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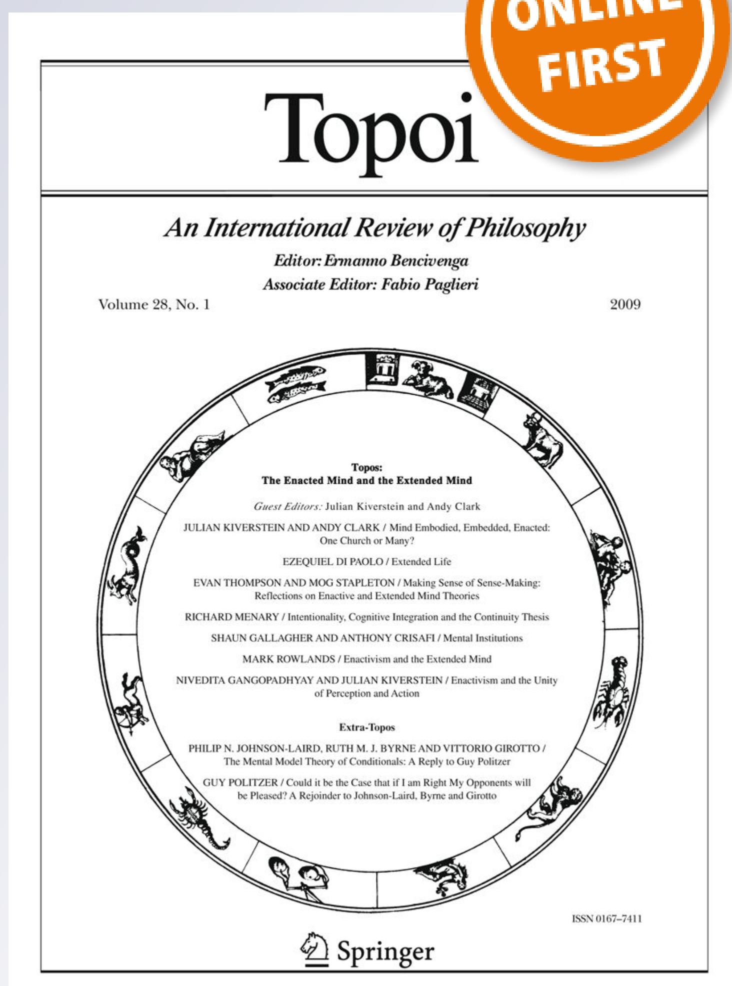

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Varieties of Knowledge in Plato and Aristotle

Timothy Chappell

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Abstract I develop the relatively familiar idea of a variety of forms of knowledge—not just propositional knowledge but also knowledge-how and experiential knowledge—and show how this variety can be used to make interesting sense of Plato's and Aristotle's philosophy, and in particular their ethics. I then add to this threefold analysis of knowledge a less familiar fourth variety, objectual knowledge, and suggest that this is also interesting and important in the understanding of Plato and Aristotle.

Keywords Plato · Aristotle · Epistemology · Knowledge

1 Introduction

> As usual, "knowledge" is understood as propositional knowledge.
>
> (Williamson 2000: 185)

> Most boys or youths who have had much knowledge drilled into them, have their mental capacities not strengthened, but overlaid by it. They are crammed with mere facts,[1] and with the opinions or phrases of other people, and these are accepted as a substitute for the power to form opinions of their own; and thus the sons of eminent fathers, who have spared no pains in their education, so often grow up mere parroters of what they have learnt, incapable of using their minds except in the furrows traced for them.
>
> (John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*, Chapter 1)

> It is not for lack of philosophy those who inquire into this question go wrong; it is just that substance is primary, and they have no conception of substance.
>
> (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1004b9-10)

2 I

For most philosophers today, the paradigm of knowledge is propositional knowledge. Of course most contemporary philosophers are likely to accept that there are other kinds of knowledge too. They may, for example (and these are the two commonest examples), agree that there is also knowledge-how (ability knowledge), or knowledge-what-it's-like (experiential knowledge); or both. But these, they are likely to say or assume, are marginal or secondary cases; it is propositional knowledge that is primary. So Timothy Williamson in my first epigraph. So also Duncan Pritchard:

> An ant might plausibly be said to know how to navigate its terrain, but would we want to say that the ant has propositional knowledge; that there are facts

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[1] Mill's *Autobiography* came out in 1873, so this is certainly an apparent and probably an actual allusion to Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854).

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> which the ant knows?…Intuitively not, and this marks out the importance of propositional knowledge over other types of knowledge like ability knowledge, which is that such knowledge presupposes the sort of relatively sophisticated intellectual abilities possessed by humans.[2]

Some contemporary philosophers go further than Pritchard goes here. They insist that propositional knowledge is the *only* kind of knowledge, and that all apparently other kinds of knowledge must either be eliminated, exposed as not really knowledge at all, or else be reduced or otherwise assimilated to propositional knowledge. Here eliminative projects are likely to take the form of insisting that experiential knowledge is just *experience* and not also knowledge, and that ability knowledge is just *ability* and not also knowledge. Though I won't try to make this out here, I think a good answer to such critics can be built around Wilfrid Sellars' thought that "In characterising an episode or a state as that of *knowing*…we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says" (Sellars 1956: 253). Ability knowledge and experiential knowledge count as knowledge because they stand "in the logical space of reasons" just as much as propositional knowledge does. What we characteristically do as cognitive agents is understand, deliberate, calculate, assess, evaluate, wonder, hesitate, decide, act, and so on. Knowledge-how and experiential knowledge are no less indispensable inputs to these activities than propositional knowledge—and no less indispensable outputs, too. There is a breadth and richness to a full understanding of knowledge which would be missed by an exclusively propositional conception.

