here that he could have said that people can see the beauty itself.

knowledge of these qualities with a person's perception of them.²⁰

Genuine Perception does not sit well with the key examples in [T2]. And in light of the straightforward way in which Genuine Perception fails to apply to these examples, it is hard to see what motivation one might have for claiming that there are some further examples (not discussed by Wang) where in fact genuine knowledge of filiality, respect, or compassion is a form of perception.

This argument against Genuine Perception, importantly, does not tell directly against the weaker Perceptual Part. Perceptual Part says only that perception is a part of episodes of genuine knowledge. The principle does not require that the relevant perception be perception of qualities such as filiality; it could instead be an episode of perceiving something else entirely. Perceptual Part does not entail that filiality, respect or compassion are instantiated in the environment. It also does not entail that a virtuous person sees filiality when they see their parents.

But the argument against Genuine Perception does point toward a problem with one of the guiding ideas of the perceptual model, and thereby undermines some of the appeal of Perceptual Part. A core idea behind the perceptual model is that the unity of knowledge and action is intended to describe the way in which a virtuous person is distinctively sensitive to features of their environment. Angle (2005, p. 41) spells out this idea, for example, by connecting Wang's views to contemporary neo-Aristotelian discussions of moral perception.²¹ He cites the following passage from Martha Nussbaum to illustrate what he takes Wang to be getting at:

Perception is not merely aided by emotion but is also in part constituted by appropriate response. Good perception is a full recognition or acknowledgment of the practical situation; the whole personality sees it for what it is. The agent who discerns intellectually that a friend is in need or that a loved one has died, but who fails to respond to these facts with appropriate sympathy or grief, clearly lacks a part of Aristotelian virtue. It seems right to say, in addition, that a part of discernment or perception is lacking. This person doesn't really, or doesn't fully, see what has happened. (Nussbaum (1990, p. 79))

²⁰Antonio Cua takes genuine knowledge to involve a rich form of perception, which he connects to a Wittgensteinian notion of "seeing as". He takes this seeing as to include an acknowledgement that the object falls under a particular category – an acknowledgement which involves an affective response of what one sees (Cua, 1982, p. 7). Cf. Cua (1998, p. 181-3). This position falls to a closely related objection: Wang is clearly not describing acknowledging one's parents as falling under the category of filiality.

²¹Angle (2005, 40-44) draws heavily on an Aristotelian tradition in contemporary discussion, citing Murdoch (1970), Wiggins (1975), McDowell (1979), Nussbaum (1990) and Blum (1991). Ivanhoe (2011) investigates the relationship between McDowell and Wang Yangming in detail.

Nussbaum's examples of what a person perceives in this passage – that a friend is in need, or that a loved one has died – are clearly facts that the person discerns in the environment, in the world around them. Nussbaum closes by saying that a person who does not respond to these facts “doesn't really, or doesn't fully, see what has happened”. In her view, virtuous people exhibit a distinctive form of sensitivity to the environment. Angle sees a related idea in Wang Yangming.

Crucially this basic thought seems to motivate not just proponents of Genuine Perception, but also those who endorse only Perceptual Part. P. J. Ivanhoe explicitly denies Genuine Perception and endorses Perceptual Part instead, taking perception to be just a part of episodes of genuine knowledge. But he still understands Wang to hold that a person who acts virtuously exhibits an elevated form of sensitivity to their environment, and describes genuine knowledge as “true seeing” or “true perception”. He writes that, according to Wang: “the necessary and sufficient condition for moral action is *true perception* of a situation. When we truly see, we don't just believe – we act. For Wang, true perception involves an understanding not only of what is being perceived but how it relates to the greater context of the Way. This larger understanding in turn entails the appropriate affective reaction to such a state of affairs, and this sets into motion a proper response or action” (Ivanhoe (2002, p. 99), emphasis his).²²

Wang's examples in [T2] do not show that Perceptual Part is incorrect. But they strongly suggest that Wang's thought is different from both Nussbaum's and Ivanhoe's, and therefore undermine at least some of the motivation for Perceptual Part. Wang does not say that people who are not virtuous do not “really” or “fully” see their parents, their elder brothers, or the child who is about to fall into a well; he does not call into question their ability to see the environment around them at all. He only says that they do not really know filiality, respect, or compassion. While Wang certainly distinguishes between different grades of knowledge of filiality, the cases he considers (as we have seen) are not ones where a person perceives filiality in the environment, so

²²Elsewhere Ivanhoe writes that “genuine knowledge...is substantially constituted by a disposition to attend and respond affectively to ethical situations and act properly and without hesitation” (Ivanhoe (2009, p. 113)). The “ethical situations” which Ivanhoe says we “attend” to are clearly mind-external, and he says explicitly that genuine knowledge is “substantially constituted by” a disposition to experience such episodes of attention, committing him to Perceptual Part (cf. also Ivanhoe (2011, 282-3)). Other remarks of Ivanhoe's might seem to suggest the flashlight model (and hence Genuine Perception), as opposed to Perceptual Part. For instance, in introducing a “spectrum” of metaethical views, Ivanhoe writes that “Wang Yangming's view, which claims that moral qualities are out there in the world and available to us through a special faculty of moral sapience...defines the ‘moral faculty’ pole”, which is opposed to the “projectivist” pole of his spectrum (Ivanhoe (2011) p. 274). One might read “out there in the world” to mean that the qualities are instantiated by objects outside the mind, in line with the flashlight model. But in the context of Ivanhoe's other writings, quoted above, the expression is better understood to mean only that Wang is a realist about moral properties and understands them to be mind-independent.

these gradations in a person's knowledge of filiality should not be understood as gradations in their perception of a situation. More generally, and looking beyond these examples, I am unaware of cases where Wang clearly distinguishes between grades of perception in the way that Nussbaum and Ivanhoe do.²³

Where does this leave the perceptual model? Many aspects of the mind, with quite different characteristics, may have episodes of perception as a part of them. On its own, Perceptual Part is too weak to be the basis of a distinctive understanding of genuine knowledge. As we have seen, the most explicit proponents of the perceptual model – whether they endorse Genuine Perception or only Perceptual Part – have supplemented this thesis with the proposal that Wang holds that virtuous people enjoy a distinctive sensitivity to their environment. Indeed, while I officially defined the perceptual model in terms of an endorsement of Perceptual Part, commitment to this broader claim about the sensitivity of virtuous people is so prominent that I might as well have included it too as a component of the perceptual model. But I have argued that this broader claim must be rejected. If Perceptual Part is true, it is not because Wang holds that virtuous people exhibit a distinctive form of sensitivity to their environment. And,

²³In the closing sentences of the first paragraph of [T1] Wang does say that a person who does not smell an odor does not hate it only because they do not know it. One might claim that, by focusing on [T2], I am ignoring this key passage where Wang does sound more like Nussbaum or Ivanhoe. But while I agree that in this passage Wang describes different forms of knowledge, he does not describe different grades of perception, as is suggested by Nussbaum's "really" or "fully" seeing and Ivanhoe's "true perception". Wang says that the person's nose is blocked, so that they do not smell the odor *at all*; he does not draw a contrast between a person who "really" smells and someone who in some sense can smell but cannot really smell in this more discerning way. Moreover, immediately after the example, Wang begins to discuss explicitly the idea that one cannot know something unless one has experienced it. In context, the most natural reading of the example of the blocked nose is as intended to illustrate this next point, especially given that Wang's examples there (of filiality and respect) cannot be understood to describe what a person perceives, for reasons I have discussed in detail in the main text. It seems then that Wang's point in this passage is to emphasize that different sense modalities can result in knowledge of different kinds. If a person hasn't smelled an odor then even if they know it is there (say, on the basis of testimony) they still do not know it in the way that interests Wang, because they have not experienced it directly. This contrast is quite different from the contrast between the way a discerning person smells, and the way an undiscerning person does.

In *IPL 171 QJ 83*, Wang says that extending one's *liangzhi* allows one to know on the basis of others' current behavior and mental states what they will do in the future. As I said in the previous section, it is not obvious that every instance of "extended knowledge" is relevant to our understanding of genuine knowledge. But a proponent of Perceptual Part might take this instance to describe genuine knowledge, and hence take it to support the idea that genuine knowledge does involve a distinctive sensitivity to the environment. Perhaps. In my view, a better interpretation of this passage takes it to be an example of "extended knowledge" used in a broad sense to describe the "full functioning of *liangzhi*", not in a narrow sense to describe genuine knowledge. First, it is noteworthy that Wang does not apply the ideas he develops in this passage to knowledge of ethical qualities such as filiality, respect and compassion. Second, this passage is the only one I know of where Wang describes extended knowledge explicitly as involving increased ability to know this kind of claim. If it were central to the unity of knowledge and action, one might have expected him to discuss it considerably more often.

given this conclusion, it is unclear what hangs on the question of whether Wang does, or does not, endorse Perceptual Part. So, while my argument leaves the letter of Perceptual Part untouched – for all I have said, it may still be that perception is a part of genuine knowledge – it does show that, whether or not the perceptual model is correct, it does not have the broad significance for our understanding of the unity of knowledge and action it has been supposed to have.

4 The practical and normative models

I turn now to two quite different views of the character of genuine knowledge, based first, on the idea that genuine knowledge is a form of knowledge-how (the *practical model*) and, second, on the idea that it is a form of knowledge-to (the *normative model*).

As in my discussion of the perceptual model, I will begin by considering the key passages which motivate these models. As a prelude to discussing those passages, however, we must start with two linguistic points about classical Chinese. First, like the English word “know”, the character *zhi* 知 can take syntactically different expressions as its complement, and when it does so it describes what we may think of as at least *prima facie* different kinds of knowledge: if it takes a sentential complement, it describes propositional knowledge (“know that”);²⁴ if it takes a simple noun-phrase as its complement (“arithmetic”), it describes objectual knowledge (“know arithmetic”); and if it takes a verb-phrase as its complement (“run”, “say thank you”), it describes knowing-how (“know how to run”), or knowing-to (“know to say thank you”). So far, so familiar. But, second, and much less familiarly to those accustomed to English or Romance languages, many characters in classical Chinese can have a diverse array of syntactic roles, making it difficult to determine what kind of complement *zhi* (“know”) in fact takes in a given instance. For example, the character *xiao* 孝 can be used as a noun (“filiality”), as an adjective (“filial”), or as a verb-phrase (“be filial”) without any change in the way it is written. As a result, the expression I have translated in [T1] and [T2] as “know filiality” might instead be translated as “know how to be filial” or “know to be filial”. And this same pattern is exhibited by the characters I have translated as “respect” and “compassion”, so the expressions I have translated “know respect” and “know compassion” might be rendered instead as “know (how) to be respectful” and

²⁴A common way of expressing propositional knowledge in classical Chinese involves a special construction where a nominalized sentence is the complement of the verb “know”. At least in Wang’s corpus, there does not seem to me a significant semantic difference between this construction and those in which the complement is an un-nominalized sentence. See Harbsmeier (1993) for discussion of a related issue in pre-Han texts.

“know (how) to be compassionate”.²⁵

Proponents of the practical and normative models will claim that my earlier translations of [T1] and [T2] are incorrect: Wang does not there describe knowledge of filiality, respect or compassion, but instead describes knowing (how) to be filial, respectful or compassionate. In their view, in the key sentence of [T2], for example, Wang says that when a person sees their parents, they automatically know (how) to be filial, that when a person sees their brother, they automatically know (how) to be respectful, and when a person sees a child about to fall into a well, they automatically know (how) to be compassionate (see e.g. Shi (2017, p. 55-6) and Huang (2017, p. 87)). The passage [T2] does not on its own support the knowing-how or knowing-to construal by comparison to the objectual construal, but proponents of the practical and normative models will naturally seek to support their translation on the basis of a parallel with other passages. One way of doing so would start from the passage in the *Mencius* which first uses the notion of *liangzhi*:

- [T3] 孟子曰：「人之所不學而能者，其良能也；所不慮而知者，其良知也。孩提之童，無不知愛其親者；及其長也，無不知敬其兄也。°°°
- Mencius said: “what people are able to do without learning is their *liang neng* [lit: “pure ability”]; what they know without reflection is their *liang zhi* [lit: “pure knowledge”]. Infants all know (how) to love their parents; when they are grown, they all know (how) to respect their older brothers...” (7A.15)

As the locus classicus for the use of *liangzhi* – a notion which, as we saw above, Wang elevated to a central position in his moral psychology – this passage had outsized importance for Wang. And, interestingly, the complements of the word “know” in this passage are not as syntactically flexible as the expressions we considered above: the expressions I have translated as “love their parents” (愛其親) and “respect their older brother” (敬其兄) are hard to understand in any way other than as verb-phrases. So the *Mencius* clearly describes knowing (how) to love one’s parents and knowing (how) to respect one’s older brother.²⁶

²⁵In principle they might also be understood as “know that one is filial”, “know that one is respectful” and “know that one is compassionate”, but I know of no one who has advocated this construal, so I won’t consider it here.

²⁶I confess that I find the “knowing-to” construal more natural here; it is odd without further context to say that a child “knows how to love their parents”. I will return to this point later on. But those who hope to understand genuine knowledge as knowing how might emphasize that Wang preserves a tight relationship between *liangzhi* and *liangneng* in his writings: for instance, in the passage just quoted, he quickly moves from discussing knowledge to citing the “ability” of the children he describes. Since ability is closely connected to knowing how, this fact could be thought of as supporting the construal as knowing-how here. For this idea, see Yu (2014, p. 33-4).

These observations are relevant to [T2] because in one passage (IPL 118 QJ 39), Wang uses the exact examples from the *Mencius* as part of an explanation of how “knowledge is the original natural condition of the mind” (知是心之本體), the very same idea with which he begins [T2]. On the basis of this parallel – and given the fact that the Mencian examples strongly favor the knowing-how or knowing-to construals – proponents of the practical and normative models might argue that “know” in [T2] should also be understood as “know how” or “know to”. According to them, [T2] goes beyond the *Mencius*’s claims about knowing (how) to love one’s parents and knowing (how) to respect one’s brother, to the further claims that people also know in general (how) to be filial, know (how) to be respectful and know (how) to be compassionate.²⁷

This striking reading of [T2] – and the possibility of understanding that passage as parallel to the key examples from the *Mencius* – is a first important line of support for the practical and the normative models. A second line of support for the models can be found in two passages from Wang’s letter to Gu Lin (顧璘, Dongqiao 東橋, 1476-1545). In the first of these (IPL 138 QJ 55-6), Wang says that “to know the detailed rites for how to warm and cool one’s parents and to know what is appropriate for how to serve and nourish them is what is called knowledge but it is not yet admissible to say that it is the extension of knowledge” (知如何而為溫清之節，知如何而為奉養之宜者，所謂知也，而未可謂之致知). He goes on to say that one’s knowledge is extended only if one acts in warming or cooling one’s parents and in serving or nourishing them, and then closes by twice discussing “extending *liangzhi* which knows (how) to warm and cool” (致其知溫清之良知) and “extending *liangzhi* which knows (how) to serve and nurture” (致其知奉養之良知 cf. QJ 8.308 for similar points). As I have said before,

²⁷My presentation of the practical and normative models differs substantially from two of these models’ most important proponents, Shi (2017) and Huang (2017). These authors (and especially Huang) present their own views as views about the knowledge *liangzhi* has, and not specifically about genuine knowledge (although they do claim that their hypotheses are relevant to the unity of knowledge and action). But it seems to me that the hypotheses are in fact more plausible if they are restricted to genuine knowledge, than if they are supposed to cover all of the knowledge of *liangzhi*. As we saw above, in IPL 168 (QJ 80), Wang says that *liangzhi* is responsible for sense perception. It is hard to understand this as a form of knowing-to, and while it *could* be that Wang intends us to think of “knowing how to perceive” this seems a stretch. Similarly, in IPL 171 (QJ 83), Wang says that *liangzhi* can be the basis of predicting what others will do. Again, this is hard to understand as a form of “knowledge-to”, and while it could be that Wang intends us to think of “knowing how to predict”, this doesn’t seem to be his idea. In a further array of passages, most notably in the “Four Sentence Teaching” (IPL 315 QJ 133-4), Wang says that *liangzhi* knows good and bad. There is some basis (most notably IPL 288, QJ 126) for thinking that he understood knowing good and bad to be exhibited by knowing to approve the good and knowing to disapprove the bad, but it is not clear how committed to this position Wang was, and in any case it is hard to understand this latter form of knowledge as knowledge-how. Together, then, the passages challenge both of these ways of thinking about *liangzhi*: the first two of the passages make it hard to understand *liangzhi* uniformly as knowledge-to, and the last of them makes it hard to understand it as knowledge-how. So, if anything, the restriction to genuine knowledge seems to make the theses more plausible, not less so.

it is not obvious that every time Wang discusses the “extension of knowledge”, and in particular the extension of *liangzhi*, he is also discussing a state which is relevant to the unity of knowledge and action. But it seems plausible that, in this case, where he discusses how knowledge requires action to count as this elevated form of knowledge, he is. So, his explicit discussion of knowledge-how in this passage supports the claim that genuine knowledge is a form of knowledge-how.