As for reductive projects, these usually try to show that experiential knowledge and/or knowledge-how is really a variety of propositional knowledge, or reducible to propositional knowledge. The best-known recent example of such a project is Jason Stanley and Timothy Williamson's argument that knowledge-how is one variety (a special variety, but still a variety) of propositional knowledge, given in what they call a "practical mode of presentation" (Stanley and Williamson 2001, Stanley 2011). Another example is the argument found in David Armstrong (1968) and some other strongly naturalistic philosophers of mind, that experience is really just a form of vividly-presented information: thus, so-called experiential knowledge, insofar as it is *knowledge*, is purely propositional. A third well-known reductive project is the Lewis-Nemirow project to reduce "knowing what it's like" to knowing how—the "ability hypothesis", as it's often called (Lewis 1988, Nemirow 1990). This looks at first sight like a project to reduce experiential knowledge to knowledge-how, but in fact the target for reduction is a particular kind of propositional knowledge. (The ability hypothesis is put up to oppose Frank Jackson's knowledge argument, according to which Mary the colour-blind colour scientist, who has spent her life immured in a monochrome room, gains propositional knowledge on first experiencing redness; hence, Jackson argued, not all propositional knowledge is physical knowledge.[3] The ability hypothesis is the claim that what she gains is not propositional knowledge but an ability, the ability to simulate or imagine the experience of redness.)

Propositional knowledge now dominates the scene, but once upon a time, we might say, it was experiential knowledge that was dominant. One way of reading Hume's or Locke's philosophy (perhaps Mill's *A System of Logic* too) is as the project of building an entire epistemology upon experiential knowledge, upon what is immediately presented in experience, and reducing other kinds of knowledge to experiential wherever possible; more recently, that is one obvious way to read both Carnap and the Russell of *Lectures on Logical Atomism*.

We might even say that, for a time, knowledge-how was the dominant conception. The time I mean is the 1940s to 1950s, the heyday of behaviourism, the time of Ryle's philosophy and the later Wittgenstein's.[4] We might say that the dominant reductive projects of that period were, in their epistemological aspect, projects of reducing propositional knowledge and experiential knowledge to knowledge-how.

Some philosophers today are oddly proud of their own dismissiveness about the history of (western) philosophy. There are plenty of familiar reasons why such dismissiveness is at least as mistaken as a reflex dismissiveness about, say, Indian or Chinese or African philosophy would be. Travel broadens the mind, and that includes time-travel. Apparently it was possible for some of the cleverest

[2] Pritchard (2009: 4). Of course Pritchard says this in an introductory book. My point is that Pritchard accurately represents an orthodoxy, not that he subscribes to it. (Williamson is perhaps more committed than Pritchard to the primacy of propositional knowledge.)

[3] Jackson 1982. Jackson has since repudiated the "knowledge argument", for reasons which I for one find much less convincing than I found the argument.

[4] The later Wittgenstein explicitly denied that he was a behaviourist (*Philosophical Investigations* I, 308, my emphasis): "And now it looks as if we had denied mental processes. *And naturally we don't want to deny them*"). This plain fact is not to be got round by claiming that for all his denials he is best read as a behaviourist; he isn't. Behaviourism, after all, is verificationism about the mental: the meaning of mental discourse is (is identical with? Is determined by?) what verifies it, "external behaviour" (meaning what?). It should be perfectly obvious that the later Wittgenstein was no verificationist; ergo, he was no behaviourist. However, he was often misunderstood as a behaviourist both by his followers and by their opponents. Moreover, there is a lot in his philosophy that is rightly understood as an emphasis on various forms of knowledge-how: knowing how to apply a rule, to take one obvious example, and concept-mastery, to take another. More about concept-mastery in Sect. II.

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philosophers of other generations to think that experiential knowledge or even knowledge-how was the basic or paradigm kind of knowledge, to which all other kinds, including propositional knowledge, should be reduced. That remarkable fact ought, once remarked, to undermine the implicit confidence of many contemporary philosophers that it is simply beyond question that propositional knowledge is the paradigm. Maybe it would make more sense to think of propositional knowledge, knowledge-how, and experiential knowledge as *all* being interesting and important varieties of knowledge, with none of them given absolute priority over the other two.

This brings us to another reason for not being dismissive about history, which is a reinventing-the-wheel thought (the world-weary may suspect it is a boulder-of-Sisyphus thought as well). In its present application, the point is that accepting a variety of forms of knowledge may bring a variety of benefits. In particular, it might help us rethink what it means to talk of knowledge or objectivity in some areas of human life. Perhaps scientific knowledge is exclusively a matter of propositional knowledge. In fact I doubt it, for reasons we'll come to. But even if it is, it doesn't follow that knowledge in other areas of human life should be a matter (exclusively, perhaps even at all) of propositional knowledge.