In the next section of his reply to Gu’s letter, Wang explicitly connects the extension of knowledge to the unity of knowledge and action, so that it is not only plausible, but in fact entailed by my criterion for when he is discussing genuine knowledge that he does so here:

[T4] 吾子謂：「語孝於溫清定省，孰不知之？」然而能致其知者鮮矣。若謂粗知溫清定省之儀節，而遂謂之能致其知，則凡知君之當仁者皆可謂之能致其仁之知，知臣之當忠者皆可謂之能致其忠之知，則天下孰非致知者邪？以是而言，可以知致知之必在於行，而不行之不可以為致知也明矣。知行合一之體，不益較然矣乎？

You say: “who does not know to say that filiality consists in warming and cooling [one’s parents bed] and settling them and inquiring after [their health]?”²⁸ But those who are able to extend their knowledge are few. If we describe someone who roughly knows the detailed rites for how to warm and cool, to settle and inquire after, and for this reason say that they can extend their knowledge, then it would be admissible to say that anyone who knows that the ruler should be humane can extend his knowledge of humaneness [or: knowing (how) to be humane], and admissible to say that anyone who knows that the subject should be conscientious is able to extend his knowledge of conscientiousness [or: knowing (how) to be conscientious]. Who in the world would not extend his knowledge? If we consider the matter from this perspective, we know that extending knowledge must consist in acting, and it is clear also that if a person is not acting then they cannot be regarded as extending their knowledge. Is the natural condition of the unity of knowledge and knowledge and action not still more evident now? (*IPL* 139, *QJ* 56; cf. *QJ* 8.308)

In this passage, the two key expressions which I have rendered in the first instance as “knowledge of humaneness” and “knowledge of conscientiousness” are ambiguous

²⁸The passage says only “warming and cooling, settling and inquiring”, but it clearly alludes to a famous passage in the *Book of Rites*, “Summary of the Rules of Propriety” (曲禮上), which Legge (1885) translates as: “For all sons it is the rule :—In winter, to warm (the bed for their parents), and to cool it in summer; in the evening, to adjust everything (for their repose), and to inquire (about their health) in the morning; and, when with their companions, not to quarrel” (凡為人子之禮：冬溫而夏清，昏定而晨省，在醜夷不爭). The original text of the *Rites* itself does not explicitly mention the bed of parents or their health, but Legge follows the standard traditional commentaries (which Wang would have known) in adding these further glosses.

in the same way that the expression I translated as “knowledge of filiality” was in [T1] and [T2]. As before, proponents of the practical and normative models will prefer to translate these phrases as: “knowing (how) to be humane” and “knowing (how) to be conscientious”. Those who favor the practical model will naturally say that Wang means here to make a similar point to the one he made in the previous section of his reply (IPL 138), where (as we saw) he says that a person’s knowledge of the details of how to enact filiality (a form of knowledge-how) is extended knowledge only if they have acted. Proponents of the normative model will offer a slightly different spin on the passage. They will naturally see it as quite significant that, when it comes time to discuss the unity of knowledge and action explicitly, Wang shifts his example away from “knowing how” and begins to discuss knowledge that the ruler should be humane, and knowledge that the subject should be conscientious, just the kind of normative claims about what one should do that were also at issue in Xu Ai’s discussion of people who know that they should be filial to their parents (quoted in the text before [T1]). While proponents of the normative model must of course acknowledge that in the previous section Wang did discuss “knowing how”, they will say that he here turns to the form of knowledge which is actually key to his doctrine, and draws a sharp contrast between those who merely know *that* people should be humane or conscientious on the one hand, and those who know *to* be humane or conscientious on the other. The latter, but not the former (they will say) is what is closely tied to action.

In either case, proponents of the practical and normative models will both see something to support their overall position in this passage, whether stemming from Wang’s explicit discussion of knowing-how, or from his explicit discussion of knowledge of normative claims.

A third, and final line of support for these models is less direct, but on the face of it no less significant. In two important passages, Wang explicates the unity of knowledge and action by emphasizing that concerns (*nian* 念) and inclinations (*yi* 意) are either actions themselves or parts of actions (“the beginning of action”) (IPL 226 QJ 109-110, IPL 132 QJ 46-7). In a further set of passages, Wang ties inclinations closely to knowledge.²⁹ (For simplicity in what follows I will treat inclinations (*yi* 意), concerns (*nian* 念) and “motivating concerns” (*yinian* 意念) – a compound expression formed from the word I have translated “inclination” and the word I have translated “concern” – as interchangeable.) These passages suggest that the two-sided relationship of inclinations/ concerns to knowledge on the one hand and action on the other is at the heart of Wang’s understanding of the unity of knowledge and action. A remarkable further

²⁹IPL 6 QJ 6, IPL 78 QJ 27, IPL 137 QJ 53, IPL 174 QJ 86-7, IPL 201 QJ 103.

passage seems to offer striking confirmation of this bold idea. In response to a question about the unity of knowledge and action, Wang says:

- [T5] 你說固是。但要曉得一念動處便是知，亦便是行。
What you say is indeed correct. But you must understand that insofar as a single concern is moved it is already knowledge, and it is also already action. (QJBB 323; cf. QJ 1292)³⁰

The practical and normative models promise an elegant interpretation of this passage. Proponents of the practical model can say that what it is to know how to be filial is to produce filial inclinations when it is appropriate to do so: episodes of knowing how to be filial are thus understood as identical to inclinations to perform filial actions (Shi (2017, p. 54-5)). Proponents of the normative model can say something similar: they can say that episodes of knowing to be filial are again identical to inclinations to perform filial actions. Proponents of both models may thus endorse the following bold thesis about the metaphysics of genuine knowledge:

Simple Knowledge All episodes of genuinely knowing (how) to be filial are inclinations to perform filial actions.³¹

Simple Knowledge says that episodes of genuine knowledge are episodes of a certain motivational kind: they are inclinations to perform particular actions. On the assumption – which Wang seems to endorse – that inclinations are parts of actions (or even actions themselves), this principle would allow us to vindicate a remarkable thesis in the vicinity of the unity of knowledge and action: inclinations which are episodes of knowing (how) to be filial would be understood at once as episodes of knowledge and

³⁰For discussion, see also Wu (2018, p. 50). Wu goes on to suggest that “a single concern” (*yi nian* 一念) here is a technical term, and takes inspiration from Wang’s student Wang Ji (王幾, Longxi 龍溪 1498-1583) in giving an exegesis of the notion. But while I agree that Wang could use this expression as a technical term, I am unsure whether it is a technical term in this instance. Wang (in my view, undeniably) uses this expression as a technical term in the set phrase “one-concern *liangzhi* (一念良知)” (e.g. in IPL 139 QJ 56; IPL 162 QJ 76). In these cases, he seems to be imagining people *singlemindedly* set on a positive goal, and I think “singleminded” might be a good translation. But in the reconstruction of this conversation which Wu relies on, immediately following [T5], Wang describes how a thief’s thought of stealing also coincides with knowledge. This example makes it in my mind quite unlikely that he wants to describe the positive state of mind denoted by his semi-technical use of “singlemindedness”. Instead, it seems to me that he is emphasizing that even if a *single* concern arises, knowledge also does.

³¹This principle is presented as part of an analysis of knowing (how) to be filial, but an analogous principle analyzing objectual knowledge of filiality would also fall to my arguments below. That analogous principle for objectual knowledge is partly of interest because it could be understood as part of a development of the affective perceptual model discussed in the previous section, provided one endorses something like the further claim that episodes of perceiving filiality in an object just are inclinations to perform filial actions in response to the object.

parts of action. If the practical and normative models vindicate this thesis, they would offer us a deep understanding of the doctrine and why it was seen as so revolutionary – an important point in favor of both models.

This completes my presentation of the motivations for the practical and normative models. In the remainder of this section I will turn to criticize these models. I first present an argument against Simple Knowledge, which suggests that proponents of the practical and normative models should endorse an alternative thesis about the metaphysics of genuine knowledge, and give up their hope of vindicating the striking understanding of the unity of knowledge and action just described. I then turn to a more direct assault on the practical and normative models, which applies regardless of how proponents of these models understand the metaphysics of genuine knowledge.

My argument against Simple Knowledge is based on the following important passage, where Wang emphasizes *liangzhi*'s introspective knowledge of the ethical qualities of mental events (see n. 11) in connection with "extended knowledge":

[T6] 凡意念之發，吾心之良知無有不自知者。其善歟，惟吾心之良知自知之；其不善歟，亦惟吾心之良知自知之。。。

今欲別善惡以誠其意，惟在致其良知之所知焉爾。何則？意念之發，吾心之良知既知其為善矣，使其不能誠有以好之，而復背而去之，則是以善為惡，而自昧其知善之良知矣。意念之所發，吾之良知既知其為不善矣，使其不能誠有以惡之，而覆蹈而為之，則是以惡為善，而自昧其知惡之良知矣。若是，則雖曰知之，猶不知也，意其可得而誠乎！今於良知之善惡者，無不誠好而誠惡之，則不自欺其良知而意可誠也已。

Whenever a motivating concern arises, your mind's *liangzhi* automatically knows it. [If it is good] your mind's *liangzhi* automatically knows that it is good; [if it is bad], your mind's *liangzhi* also automatically knows that it is bad....