Maybe, for example, moral knowledge, aesthetic knowledge (see Kieran 2011), folk-psychological knowledge, perhaps even religious knowledge are not just, or not primarily, propositional knowledge. Maybe moral knowledge, or a lot of it anyway, is best understood as knowledge-how;[5] maybe much aesthetic knowledge is best understood as experiential knowledge; maybe much folk-psychological knowledge is a mixture of the two. If so, then there is knowledge in these areas which, as knowledge, is objective—yet is not vulnerable to the kinds of challenge that are so familiarly pressed against propositional knowledge about ethics, or aesthetics, or folk psychology, or indeed religion. (I am not of course denying that there might be other kinds of challenge to which such knowledge is vulnerable.) Both in and beyond philosophy, many people are now attacking the very idea of knowledge that is not scientific but humane with a sectarian ferocity that does them no credit whatever, and also rather undermines their frequent self-identification as "humanists". This is just one reason why exploring the varieties of knowledge now seems to me an urgent task for genuine humanists: a word which I mean not in its original sense of specialists in *literae humaniores*, but in the broader and more recent sense of philosophers and other thinkers who, like Wittgenstein, take the pursuit of humane understanding seriously as a pursuit of *understanding*, not merely as one more option for our leisure-time entertainment. "People nowadays think that scientists exist to instruct them, poets, musicians, etc. to give them pleasure. The idea *that these have something to teach them*—that does not even occur to them."[6]

3 II

Another thing we can do with the varieties of knowledge is reapply them to the study of the history of philosophy. We can ask whether it helps us to understand particular arguments or movements of thought in the light of those varieties. In the case of Plato's and Aristotle's thought, my answer to this question, which I develop in the rest of this paper, is yes.

Of course I am not claiming that either Plato's or Aristotle's thinking was explicitly structured around, or even that either directly asserted, the thesis that there are the three varieties of knowledge that I have distinguished so far—experiential, propositional, knowledge-how. Both philosophers do distinguish between a variety of doxastic states. The Divided Line (*Republic* 509d-513e) distinguishes *eikasia*, *pistis*, *dianoia*, *noesis*, at least two of which are presumably worth calling varieties of knowledge. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1139b15 ff. recognises five "intellectual virtues", *techne*, *episteme*, *phronesis*, *sophia*, *nous*, which probably all deserve to be called by the English word "knowledge". (Notice how Aristotle stresses in this passage that all of these are powers of the mind which are *truth-apt*, οἷς ἀληθεύει ἡ ψυχὴ τῷ καταφάναι ἢ ἀποφάναι.) But these distinctions represent different ways of dividing conceptual space from my thesis about three varieties of knowledge (and perhaps both cases are concerned with different conceptual spaces). I think both Plato and Aristotle would have *denied* the thesis that there are just these three varieties of knowledge, for reasons we shall come to in Sect. IV. My thesis is only that we can use the three varieties of knowledge I have identified to help us understand some of the things that go on in Plato's and Aristotle's texts.

I believe I could run a number of case studies to corroborate this thesis. It seems plain, for example, that the Heracleitean-Protagorean synthesis presented in *Theaetetus* 151-187 can be fruitfully read as an exploration of the prospects for experiential knowledge—in particular, for taking it as the paradigm and the foundation of all other knowledge. In effect I have already run this case study: I

[5] For this suggestion, and for the importance of knowledge-how in science as well as ethics, cp. Churchland (2000) and Clark (2000).

[6] Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 36e: Die Menschen heute glauben, die Wissenschaftler seien da, sie zu belehren, die Dichter und Musiker etc., sie zu erfreuen. *Dass diese sie etwas zu lehren haben*; kommt ihnen nicht in den Sinn.

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have argued in Chappell (2005) that we can understand Plato's extraordinary achievement in that dialogue as being to anticipate not only the growth and development of empiricism, but also its downfall—a downfall which we might say results from the simple, basic, and ultimately unavoidable truth that experiential knowledge is not the only kind of knowledge there is, and cannot be made the foundation to which all other kinds of knowledge can be reduced, either.

A second and very obvious way of applying my distinctions between varieties of knowledge is to the familiar problems raised by Socrates' critique of the *technai* in the *Apology* (22d ff.) and elsewhere. The gist of Socrates' recurring complaint about the *technai*—he puts the point various ways in various contexts—seems to be that in cases like that of the craftsmen, it looks like they do know something; yet craftsmen, poets, orators and others who undeniably have the kind of knowledge that goes with having a *techne* all seem unable to give any account (*logos*) of what they do or how they do it. This leads Socrates ultimately to the conclusion that the appearance of (real) knowledge in those who have a *techne* must be an illusion. Because knowledge, unlike inspiration, is intrinsically general (*Republic* 457b-c), Ion, for example, cannot really have any knowledge about Homer, because if he had it would be applicable to Hesiod as well (*Ion* 532c6-7). The craftsmen in the *Apology* cannot really have any knowledge, for if they had they would not imagine that their "knowledge" of their own crafts makes them wise about anything else (*Apology* 22d). One obvious way to block this kind of argument is to protest that it is no part of a *techne* to be able to give a *logos* of what one does; Socrates' mistake, we might say, is precisely to fail to distinguish propositional knowledge from knowledge-how. (We *might* say that: for a qualification of it, see Note 27.) This is one moral that we also might take from *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.5, where Aristotle treats *techne* as something simply different from the other "intellectual virtues".

Or again, though I freely admit that this suggestion is more speculative, consider Aristotle's famously enigmatic definition of tragedy at *Poetics* 1449b2-3:

> ἔστιν οὖν τραγῳδία μίμησις πράξεως σπουδαίας καὶ τελείας μέγεθος
> ἐχούσης, ἡδυσμένῳ λόγῳ χωρὶς ἑκάστῳ τῶν εἰδῶν ἐν τοῖς μορίοις,
> δρώντων καὶ οὐ δι' ἀπαγγελίας, δι' ἐλέου καὶ φόβου περαίνουσα τὴν
> τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων κάθαρσιν.

I offer this translation of Aristotle's words:

> Tragedy, then, is the representation of a noble and complete action which has greatness, [and which is represented] by means of language made beautiful in each of the ways that is possible, each way being used separately in the parts [of the tragedy]; [it is a representation] of actions themselves, not of reported actions; and by pity and fear it brings about the purification of experiences of these sorts.

In the rest of the *Poetics* Aristotle notoriously turns to other issues. He does remarkably little to spell out the meaning of his pregnantly-phrased definition, and in particular of its famous last clause, δι' ἐλέου καὶ φόβου περαίνουσα τὴν τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων κάθαρσιν. Above all he does not clarify what he means by *katharsis*. What makes things even more tantalising is his comment, at *Politics* 1341b39, that "here I will just use the word *katharsis*; what I mean by it, I will explain in the *Poetics*". And perhaps he did explain, in some part of the *Poetics* that is now lost. But we have no explanation, either in *Poetics* or in the *Politics* (where the word occurs five times).

In the light of what LSJ has to say about the word—it gives religious purification, winnowing, pruning, purgation, evacuation of toxic matter from the body, and clearing as possible senses of *katharsis*—what I suggest Aristotle means is something like this.[7] The competent spectator[8] of an artistically-successful tragedy experiences, at one remove, the kinds of emotions that are involved in whatever action the poet portrays. (This is how I gloss τοιούτων παθημάτων.) If the poet portrays pain, shame, rage, and defiance—as for example Aeschylus does at the beginning of *Prometheus Bound*—then the spectator feels these emotions too. (As also may a narrator: *Ion* 535c.) He feels them, of course, "offline". Even at the level of what he feels, the spectator watching *Prometheus Bound* need not be under any illusion that he himself, rather than Prometheus, is the victim of what happens at the start of the play, when Zeus uses Force to make Hephaestus chain Prometheus to a Scythian cliff. Nonetheless the spectator does *feel* Prometheus's pain, shame, rage, and defiance.

[7] Here I won't even try to engage with the vast literature on Aristotle's delphic definition. The best starting-points for that are Rorty (1992) and Halliwell (1998).
Veloso (2007), is the most recent attempt I know of to argue that the clause containing these words is a corruption and should simply be deleted. (Scott (2003) is another; Scott and Veloso both give full bibliographies of this long-running dispute.) Despite its current popularity, I am not attracted by this modest proposal, either on textual grounds or on philosophical ones. On the textual side, I think the purgers' central claim, that the notions of *katharsis*, fear, or pity do little or nothing elsewhere in the *Poetics*, is simply false: see e.g. 1452b–1453a. The main text shows what I think can be done with the clause philosophically.

[8] It should be obvious both that being a spectator of a tragedy involves a kind of competence, and that the notion of such a competence is thoroughly Aristotelian: see e.g. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1113a30-4.

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> Would he had hidden me
> deep under ground,
> below corpse-swallowing Hades
> at Tartarus' ultimate bound,
> had staked me out *there* with cruel chains that no one can release,
> there where no god or mortal mocks because no one *sees*.
> But here, raised up like a tattered flag bleached in the wind, my name
> is the open joy of my enemies and my shame.[9]

The spectator's response is not merely that he grasps a proposition that Aeschylus implicitly asserts, to the effect that this is how Prometheus feels. Rather, what Aeschylus' art brings about in the spectator is that he knows in his own experience, that is *by* his own experience, how Prometheus feels—or something like it.

At the same time as feeling, albeit "off-line", the pain, shame, rage, and defiance that Prometheus feels, Aristotle tells us (as I am reading him) that the competent spectator of the tragedy also feels something second-order—pity and fear.[10] (This is a second place, alongside the off-line-ness, where Prometheus' experience and the spectator's part company. It is of course not the case that even an ideally competent spectator of a tragic drama feels *exactly* what the protagonist feels, no more and no less.) The spectator feels pity and fear in response to the first-order emotions that the drama causes in him: pity for Prometheus to whom this terrible thing is happening; the self-focused fear that something like this might happen to the spectator himself, and the more general fear that the world in which we live is the kind of world in which such terrible things happen. This pity and fear help Aeschylus to achieve what Aristotle takes to be the overall purpose of tragedy. This is that what all humans feel in more or less muddy and muddled ways as they struggle and stumble through life should be presented back to them as something elevated and beautiful, stripped of accidental irrelevances and the poisonous preoccupations of this or that individual, and transformed into a universally-valid symbol of many particularities.