Now, if you want to discriminate good and evil in order to make your inclinations wholehearted, this just depends on extending what your *liangzhi* knows about them and nothing more. Why is this? When a [good] motivating concern arises, the *liangzhi* of your mind already knows that it is good. Suppose you do not wholeheartedly love it but instead turn away from it and diminish it. You would then be taking what is good to be bad and obscuring your *liangzhi* which knows that it is good. When a [bad] motivating concern arises, the *liangzhi* of your mind already knows that it is bad. Suppose you do not wholeheartedly hate it but instead backslide and promote it. You would then be taking what is bad to be good and obscuring your *liangzhi* which knows that it is bad. In such cases one says that you know it, but in fact you do not know – how could your inclinations have become wholehearted! [But] now if what *liangzhi* [recognizes as] good or bad is wholeheartedly loved or hated,

one's *liangzhi* is not deceived and one's inclinations can be wholehearted. (QJ 26.1070-1, cf. Chan (1963, p. 277-9))

My main observation is that, if Wang is discussing something related to genuine knowledge here, and if he endorses Simple Knowledge, this passage is bizarre. One would have expected Wang to emphasize not *liangzhi*'s knowledge that the relevant inclinations are good or bad, but instead the fact that *liangzhi* produces the relevant inclinations, and that this manifests its knowing (how) to act virtuously. But Wang says nothing of the kind: instead he talks about extending *liangzhi*'s knowledge about the relevant inclinations and motivating concerns.

This argument is rough. But one can think of the rough argument as resting on a more exact claim. Wang's remarks strongly suggest that the extended knowledge he considers does not merely correlate with *liangzhi*'s introspective knowledge that relevant inclinations are good, but that it has *liangzhi*'s (unobscured) knowledge that the inclinations are good as a part of it (where "part" is meant literally, as in the example of a party used at the opening of section 3). If Wang did not believe that *liangzhi*'s knowledge was a part of this extended knowledge, it is unclear why he would connect the fact that a person's *liangzhi* is "obscured" so closely to the fact that "one says that [they] know it, but in fact [they] do not know it". If Wang is discussing genuine knowledge here, the passage supports the idea that *liangzhi*'s introspective knowledge of the ethical qualities of mental events can be a part of episodes of genuine knowledge. The problem for Simple Knowledge is that Wang clearly holds that the event of *liangzhi* knowing the ethical qualities of inclinations is distinct from the (first-order) motivating concern or inclination itself.³² So Simple Knowledge is incompatible with the claim – supported by this passage – that genuine knowledge has *liangzhi*'s knowledge that inclinations are good as a part.

Both versions of the argument rest on the assumption that [T6] describes genuine knowledge, or at least something closely related to it. Appreciating the strongest case

³²Two others passages provide further support for this claim. First, in IPL 169 (QJ 81-2), after discussing thoughts that are the "aroused functioning" of *liangzhi* (良知之發用), Wang says that "*liangzhi* also is automatically able to know" (良知亦自能知得). This "also" strongly suggests that Wang takes the relevant knowledge to be distinct from the thoughts *liangzhi* produces. Second, in IPL 206 (QJ 105) Wang says: "Insofar as your motivating concerns (*yinian*) are attached, it [viz. *liangzhi*] knows that they are right if they are right, and that they are wrong if they are wrong" (爾意念著處，他是便知是，非便知非); here, he clearly takes the knowledge of the rightness and wrongness of the motivating concerns to be distinct from those motivating concerns themselves.

It is worth emphasizing that my argument here does not require the claim that knowing that an inclination is good is a non-affective state itself; for all I have said the event of knowing could be an affective internal response to the relevant inclination. The argument only requires the mental event of knowing that the mental event is good is distinct from the underlying mental event itself.

for this assumption requires a little background. In this passage, Wang discusses a connection between “extending knowledge” (*zhi zhi* 致知) and “making inclinations wholehearted” (*cheng yi* 誠意, often translated as “making the will sincere” or “making intentions sincere”). These terms come from a central section of the *Great Learning*, one of the most important canonical texts for scholars working in Wang’s tradition. In the *Great Learning*, the extension of knowledge and making inclinations wholehearted first appear as two items on what was understood by later scholars to be a list of four stages of or tasks in a person’s progress toward becoming fully virtuous. Essentially everyone in Wang’s tradition accepts the claim that a person can be fully virtuous person only if they have performed all four of these tasks. But Wang holds a further distinctive view about their relationship: that in fact one can not complete any one of the four without completing them all. So in particular, Wang holds that a person can have extended their knowledge if and only if they have made their inclinations wholehearted.³³

I emphasized in section 2 that Wang can sometimes use “extending knowledge” to describe cultivating abilities which are distinct from and broader than genuine knowledge (e.g. in *IPL* 171, *QJ* 83). But, in general, when Wang talks about a connection between an elevated form of knowledge and wholeheartedness of the inclinations, there should be a presumption that he has genuine knowledge in mind. In such passages, Wang is thinking of the state of a fully virtuous person, not about other capacities *liangzhi* might have for acquiring different forms of knowledge. So, given Wang’s detailed analysis of the relationship between extended knowledge and wholehearted inclinations in this present passage, it is natural to think that Wang has something related to genuine knowledge in view here as well.³⁴

So, it seems to me, Simple Knowledge does not correctly describe Wang’s views about the metaphysics of genuine knowledge. And, as a result, the practical and normative models cannot be motivated on the grounds that, by appealing to Simple Knowl-

³³*IPL* 137 *QJ* 54, *QJ* 26.1069-70, Chan (1963, 277). See Shun (2011, Section IV) and Ching (1976, p. 82-4) for discussion.

³⁴One might try to defend the claim that Wang does not speak of genuine knowledge in this passage by alleging that he had changed his mind about the unity of knowledge and action by this point in his career, in part on the basis of the fact that [T6] comes from a much later work (1527) than [T1] does (a conversation which must have taken place before 1517 and is usually reported as a record of conversations in 1512/13). But this response to the argument should not be attractive to proponents of the practical and normative models. First, [T6] is not much later than [T4] and proponents of the practical and normative models will want to emphasize the importance of the latter passage, so they cannot discount Wang’s later writings altogether. Second, Wang continued to speak of the unity of knowledge and action until quite late in his life; he still mentioned it in the year before [T6] was written (see Lederman (forthcoming, n. 5) for more discussion). Third, Qian Dehong (錢德洪, Xushan 緒山 1496-1574) tells us that [T6] comes from a set of ideas that Wang would use to introduce students to his system well before it was written down (*QJ* 26.1066).

edge, they can give a neat account of [T5] and related passages. This conclusion, of course, does not entail that the practical or the normative models are incorrect. There are many different positions one could develop that understand genuine knowledge as a form of knowledge how or knowledge-to, but which respect the constraint introduced by [T6], namely, that *liangzhi's* introspective knowledge that an inclination is good be a *part* of episodes genuine knowledge. Here, for ease of exposition, I will focus on one such thesis, which takes the event of genuine knowledge to be a *total mental event*, that is, an event composed of all mental events ongoing for a person at a given time:

Total Knowledge Episodes of a person's genuinely knowing (how) to be filial are total mental events of that person which have as a part an inclination to perform a filial action, as well as an episode of their *liangzhi's* knowing that the relevant inclination is good.³⁵

Unlike Simple Knowledge, Total Knowledge is consistent with the claim that *liangzhi's* introspective knowledge can be a part of genuine knowledge. It thus allows us to uphold the practical and normative models in a way which escapes the problem that [T6] poses for Simple Knowledge.³⁶

³⁵An alternative is

Complex Knowledge Episodes of a person's genuinely knowing (how) to be filial are complex events consisting of an inclination to perform a filial action, and *liangzhi's* introspective knowledge that that inclination is good.

Total Knowledge could be thought of as the "maximal" extension of the idea that the first-order inclination is itself an episode of genuine knowledge, by contrast to this "minimal" extension of that idea.

³⁶In his magisterial paper Shun (2011), Kwong-loi Shun does not discuss genuine knowledge in the terms I use in this paper, but he does seem to endorse something quite close to Total Knowledge as part of a general picture which is quite close to the normative model. He writes:

It follows from Wang's teaching that knowledge and action are not separate when the heart/mind responds in its original state. While one might have the thought that one should so respond and in that sense have knowledge, that knowledge is part of and does not guide the response. Action is constituted by that response, which also includes the thought of so responding. Thus, the terms *zhi* (knowledge) and *xing* (action) are just two different ways of describing the same response, one emphasizing the thought that is part of the response and the other emphasizing the actualization of the response. Thus, for Wang, the terms *zhi* and *xing* refer to the same thing, the former emphasizing the conscious discernment (*ming jue jing cha chu* 明覺精察處) and the latter the intimate actualization (*zhen qie du shi chu* 真切篤實處). ((Shun, 2011, p. 99-100))

Shun typically translates *yi* (意, my "inclination"), by "thought", and I'll assume that when he uses "thought" here he also means what I would translate as "inclination".