For this Aristotle can aptly take over a piece of religious terminology, and call it a "purification". Like the religious rite that, indeed, it originally was, the tragic drama is a purification both because it represents emotions as purified and clarified from the irrelevance and squalor of life's everyday confusion, and also because it works upon the spectator to purify and clarify *his* emotions, not just while he is watching the play but thereafter, from irrelevance, confusion, and squalor. He will come away from the play a better person; he will come away someone who understands better what it is to be human.

If we are challenged to put into words *what* he understands, then one of the various things we might say would be something like: he has come to see that the emotions that he knows from his own life are part of universal human patterns; that what he feels and experiences, or what anyone feels and experiences, is both a very tiny part of the universe, and also something that irreducibly *matters*; and this understanding shows him why, in the long run, the only responses to human life and human beings that can ever really be morally or aesthetically fitting or make adequate sense of them are pity, love, and gentleness.[11] But any form of words that we reach for here will both be incomplete, and teeter on the brink of metaphor, or perhaps fall back into poetry.[12] The heart of the knowledge for which we are reaching here is, as I say, experiential, and not propositional. "Art… is the telling of truth, and is the only available method for the telling of certain truths" (Murdoch 1973: 80).

4 III

If I am right so far, then a conception of something like experiential knowledge can be found, in different guises to be sure,[13] in the form of empiricism that Plato's *Theaetetus* sets up, and also in Aristotle's definition of tragedy; and a distinction something like the modern distinction between propositional knowledge and knowledge-how turns out to be obviously relevant to Socrates' critique of *techne*, and

[9] εἰ γάρ μ᾽ ὑπὸ γῆν νέρθεν θ᾽ Ἅιδου τοῦ νεκροδέγμονος εἰς ἀπέρατον Τάρταρον ἧκεν, δεσμοῖς ἀλύτοις ἀγρίως πελάσας, ὡς μήτε θεὸς μήτε τις ἄλλος τοῖσδ᾽ ἐπεγήθει. νῦν δ᾽ αἰθέριον κίνυγμ᾽ ὁ τάλας ἐχθροῖς ἐπίχαρτα πέπονθα.

Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound* 152-160, my own translation. (And no doubt over-translation; here as always with poetry, a literal translation would fail in a different and more basic way.).

[10] If we take the *Codex Coislinianus* seriously as an indication of what was in the lost second book of the *Poetics*, then in *Poetics* II Aristotle made a parallel claim about comedy: through laughter and pleasure, comedy brings about the purification of the first-order emotions that are aroused in the competent spectator by the action of the comedy. See Janko (1987).

[11] "He spoke well who, when asked what in us makes us like the gods, replied 'kindness and truth'." Longinus, *On the sublime*, Chapter 1.

[12] Such as Philip Larkin's words about a somewhat similar sense of finding a place where the transfiguration of commonplace experiences is possible, namely the church of "Church Going":

> A serious house on serious earth it is,
> In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,
> Are recognized, and robed as destinies.

[13] Experiential knowledge is an ambiguous notion anyway; for a start, contrast knowing things by experience, knowing qualia, and Russellian acquaintance. These ambiguities do not make the notion unusable, but they do demand care.

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perhaps actually applied by Aristotle in his response to Socrates' critique.

A further use for the notion of knowledge-how, as distinct from propositional knowledge, seems obvious when we consider Aristotle's ethics. On reflection it might seem that it is not just Aristotle's account of *techne* which fits my category of knowledge-how. Doesn't *phronesis* fit that category too?

I have been careful to avoid any suggestion that ethics is *only* about knowledge-how, any more than science is only about propositional knowledge. If I am right in the speculative philosophical expansion of the *Poetics* definition of tragedy that I have just offered, then in my terms, Aristotle cannot think that ethics is only about knowledge-how either. He does, after all, use the word *aisthêsis* repeatedly in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (e.g. NE 1113a1, 1109b23, 1142a27), and *aisthêsis* is also one of his most regular terms for what I am calling "experiential knowledge". (Another is pathos or, as in the *Poetics* definition, *pathêma*.) If Aristotle thinks that experiential knowledge is relevant to aesthetics in anything like the way that I have suggested, then this aesthetic role of experiential knowledge must surely spill over into an ethical role. For example, if *Prometheus Vinctus* teaches us how to feel about human beings and human life, that teaching is a moral one as much as an artistic one. (That art had this sort of moral function was taken for granted in Plato's and Aristotle's society: see e.g. Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1053-1056.)

There are, nonetheless, times when Aristotle's own words suggest that he is interested only in the practical, "applied", on-line side of ethics to which we might naturally think knowledge-how is particularly applicable:

> Our present study [ethics] is not conducted, as our others are, for the sake of *theôria*. We are not inquiring in order to learn the essence of virtue, but to become virtuous. Otherwise this study is useless. (NE 1103b26-29)[14]

It is not only in this well-known passage that there is a studied and forceful rejection of the claims of *theôria*—contemplation, speculation, a directly intellectual approach to ethics[15]:

> It is well said that the just man comes to be from just actions, and the self-controlled man from self-controlled actions. For no one has any prospect at all of becoming a good person *except* by such actions. But most people do not do these things; instead, they "take refuge in argument", thinking that that is doing philosophy, and they will become admirable people that way. In this they act like sick men who listen attentively to their doctors' instructions, but do nothing to *follow* those instructions. (NE 1105b12-17)

Aristotle insists again and again that talk about virtue, or listening to talk about virtue, is no substitute for the practice of virtue. The point of medicine is to make people well, and that point is not achieved by talking about prescriptions but by following them; the point of ethics is to make people good, and that point is not achieved by talking about the virtues, but by practising them. "Truth in practical matters is judged from deeds, and from life" (NE 1179a19-20).

1105b13's phrase "take refuge in argument" (ἐπὶ δὲ τὸν λόγον καταφεύγοντες) seems to be an allusion to Plato, *Phaedo* 99e5. The allusion is a dig at Socrates, whose most famous ethical view was that we should begin in ethics by seeking definitions, *logoi*, which express the essence of the virtues (1144b29-30). Only then will we be able to proceed on the basis of knowledge in ethics (which here apparently means propositional knowledge): a knowledge which if *Protagoras* 356b1-e2 is to be believed (it isn't, but that's another story) will be a systematic understanding of the relative weights of the pleasant and the painful that will enable us to provide a hedonistic calculus as a basis for action. However, as everybody also knows, Socrates himself proved quite unable to find such definitions or weights, and no one he talked to could do it either. Hence, the explicitly moral-theoretical structure proposed for ethics in the *Protagoras* is not completed.

Is not; and the moral that both Plato and Aristotle drew from the failure of the hedonistic project outlined in the *Protagoras* is that such a structure of moral theory *cannot* be completed. But, we might say in very swift and rough summary, they thought this for different reasons. What Plato thought, or came to think by the time he wrote the *Phaedo*, was that a systematic moral theory would not be based on propositional knowledge of pleasure and pain in the way that Socrates, whether seriously or ironically (I think the latter), suggests in the *Protagoras*. Rather, if there

[14] ἡ παροῦσα πραγματεία οὐ θεωρίας ἕνεκά ἐστιν ὥσπερ αἱ ἄλλαι (οὐ γὰρ ἵνα εἰδῶμεν τί ἐστιν ἡ ἀρετὴ σκεπτόμεθα, ἀλλ' ἵν' ἀγαθοὶ γενώμεθα, ἐπεὶ οὐδὲν ἂν ἦν ὄφελος αὐτῆς)…

Theôria and its cognates can have a wide range of meanings, not all of which are at all closely related either to the English descendant word "theory" or to the notion of contemplation that *theôria* often indicates. LSJ tells us that θεωρίας ἕνεκά could (and commonly did) mean "just to see the world". No translation of NE 1103b26-9 that I know attempts to capture this implied charge of intellectual tourism, presumably because ὥσπερ αἱ ἄλλαι would then apply the charge to Aristotle himself.

[15] A passage that Aristotle may well have in his sights in NE 1103b26-29 is *Republic* 527b1, τὸ δ' ἔστι που πᾶν τὸ μάθημα

Footnote 15 continued
γνώσεως ἕνεκα ἐπιτηδευόμενον, "the whole of this academic study [of geometry is undertaken for the sake of knowledge". Plato immediately goes on to stress how geometry is good for the character: because it concentrates on timeless truths, it makes the soul that studies it truthful and philosophical.

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is to be any systematic moral thinking, it will need to be based on knowledge of the Good. (*Propositional* knowledge? More about that in Sect. IV.) This is what Plato has Socrates say at *Phaedo* 69a-b, with a clear back-reference to the *Protagoras*:

> Bless you, Simmias, I don't think *this* can be the right sort of exchange, or one that will move us towards virtue—to swap pleasures for pleasures and pains for pains and fears for fears, as if they were coins, and greater for smaller. The only true coinage, the coin which is an exchange for everything else, is practical wisdom (*phronêsis*). In reality it is in wisdom's currency that all these other things should be bought and sold, and likewise courage and temperance and justice and, in short, true virtue combined with wisdom —with or without pleasure, pain, fear and other such things. A virtue separated from wisdom, which exchanges pleasures for pleasures, I suspect that kind of virtue is a mere shadow-painting (*skiagraphia*), slavish in reality, with nothing healthy or true about it; real virtue is a kind of purification (*katharsis*—that word again) from this sort of thing.

We might suggest that the view of the *Phaedo* and the *Republic* is that a system of moral knowledge, propositional insofar as it is based upon explicitly-known definitions, cannot be completed *by us*, because we do not possess the godlike knowledge—the vision of the Form of the Good—that we would need to complete it. In principle it is possible that someone might attain that godlike knowledge, and then that person *would* be able to complete such a moral theory (although then, perhaps, he would no longer need it). In the mean time, Plato suggests, the best knowledge we can have of what to do is tacit and inarticulate, more a matter of having the right character than of having the right beliefs.