I want to highlight two points about this passage. First, I earlier described the normative model as endorsing the claim that genuine knowledge is a form of "knowing to", but one could consider it as a more general position, according to which genuine knowledge can also be a special form of knowledge of a normative proposition, for instance that one should do something. Huang Yong, the most vocal proponent

Before turning to my main objection to the practical and normative models, I want to pause for a moment to consider the relationship between the different models we have considered to this point. As the reader may already have noticed, there is an important sense in which the practical and normative models answer a different kind of question than the perceptual model does. One question is: is genuine knowledge best understood as knowledge-that, objectual knowledge, knowledge-how, or knowledge-to? Answers to this question might be called *construals* of genuine knowledge. A different question is: granting a construal of genuine knowledge, what kind of events are episodes of genuine knowledge? Answers to this question might be called *metaphysical analyses* of genuine knowledge. The distinction between construals and metaphysical analyses is not always clear. For instance, Genuine Perception is best understood as combining an objectual construal of genuine knowledge (there is no “seeing how” or “seeing to”, if “see” means a form of sensory perception) with a metaphysical analysis of genuine knowledge. But in some cases the difference is quite clear: I presented Perceptual Part above as assuming that genuine knowledge is construed as objectual knowledge (i.e. knowledge of filiality), but the main idea behind Perceptual Part is a constraint on a metaphysical analysis of genuine knowledge – that perception is a part of genuine knowledge – and this idea is compatible also with a construal of genuine knowledge as knowledge-how or knowledge-to. Understood in this broader way, which allows a construal of genuine knowledge as knowing-how or knowing-to, Perceptual Part is compatible with Total Knowledge. In fact, on the natural assumption that events of perceiving can be parts of the total mental events of people who genuinely know filiality or (how) to be filial, Total Knowledge *entails* Perceptual Part. Total Knowledge thus illustrates that the practical and normative models need not be seen

of this normative model, emphasizes the importance of distinguishing “knowing to” from knowledge of normative propositions (see, e.g. [Huang \(2017\)](#), p. 85-88), for discussion), but this aspect of Huang’s view could be seen as incidental to the main position. And, if we adopt this broader understanding of the normative model, then when Shun describes knowledge as “the thought that one should so respond”, this could be understood as an endorsement of the normative model. Second, it seems plausible that Shun has something like Total Knowledge in mind in this passage. When Shun concludes (“thus”) that “the terms *zhi* and *xing* refer to the same thing” he cannot any longer have in view the relationship between what he earlier described as the response (the total mental event) and the knowledge which he said was just a (proper) “part of the response” (since by definition nothing is identical to a proper part of it). Instead, he is best understood to have shifted his attention to genuine knowledge, and to be taking genuine knowledge to be distinct from the knowledge which is merely a part of the response, and identical with the person’s total mental event. (The shift is suggested by his citation of passages like *IPL* 133 (*QJ* 47-8) in the final sentences, since there Wang explicitly discusses genuine knowledge.) The basic idea seems to be that the whole response is understood to be knowledge because a part of it is, and that the part which is understood as knowledge is “the thought that one should respond”.

While it is not easy to categorize Shun’s detailed and rich exegesis in any simple way, these two points suggest that his position can be seen as combining the normative model with Total Knowledge.

as competitors to the perceptual model; if developed in the right way, they are in fact compatible with Perceptual Part. And this result supports the point that I made at the end of the last section: that on its own Perceptual Part is too weak to be the basis of a distinctive understanding of genuine knowledge. It must be supplemented in some way, for instance, by the practical or normative models, if it is to yield a strong thesis about the character of genuine knowledge.

These points about the relationship between the three models will be important again in the next section. But for let us turn back to the main thread, and to what I see as a crucial objection to both the practical and normative models. The objection turns on [T1], the passage which I used to introduce the unity of knowledge and action in section 2. Wang's first two examples in this passage – knowledge of a sight and knowledge of a smell – importantly do not exhibit the ambiguity between objectual knowledge, knowing-how and knowing-to that I emphasized at the start of this section in the cases of knowledge of filiality, respect, compassion, humaneness and conscientiousness; the expressions Wang uses in this case can only describe objectual knowledge. These examples do come from the *Great Learning*, but Wang was free to choose which aspects of the example he described as knowledge. It is therefore significant that he does not choose to describe this knowledge as knowing (how) to love a sight, or knowing (how) to hate an odor; instead he speaks of knowing the sight, and knowing the odor. Later in the passage, Wang presents three further examples: of pain, cold and hunger. These examples are less grammatically straightforward than the examples of the sight and the odor, but in the context, it is clear that they too must be read as describing objectual knowledge. Like the characters for “filiality” and “respect”, the characters for “pain”, “cold” and “hunger” can in general be understood either as nouns, *or* as verb-phrases (“be in pain”, “be cold”, “be hungry”). So in principle, one might take these examples to be intended as examples of knowing-to or knowing-how. But the way in which Wang uses these examples clearly favors understanding them as describing objectual knowledge. Wang says that one must experience pain, cold or hunger in order to know them in the way that interests him. This claim would be strange if he had knowledge-how or knowledge-to in mind: it is plausible that without previous experience, infants *do* know how to be in pain, how to be cold, and certainly how to be hungry. Moreover, without any prior experience they also know *to* be in pain, to be cold, and to be hungry. By contrast to the odd, implausible claims Wang would be making if he had knowledge-how or knowledge-to in mind, the claim that people can acquire objectual knowledge of pain, cold, or hunger only through experience is intuitively plausible. Since Wang does not give any argument to defend his claims about these three ex-

amples, it is far preferable to interpret him as speaking of objectual knowledge, and making these intuitively plausible claims.

Given that these examples all describe objectual knowledge, there is a strong case that Wang intends to describe objectual knowledge also when he speaks of filiality and respect. Wang uses the examples discussed in the previous paragraph to illustrate cases where knowledge arises simultaneously with or later than action. If he understands knowledge of filiality and respect as objectual knowledge, then the examples directly support his claim that knowledge of filiality and respect must come after filial or respectful action. If, however, he means to speak of knowing (how) to be filial or respectful, the examples which seem designed to support his claim are a non-sequitur.³⁷ The observation that acquiring objectual knowledge may require prior experience provides little or no support for the claim that knowing-how, or knowing-to requires prior experience. And the latter claim would be badly in need of some defense. It is not only intuitively plausible that both knowing-how and knowing-to often precede action, but this point is central to the canonical discussion in the *Mencius* ([T3]), of the fact that children know (how) to love their parents without prior experience. It is hard to imagine that Wang failed to appreciate this aspect of knowing-how and/or knowing-to given its importance in one of his favorite passages of the *Mencius*, and thus there is a strong case that Wang also means to describe objectual knowledge when he speaks about filiality and respect.³⁸

The practical and normative models do not offer a satisfying interpretation of this passage, and this is an important mark against them, since the passage is central to our understanding of the unity of knowledge and action. Still this observation does not show conclusively that the models are incorrect. It may be that, by comparison to the problems alternative models face, this one is not particularly deep, and that on balance, the practical and normative models offer the best overall account of what Wang says. I will return to this issue, and offer some comparison of the costs and benefits of different interpretations, after I present our fourth and final model of genuine knowledge, in the next section.

³⁷Yu (2014, p. 30-1) suggests that the examples of filiality and respect are examples of knowledge-how, while acknowledging that the surrounding examples are examples of objectual knowledge.

³⁸In *IPL* 136 (*QJ* 51), Wang says that in order to learn archery or writing one must first perform various actions – indeed he says that all learning requires some form of action. A proponent of the practical model in particular might seek to use these examples to argue that Wang does think that knowing how comes after action. But this claim overlooks an important fact. As I discuss in detail in [Lederman \(2021\)](#), Wang sees his doctrine as having two distinct aspects: one of which concerns training (*gong fu* 功/工夫), and the other of which concerns the original natural condition of knowledge and action (*ben ti* 本體). In the present paper, I have focused only on the latter of these, but in the passage from *IPL* 136, Wang is explicit that he is focused on the former aspect of the doctrine, about “training” (知行並進之功, *QJ* 52).

5 The introspective model

The introspective model can be motivated by considering the two arguments I have just given against the practical and normative models. First, consider the series of passages where Wang emphasizes the fact that *liangzhi* acquires introspective knowledge of the ethical quality of mental events (n. 11), and in particular, [T6], which led to the idea that episodes of genuine knowledge have *liangzhi*'s introspective knowledge of the ethical qualities of mental events as a part of them. In the context of the practical and normative models, this last idea was something of a problem: it forced proponents of those models to abandon Simple Knowledge and complicate their understanding of the metaphysics of genuine knowledge. But a proponent of the introspective model will see these texts as a starting point for their own understanding of genuine knowledge. They will see the passages as supporting not only the weak claim that genuine knowledge has the introspective knowledge of *liangzhi* as a part, but in fact the stronger claim that episodes of genuine knowledge *just are* episodes of introspective knowledge, that is:

Introspective Knowledge Episodes of a person's genuinely knowing filiality are episodes of their *liangzhi*'s knowing that an inclination to perform a filial action is good.