At least when he is talking about "practical affairs" and our political life, Aristotle goes further than Plato. He thinks not only that a moral theory based upon explicitly-known definitions, such as Socrates apparently envisaged, cannot as it happens be completed by us, but that such a theory necessarily cannot be completed by anyone. It is not just that we do not possess a godlike knowledge of ethical definitions; it is that there is no such knowledge for anyone to possess. For Aristotle, the non-propositional knowledge involved in having the right character is not just the best kind of practical-ethical knowledge *that we can have*; it is the best kind of practical-ethical knowledge, period. Apparently then the ideal in ethics is not a matter of propositional knowledge at all. (There may be propositional knowledge in ethics, but this is not the ideal case.) At its core, practical truth is not a matter of *logoi*, general definitions, but of virtues, and also of *praxeis*, particular actions.

> What affirmation and denial are in understanding, pursuit and avoidance are in appetition… This is understanding and practical truth. (NE 1139a21-31)

On this Aristotelian conception, ethical knowledge is (at least for the most part) more like knowledge-how than knowledge-that; what the good person knows, in knowing what to do, is more like what the cyclist knows in knowing how to stay on his bike, or what the language-speaker knows in knowing how to speak his language grammatically, than what the historian knows in knowing when the Battle of Marathon took place.

These thoughts suggest a contribution to our understanding of NE VI's famous catalogue of the five kinds of intellectual virtue, and in particular of the starring role that catalogue gives to *phronêsis*, practical wisdom. In the face of Platonist conceptions, Aristotle needs to explain how a virtue of the intellect can be genuinely *of the intellect*, and genuinely *a virtue*, without being knowledge of the explicit propositional kind that, typically, Platonic (or at any rate Socratic) knowledge apparently is. His famous solution is to insist (NE 1142a24 ff.) on the particularity of the objects of *phronêsis*: "*phronêsis* is of the ultimately specific thing, for the thing to be done is something ultimately specific… and of this there is no *epistêmê*, but rather *aisthêsis*"; "where particulars are concerned, the judgement lies in the perception" (NE 1126b4-5). Perhaps, with our eye on the bicycle-riding analogy, we might even translate *aisthêsis* here as "feel" rather than "perception": knowing how to ride a bike without falling off is a matter not of mastering a theory but of feel. And so, on Aristotle's view, is knowing how to do the right thing. (So, if knowledge of feel is a form of experiential knowledge, perhaps there is a place in Aristotle's ethics for experiential knowledge as well as for knowledge-how. No doubt experiential knowledge and knowledge-how often work closely together: think, for example, of how my sense of balance gives me real-time feedback on how well my bike-riding is going. A good cyclist knows how it *ought* to feel if he is riding in balance, and adjusts his riding accordingly if it *doesn't* feel like that.)

Appreciating Aristotle's largely non-propositional conception of practical-ethical truth also helps us to understand a claim that he consistently holds to, but which can seem strange to our eyes, about the conclusion of what has unfortunately[16] come to be called "the practical syllogism". Aristotle's odd-seeming claim is that the conclusion of such reasoning is not a proposition stating what action should be done, nor even an intention to perform that

[16] "Practical reasoning" would be a better phrase; "reasoning towards action" would be better still. As Kenny 1979: 112–113 points out, the Greek, *syllogismoi tôn praktôn*, is hardly ever used by Aristotle, and certainly not intended by him as a technical term.

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action; it is the action itself (see NE 1147a25-30, dMA 701a20-33).[17] This claim has puzzled modern commentators, who have been inclined to ask how Aristotle thinks such a view can possibly be reconciled with the logic of syllogisms laid out in his *Analytics*. But the sharp contrast in the relation of reasoning to conclusion between practical "syllogising" and formal syllogistic is intentional on Aristotle's part. What he wants us to see is how radically different practical reasoning is from such syllogistic, *precisely because* it issues in actions not propositions: in practical not theoretical truth. To understand the claim best we should not only note how different it makes practical reasoning from classic syllogistic reasoning; we should note also how closely what Aristotle says here connects with the remarks just quoted about the non-propositional nature of practical truth.

The suggestion that for Aristotle practical knowledge is (at least mainly) knowledge-how and/or experiential knowledge, not propositional knowledge, also helps make sense of a third thing. This is Aristotle's frequent repetition of what may well seem to us maddeningly unhelpful remarks about virtue and rightness in action:

> The one who stands his ground against or runs away from those things, and for the sake of those things, that he should, and in the way and at the time that he should, and who likewise, in respect of confidence, acts as he should—that man is the courageous one. (NE 1115b17-19)

> The temperate man desires what he should, as he should, when he should, which is also what reason requires. (NE 1119b16)

> Bad taste and vulgarity do not fall into excess in the *amount* of what is spent beyond what should be, but rather because they involve ostentation on things that are not as they should be, in a way that is not as it should be. (NE 1122a33)

> And so the liberal man will give for the sake of what is noble. And he will give rightly, for he will give *what* he should, *to whom* he should, and *when* he should, and will do as he should in all the other respects relating to right giving. (NE 1120a24-26)

> For indeed the liberal man will spend what he should, in the way that he should. (NE 1122b12)

> Thus the man who gets angry about the things and with the people he should, and in the way he should, and when he should, and for as long as he should, is praised… Those who do not get angry about the things that they should are thought to be ineffectual, as are those who do not get angry in the way they should, or when they should, or with the people they should. (NE 1125b30-33, 1126a4-6)

What, we might ask, can possibly be the point of repeating such remarks? How is it supposed to be helpful as practical guidance, to be told merely that, to reveal these various virtues, you should act "as you should", *ὡς δεῖ*?