I will take the introspective model to be characterized by adherence to this claim.³⁹

Second, the practical and normative models stumbled on the fact that, in [T1], Wang emphasizes that the kind of knowledge which interests him is acquired through first-hand experience: one knows pain, cold and hunger, only after one has been in pain, been cold or been hungry. This basic point is not restricted to a single passage. Elsewhere Wang tells a student that the "mean before the feelings are aroused" can be known only by experiencing it: "it is like a mute person who eats a bitter melon; I can't describe it to you. If you want to know this bitterness, you will have to eat it for yourself" (IPL 125, QJ 42, 啞子吃苦瓜，與你說不得。你要知此苦，還須你自吃). (Xu Ai, the student we encountered in [T1], follows Wang's remark by saying that this example illustrates the character of genuine knowledge (*zhen zhi* 真知), and the recorder of this conversation approvingly tells us that on this day all present gained a little enlightenment.) These examples pose a problem for the practical and normative models,

³⁹In Lederman (forthcoming, §5), I characterize the "introspective model" slightly differently, as including some further commitments as well. There, I focus on the sense in which genuine knowledge can be understood as an elevated form of knowledge, and also use the name "Introspective Knowledge" for a stronger principle, which connects genuine knowledge to freedom from doxastic conflict (and hence to having wholehearted inclinations). Independently, I also discuss in detail there what is at stake in stating Introspective Knowledge in terms of *liangzhi*'s knowledge that an inclination is good, rather than its knowledge that an inclination is filial.

but the introspective model has a natural way of accounting for them. First, a person can have knowledge of features of their own mind only if their mind exhibits those features. So the general point that Wang is making – that certain forms of knowledge require experience – fits well with the idea that genuine knowledge is a form of knowledge of qualities of one’s own mental states. But, second, it is possible that Wang means to draw an even more exact parallel. Especially the later examples in [T1] – which he did not simply inherit from the *Great Learning*, but developed himself – seem carefully chosen to use terms (“pain”, “cold”, “hunger”) which may be (or in some cases must be) used to describe properties of sensations as opposed to properties of the objects which cause those sensations. Wang may be saying that these properties of sensations are exactly analogous to the goodness (or even filiality) instantiated by a person’s inclinations. Just as one can acquire direct knowledge of the relevant properties of sensations only by having sensations which instantiate them, so too, one can directly know filiality and respect in the relevant way only by having inclinations which are filial or respectful.

In the terms introduced in the previous section, the introspective model combines a construal of genuine knowledge as objective knowledge with a metaphysical analysis of genuine knowledge as the introspective knowledge that *liangzhi* has of the ethical qualities of mental events. According to the introspective model, genuine knowledge is a form of objectual knowledge. This objectual knowledge of filiality – which is understood to be identical with *liangzhi*’s introspective knowledge – cannot be understood as knowing-how, or knowing-to, so the introspective model is incompatible with the practical and normative models.⁴⁰

Introspective Knowledge is also incompatible with the metaphysical analyses and constraints on such analyses which we have seen so far. An example will help to illustrate this point. Suppose a person who sees their parents has an inclination to perform a filial action (say, to cool their parents’ bed in the summer), and that their *liangzhi* knows on the basis of introspection that this filial inclination is good. Supposing furthermore that they experience an episode of genuine knowledge, our different theories will give different verdicts about which mental event counts as that episode. Simple Knowledge says that the episode of genuine knowledge is the first-order inclination to perform a filial action, their inclination to cool their parents’ bed. Introspective Knowledge says

⁴⁰On the basis of IPL 288 (QJ 126), one might argue that *liangzhi*’s introspective knowledge that an inclination is good or bad is its loving or hating the inclination. Accordingly one might think that *liangzhi*’s introspective knowledge is constituted by its knowing (how) to love the good and (how) to hate the bad. But even granting this sense in which *liangzhi*’s knowledge might be understood as practical or normative knowledge, genuine knowledge of filiality would still not be a form of knowing (how) to be *filial*.

that it is their *liangzhi*'s introspective knowledge of the goodness of this first-order inclination. And Total Knowledge says that it is their total mental event, including not only the first-order inclination and the episode of *liangzhi*'s introspective knowledge, but also (compatibly with Perceptual Part) the episode of their perceiving their parents. Since the episode of introspective knowledge is distinct from the first-order inclination to cool the person's parents, and also distinct from the total mental event which has the introspective knowledge as a proper part, Introspective Knowledge is incompatible with both Simple Knowledge and Total Knowledge.⁴¹ And Introspective Knowledge is also incompatible with Perceptual Part, since the episodes of *liangzhi*'s introspective knowledge that certain mental events are good or bad in fact will never have perception as a part of them.⁴²

So the introspective model offers an understanding of genuine knowledge that is distinct from the models we have considered so far. But how well-supported is this model? The remainder of this section will examine this question, by working through the passages we have encountered in the paper to this point.

Let us start at the beginning, then, with [T1]. We saw above how the introspective model handles the second half of that passage, and in particular the five examples Wang discusses there (filiality, respect, pain, cold, and hunger). But one might wonder whether it can help to explain the first half of the passage, and in particular the two perceptual examples of loving a lovely sight and hating a hateful odor. I noted early on that the introduction of these examples can be read in two different ways, de-

⁴¹In n. 35 I discussed Complex Knowledge, according to which episodes of genuine knowledge are complex mental events, consisting in part of first-order inclinations and in part of episodes of introspective knowledge. Introspective Knowledge is on its face distinct from this thesis as well, since it identifies the episode of genuine knowledge solely with the episode of introspective knowledge. But one might wonder how different they really are. Since having introspective knowledge that a filial inclination is good requires having a filial inclination, it might seem that proponents of Introspective Knowledge are committed to thinking that the filial inclination is in fact a component of the episode of genuine knowledge. But the thesis should not be understood in this way. To illustrate the point, consider a different example. I know that Beijing is the capital of the PRC. The existence of the city of Beijing (and its being the capital of the PRC) is required for my mental state to count as knowledge, but there is a salient sense in which the city itself is not a part of my mental state of knowing. Similarly, it is a precondition for the relevant introspective to be knowledge of filiality that the relevant inclination be filial, but the inclination itself need not be a part of the mental event of *liangzhi*'s knowing that it is good.

⁴²This conclusion is consistent with a number of other claims that might tie perception to genuine knowledge. Perhaps most obviously, one might hold that perception of the environment is a precondition of genuine knowledge. To illustrate the idea, suppose that, necessarily, any party must be preceded by some form of invitation. Plausibly the invitations – unlike the lawn games or the conversations – would not be parts of the party, even though they are required for the party to take place. The view in the main text is consistent with the claim that a person can have genuine knowledge only if they perceive the environment around them. For even given this claim, the perception, like the invitations, need not be a *part* of the episode of genuine knowledge.

pending on how one understands the word I have translated “like” (如) – whether as “for example” or “similar to”. On the reading preferred by proponents of the perceptual model, loving a lovely sight and hating a hateful odor are understood as *examples* of genuine knowledge, so some perceptual knowledge counts as genuine knowledge. But there is another reading available – which is equally natural linguistically – according to which Wang merely intends the examples as illustrative analogues for genuine knowledge, and not examples of it. On this reading, Wang says that having genuine knowledge is *similar to* loving a lovely sight or hating a hateful odor, insofar as action and knowledge are closely connected in both cases. Importantly, on this interpretation, his remarks do not imply that seeing a lovely sight or smelling a hateful odor are instances of genuine knowledge. So, there is a perfectly natural way of reading these examples on which they too are compatible with the introspective model.⁴³

According to the introspective model, the examples of loving a lovely sight and hating a hateful odor do not illustrate the role of perception in genuine knowledge, but they do illustrate an important aspect of Wang’s view of the mechanics of genuine knowledge. In the lead-up to the key passage [T6], Wang uses these examples from the *Great Learning* again, this time to illustrate the way in which *liangzhi* loves good motivating concerns and hates bad ones. Just as, when a person sees a lovely color or smells a hateful odor, they spontaneously and automatically love or hate, so too, Wang says, when a person’s *liangzhi* recognizes that an inclination is good or bad, it spontaneously and automatically loves or hates it. Wang clearly holds that *liangzhi*’s recognizing that an inclination is good or bad is tightly tied to *liangzhi*’s loving and hating, just as, in [T1] he says that seeing the sight is closely connected to loving it, and smelling the odor is closely connected to hating it.⁴⁴ Thus, proponents of the introspective model can make sense of Wang’s emphasis on these examples from the *Great Learning* by holding that Wang sees the examples as important models for the way in which, when *liangzhi* acquires introspective knowledge that an inclination is good or bad (i.e. the kind of knowledge which constitutes genuine knowledge), it spontaneously and

⁴³Elsewhere I argue that evidence from one of Wang’s letters strongly suggests that he himself favored the second reading, in line with the introspective model, but I will not press this point here. See Lederman (forthcoming, §5), discussing QJ 5.218, Ching (1972, p. 91).

⁴⁴More strongly than this, Wang may even hold that for *liangzhi* to know that a motivating concern is good (or bad) just is for *liangzhi* to love (hate) the motivating concern (IPL 288, QJ 126). (This passage is framed in terms of knowing that the relevant mental event is right/ correct (是) or wrong/ incorrect (非), not in terms of its knowing that it is good or bad, but we can elide this difference for present purposes.) This claim could be thought of as a version of Simple Knowledge, transposed to the key of introspection. Instead of saying that a person’s affective responses count as knowledge, Wang would be saying instead that *liangzhi*’s affective responses to their mental events count as knowledge of qualities they instantiate. Lee (1994, p. 433) emphasizes this point in a slightly different context.

automatically loves or hates the relevant inclination.⁴⁵

Our second text, [T2], also does not pose a serious challenge to the introspective model. As we saw above, Wang's key remarks about perception and knowledge in this passage ("when it sees the parents, it automatically knows filiality [or: (how) to be filial]", and so on) can be understood in at least two different ways: first, as claiming that knowledge of filiality, respect or compassion can have perception as a part; or, second, as claiming that perception is a precursor to the separate, automatic achievement of genuine knowledge. Proponents of the perceptual model have found the first of these claims in the passage; proponents of the practical and normative models have found the second there. For the second group of interpreters, perceiving one's parents is simply the occasion for *liangzhi* to exhibit its knowing (how) to be filial in the circumstances, presumably by producing a filial inclination or concern. And proponents of the introspective model can offer a similar reading of this passage: they can say that Wang means that (for example) when a person sees their parents, their mind produces an inclination to perform a filial action, and, as a result *liangzhi* comes to know that this inclination is good. Wang of course does not elucidate this picture in detail in the passage, but what he says is consistent with it.⁴⁶

So the introspective model can make sense of the main passages that were supposed to support the perceptual model.⁴⁷ How does it fare on the passages which seemed to

⁴⁵As noted above in n. 13, some authors who speak of genuine knowledge as a form of perception understand "perception" to include the operation of an inner sense. It may be that, if pressed, many who have defended the perceptual model in print would say that they did not intend to endorse the claim that perception was a part of genuine knowledge, but only the claim that the automatic, spontaneous way in which a person exhibits or acquires genuine knowledge is analogous to the automatic and spontaneous way in which people acquire knowledge on the basis of perception. I want to emphasize that my arguments against the perceptual model are *not* arguments against this claim: as the discussion in the main text illustrates, I in fact endorse it. But even if some proponents of the perceptual model would retreat to this claim when pressed, abandoning the claim that perception is really a part of genuine knowledge, this seems to me an important change of view, and I hope my discussion here at least helps to clarify the difference between the relevant positions.

⁴⁶One might try to decide between these interpretations on the basis of Wang's comment in the passage that "this is *liangzhi* and should not be sought outside", since it might seem that this comment explicitly states the object of the knowledge is not external to the mind, and thus that perceiving one's parents or brothers is an *occasion* for having genuine knowledge, but not itself part of genuine knowledge (since the perception, but not the knowledge, has an external object). At times I have been attracted to this idea. But I note that it is not the only reading of the remark: proponents of the perceptual model can instead read the remark as emphasizing *liangzhi's* self-sufficient role in the apprehension of ethical qualities, as opposed to the physical location of the qualities which are apprehended. On this reading, the point would be that a person need not have acquired other knowledge in order for *liangzhi* to operate in the right way.

⁴⁷How should we understand the relationship between Wang's notion of genuine knowledge and the example of genuine knowledge which Cheng Yi uses described in n. 16? The introspective model – unlike the perceptual model – seems committed to denying that Wang held that this example was an example of genuine knowledge. But there is no obvious problem for the introspective model here. Cheng lived four centuries before Wang, and while there was undoubtedly a preference for conforming with the remarks

favor the practical and normative models?

First, there is the canonical passage from the *Mencius* ([T3]), together with Wang's explicit discussions of it. I suggested earlier that proponents of both the practical and normative models might want to emphasize the parallel between these examples and Wang's discussion in [T2]. Proponents of the introspective model, by contrast, should reject the proposed parallel. They will agree with proponents of the practical and normative models (as everyone should) that among many other things, *liangzhi* is the basis of a person's knowing to love their parents, and also of their knowing how to take care of their parents (as emphasized in *IPL* 138 (*QJ* 55-6), for instance). They will also agree that Wang ascribes these powers to *liangzhi* in part on the basis of *Mencius* 7A. 15 ([T3]). But they will naturally hold that, in [T2], Wang is not focused on *these* capacities of *liangzhi*, but is rather interested in *liangzhi* as the basis of the elevated form of knowledge which is closely related to action, that is, of genuine knowledge. They will then argue that this genuine knowledge is best understood not as knowing-how or knowing-to, but instead as introspective knowledge of the ethical qualities of mental events. So, while proponents of the introspective model will accept that [T3] provides important constraints on how we should understand *liangzhi*, they will deny that the fact that we should understand "know" as "know how" or "know to" in [T3], and *IPL* 118 (*QJ* 39), creates significant pressure to understand "know" in either of these ways in [T2], or to understand genuine knowledge more broadly as a form of knowing how or knowing to.

Next, skipping over for a moment the passages from the letter to Gu Donqiao ([T4] and the preceding discussion from *IPL* 138), let us turn to [T5] and related passages which seemed to support Simple Knowledge. The introspective model offers a simple, natural account of the passages other than [T5] which I cited in the lead-up to that text. The first two passages I cited there (*IPL* 132 *QJ* 46-7, *IPL* 226, *QJ* 109-110) focus on the fact that inclinations or concerns are already action; they do not themselves explain how knowledge might accompany these mental events. But, according to the introspective model, Wang's point is clear: he emphasizes that a person's mental events are actions or parts of actions because, once one recognizes that actions start with mental events, it becomes obvious that the relevant form of knowledge – introspective knowledge of the quality of these mental events – will arise at the same time as the action begins. And, similarly, the second set of passages which connect knowledge and inclinations (see n.

of eminent predecessors in Wang's tradition, Wang did not hesitate to diverge from them in many cases. The fact that the introspective model sees a divergence in the analysis of this example does not seem to me a serious cost to the view.

29), can be read as emphasizing that, although inclinations are not themselves (or at least not always) identical to knowledge, they are the objects of an important form of knowledge. So, in both cases, the introspective model can offer a natural account of what Wang wants to achieve.

[T5] itself, however, does seem to present a challenge for the introspective model. Understood literally, the passage says that a concern – in context, a first-order concern to perform some action – *itself* is the form of knowledge that is relevant to the unity of knowledge and action. The introspective model cannot make sense of this claim, since a first-order concern cannot be understood as the kind of introspective knowledge which the introspective model takes genuine knowledge to be. But the introspective model is not alone in this regard. The only natural theory I am aware of which can make sense of the literal content of what Wang says in the passage is Simple Knowledge. But, as we have seen, Simple Knowledge itself should be rejected. So every natural, live interpretation of Wang must offer a non-literal interpretation of this passage. The most obvious idea is that Wang says that the concern *just is* knowledge not because he means that it is, but because he wants to emphasize the close connection between a concern and knowledge. Proponents of Total Knowledge, for instance, might say that Wang’s goal is to emphasize that a single concern can be the basis for (genuine) knowledge if one’s total mental event is relevantly coherent.⁴⁸ And proponents of Introspective Knowledge can say much the same thing: they can say that Wang holds that the single concern is the occasion for introspective knowledge, which coincides with the arising of the concern in the mind. This interpretation does not capture the full force of Wang’s claim that the concern itself *is* knowledge. But this should be not a problem for Introspective Knowledge in particular, since – as I have said – I do not know of an interpretation which can. And in general it is reasonable to think that Wang might make the strong claim about the identity of the concern and knowledge in order to draw our attention to something like the claim “when the concern arises, there is already knowledge”.

This brings us at last to what are in my view the hardest passages for the introspective model, the two passages I discussed from the letter to Gu Dongqiao: IPL 138 (QJ 55-6), and [T4] (IPL 139 QJ 56). As we saw, in IPL 138 Wang explicitly describes extending one’s knowledge of how to take care of one’s parents, and in [T4] he discusses knowledge-how and knowledge of what one should do, in the lead-up to an explicit discussion of the unity of knowledge and action. I will first lay out what I see as the best

⁴⁸Proponents of Total Knowledge might hope to make this point more explicit by claiming that Wang uses the expression “single concern” (*yi nian* 一念) in a semi-technical way in this passage to mean something like “singleminded state of mind”. But as I argued above in n. 30, I am not yet convinced that we can find this point in the passage.

interpretive strategy for proponents of the introspective model here, before turning to the costs and benefits of this approach.

Proponents of the introspective model should argue that in the passage from *IPL* 138, Wang discusses extending a capacity of *liangzhi* whose extension does not result in genuine knowledge properly understood. Everyone agrees that Wang holds not only that *liangzhi* produces introspective knowledge, but also that it produces appropriate thoughts and emotions in the right circumstances (*IPL* 169 *QJ* 81-2; *IPL* 290 *QJ* 126). So it is not surprising that Wang might speak of acting on the inclinations that *liangzhi* produces as “extending *liangzhi*”. But, crucially, this claim does not entail that this form of “extending one’s *liangzhi* which knows how to warm and cool” or “extending one’s *liangzhi* which knows how to serve and nourish” itself counts as genuine knowledge (*zhen zhi* 真知). Instead, this “extended knowledge” can be thought of as a separate mental state which goes along with or precedes the acquisition of genuine knowledge.

By contrast to this reading of *IPL* 138, proponents of the introspective model should take a different tack in interpreting [T4] (*IPL* 139). They should hold that Wang describes genuine knowledge here, but argue that, when he does, he means to describe objectual knowledge. In the passage, Wang does start out by discussing knowing-how, but, as we saw above, in the course of his discussion he changes his example, and explicitly speaks of (normative) knowledge that the ruler should be humane, and that the subject should be conscientious. When he turns to the knowledge that would count as extended knowledge in that passage, he uses an expression which is crucially ambiguous, and can be understood as describing objectual knowledge. Proponents of the introspective model should argue that he is describing objectual knowledge here, and making a point similar to the one we saw in the examples of pain, cold and hunger in [T1], namely, that one can acquire knowledge of the relevant virtues only by experiencing them oneself.

This interpretive strategy allows us to read these two passages as consistent with the introspective model. But the interpretations I have just described are certainly not how one would understand these passages on a first encounter. I want to acknowledge, then, that these passages do provide some evidence against the introspective model.⁴⁹

⁴⁹I should note that there is also some evidence that in fact this interpretation of [T4] is on the right track. Earlier in *IPL* 139 (*QJ* 57), Wang says “If one does not examine the subtleties of the one concern of the mind’s *liangzhi*, then what use would learning be?” (不於吾心良知一念之微而察之，亦將何所用其學乎?) (In this passage, by contrast to the one discussed in 30, I think it plausible that “one concern” 一念 is meant as a technical term; a better translation might be “the subtleties of the singlemindedness of the mind’s *liangzhi*”.) The fact that Wang speaks here of *examining* one’s own *liangzhi*, seems to me to support the interpretation of [T4] I sketched in the previous two paragraphs. While Wang focuses throughout the discussion here on the fact that *liangzhi* produces the appropriate inclinations and concerns in response to

But I want now to argue that this evidence against the introspective model is much weaker than the evidence against the practical and normative models, and that, on balance, the introspective model remains the most attractive of the interpretations we have considered.

I want to make two points in defense of this claim. First, by presenting the practical and normative models together, there is an important way in which I have made these models seem more attractive than I believe they are. There are a number of passages supporting the disjunction of the practical model and the normative model. But the support for each of these models on their own is not particularly strong. For instance, the passage from the *Mencius* ([T3]), is naturally read as describing knowing-to, but not naturally read as describing knowing-how (see above, n. 26). So, while the normative model is in a strong position to invoke the parallel between that passage and [T3] to motivate their view, the practical model is not. But other passages exhibit the reverse pattern, supporting the practical model but not the normative one. *IPL* 138, which we have just been discussing, provides strong support for the practical model, since Wang discusses knowing-how there explicitly. But the normative model cannot explain his emphasis on knowing-how in this passage, and in fact it faces exactly the same problem the introspective model faces in trying to make sense of this passage. More generally, the practical model does not offer a good account of the normative model's favorite passages, while the normative model does not offer a good account of the practical model's favorite passages, and as a result, neither has as broad support in the texts as they might have seemed to have in the discussion above.

Second, the introspective model's challenges with the passages from *IPL* 138 and *IPL* 139 are far less troubling than the practical and normative model's challenges with [T1]. The introspective model has a way of explaining what Wang is doing in *IPL* 138, by emphasizing the distinction between the capacities of *liangzhi* and the achievement of genuine knowledge. By contrast, I do not see how the practical or normative models can offer a natural account of what Wang says in [T1]. And there is an important difference between the aspects of the passages which give these models trouble. The introspective model struggles to make sense of some examples in *IPL* 138. While I believe the introspective model can make sense of these examples, even if somehow it were shown that the introspective model could not make sense of them, it does not seem to me catastrophic if we are forced to say that these examples do not quite fit with

one's changing circumstances, there are still suggestions (as in this quote) that he takes the relevant form of knowledge to be acquired by investigating the concerns produced by *liangzhi*, that is, that the relevant form of knowledge is introspective knowledge.

Wang's considered view. By contrast, the practical and normative models struggle to make sense of what is arguably *the* central claim of the unity of knowledge and action: the claim that the relevant form of knowledge does not precede action. Being forced to concede that we cannot make sense of this claim, is tantamount to giving up on the exegesis of the unity of knowledge and action altogether.⁵⁰

This completes my arguments in favor of the introspective model by comparison to the normative and practical models. Together with my arguments in section 3, that the perceptual model does not on its own constitute a distinctive understanding of genuine knowledge, these arguments lead me to the conclusion that the introspective model should be preferred over the other models of genuine knowledge I have considered in this paper.⁵¹

6 Conclusion

The main aim of this paper has been to develop detailed versions of the perceptual, practical, normative and introspective models of genuine knowledge. In the course of developing these models, I also presented a series of arguments which constrain them. For example, I argued that Wang does not hold that genuine knowledge is an elevated form of perception, and that the unity of knowledge and action cannot be understood to

⁵⁰A third, more involved argument against the practical and normative models aims at Total Knowledge. Total Knowledge is not an obvious metaphysical thesis that any person casually considering the question of what it is to know filiality would come up with on their own. If Wang endorsed this view, one would expect him to have said much more about how we can understand a total mental event as knowledge, and what a total mental event is. But we find no such explanations in the text. Moreover, some comments he makes seem to flatly contradict Total Knowledge. In [T6], Wang discusses an elevated form of knowledge, and specifically describes a barrier to that elevated form of knowledge as "obscuring one's *liangzhi* which knows goodness". Earlier I extracted from this passage only the weak claim that introspective knowledge is a part of genuine knowledge. But this reading is a bit of a stretch to make space for the practical and normative models. By far the more natural reading of this passage takes it to say, more strongly, that *liangzhi's* knowledge of goodness would *be* the elevated form of knowledge (i.e. genuine knowledge) were these obstacles absent. On this reading Wang essentially asserts Introspective Knowledge. By contrast, it is unclear how proponents of Total Knowledge should make sense of Wang's remarks here. Perhaps there are other metaphysical analyses of genuine knowledge that could vindicate the practical and normative models. But to me these problems for Total Knowledge are at least an important challenge for the practical and normative models, which I have not seen addressed by their proponents.

⁵¹I have not discussed interpretations which attribute to Wang different construals or different metaphysical analyses of genuine knowledge in different passages. While it may be worth exploring interpretations of this kind further, those who (like me) believe that Wang's views on the unity of knowledge and action were largely consistent over the course of his career will see them as something of a last resort. Those who think that Wang's views about the unity of knowledge and action underwent significant changes, for instance, after 1521 will of course see the costs of such an interpretation very differently than I do.

concern the putatively distinctive perceptual capacities of fully virtuous people. Similarly, I argued that some examples where Wang discusses genuine knowledge should not be understood to describe knowing-how or knowing-to. In the previous section, I went beyond these piecemeal constraints, and argued that my own introspective model of genuine knowledge is on balance preferable to the alternatives considered here.

The four interpretations I have considered in this paper are certainly not the only interpretations which have been offered in the voluminous literature on Wang Yang-ming. I have discussed these four because they seemed most salient to me, whether because of recent scholarly attention they have received, or because they strike me as naturally suggested by one passage or another. But it may well be that some other historical interpretation – or a new one that I have not been able to imagine – can make better sense of the texts. I would consider this paper a success if it inspires others to revive or develop an alternative interpretation which does better than the ones I have considered here.

In closing, I want to address an assumption I have made throughout. My investigation has been premised on the assumption that Wang held systematic views about genuine knowledge. But there is a case to be made, to the contrary, that Wang was not interested in advancing detailed or systematic theories of any kind, whether about genuine knowledge or anything else. I do not believe the current scholarly consensus points strongly against, or strongly in favor of this view of Wang Yangming. But I do believe that an important strategy for making progress in our understanding of the extent to which Wang was a systematic thinker is to study his writings on the hypothesis that he was. In some cases, one chooses to investigate a hypothesis because it is most likely to be true out of the reasonable alternatives. But in other cases, one chooses to investigate a hypothesis because it is in an intuitive sense stronger than the reasonable alternatives. Since intuitively stronger hypotheses make more predictions than weaker ones, in general they are more likely to be falsified than weaker hypotheses are. If we succeed in falsifying a strong hypothesis, we learn the important fact that the hypothesis is false. But even if we do not falsify the hypothesis, we learn more than we would have by investigating a weaker one. Since we are more likely to falsify a stronger hypothesis, the fact that we have failed to do so is more evidence in favor of that hypothesis than we could have obtained in favor of a weaker one by the same methods.

We thus have good reason to begin our inquiry with the hypothesis that Wang had coherent and consistent views about genuine knowledge. This hypothesis is intuitively much stronger than the alternative hypothesis that Wang did not have coherent or con-

sistent views on this topic. So, whether or not it turns out to be true, it is worth exploring first, if we wish to learn more about the philosophy of Wang Yangming.

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