The best answer, I think, is that it's *not* supposed to be helpful, except in the sense of eliminating the distracting thought that guidance of that sort is so much as available. Aristotle is not lamely repeating a tiresomely cryptic formula here, under the mistaken impression that he is giving us advice of a sort that we could actually implement. The point is precisely the opposite. What he is trying to show us is that if we want to know exactly what to do in words and definitions, instead of using words and definitions to get a rough idea of what to do and then relying on *aisthêsis* to complete the picture, then ὡς δεῖ, "as it should be", is all there is to say. Right action (and similarly right reason, *orthos logos*) cannot be precisely captured in a definition—or at any rate, it can't be precisely captured in a useful definition: the only precise formula on offer is the unhelpful ὡς δεῖ. (Just as, if we were trying to describe skilful bike riding, we might at a certain point fall back on remarks like "He rides his bike *just so*." This is helpful only insofar as it ostends something particular).[18] The whole point of repeating this phrase is that, where practical truth is concerned, to look for a usable verbal formula or definition that will characterise it completely and exactly is to look in altogether the wrong direction. Instead, we should look for examples of good performance.

> But no doubt this is difficult, especially in matters which are particular. For it is not easy to define how and with whom and why and for how long a man should be angry… Nor is it easy to fix exactly by reason how far and how much a man should be blamed, either. For indeed nothing else that is perceived is easily defined. Such things are among particular matters, and the judgement on them lies in perception. (NE 1109b14-24)

If you want to see exactly what good bicycle-riding is, you need to look not at a verbal definition of good bike-riding, but at actual examples of it. The only place to find complete determinacy about what counts as good bike-riding is, unsurprisingly when you think about it, in the principal actualisation of the skill of bicycle-riding: i.e. in

[17] The conclusion is the action, not a sentence stating that the action is to be done, nor yet an intention. Practical reasoning that issues only in these kinds of results has gone wrong, for Aristotle, because the whole point of practical reasoning is to lead to action.

[18] On the place of ostension in defining the virtues, cp. Zagzebski 2004: 40–50.

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examples of good bike-riding. Just likewise, if you want to see exactly what virtue is, no definition of virtue or prescription for virtue can tell you that; what you need to do is look at the principal actualisation of virtue, which is of course some actual example of a good person. Practical truth lies in action, not in words. Where else could it lie?

I have spoken here of ethical knowledge-how. Another recent writer on Aristotle's ethics, Rosalind Hursthouse, speaks at a similar point in her argument of ethical concept-mastery (Hursthouse 2011: 44):

> Given the content of the second half of [*Nicomachean Ethics*] Book III and all of Book IV, namely the extended discussion of various virtues and what they may be confounded with (which includes their corresponding vices), at the very least what we ascribe to the *Aristotelian phronimos* in this area is knowledge of what courage (or temperance or generosity or "mildness," etc.) really is; we ascribe to him, in our modern terminology, a full mastery of the concept.

Hursthouse never explicitly mentions the notion of knowledge-how in her fine essay; the connections she makes are rather with Wittgenstein's accounts of rule-following and concept-acquisition. Those are connections that I want to make too (cp. Note 4), because of a simple but rather striking point about concept-mastery in general. This is that *all* concept-mastery, not just in ethics but in every other domain as well, is knowledge-how—specifically, knowledge how to deploy and apply the concept.[19] So if (as I believe) Hursthouse is right that what the *phronimos* has that others lack is mastery of the virtue-concepts, then here Hursthouse and I are not just in close agreement; we are using different words to say the very same thing.

To close this section, one last point that seems well explained by taking Aristotle's emphasis on the practical to be, in effect, an emphasis on knowledge-how (and perhaps also, though this is less clear, on experiential knowledge) at the expense of propositional knowledge. It is a point about the picture that I am suggesting is an illuminating way of understanding Aristotle, that is likely to be of great interest to contemporary philosophers, given their preoccupation, already referred to, with questions about objectivity, especially moral objectivity.

The point is that, on this picture, knowledge-how and experiential knowledge can be perfectly objectively *knowledge*, and yet there be no clear or decisive way of arguing for them, in the way that there often is with propositional knowledge. If you know how to ride a bike, or know the smell of oranges, then there is nothing in the least *subjective* about your knowledge. What you know in the one case *really is* how to ride a bike—that is, attempts to bike-ride along the lines of your knowledge-how will characteristically succeed. What you know in the other case *really is* what oranges smell like—that is, those who have or imagine an olfactory experience relevantly like[20] your experience characteristically will be having or imagining an experience of the smell of oranges. Nonetheless there may well be a limit to the things you can say to explain or teach or defend your knowledge to critical or sceptical others. And this may be a limit which you reach rather more quickly and uncomfortably than you reach any corresponding limit in the case of propositional knowledge, especially where that propositional knowledge can be given a systematic or deductive form. It seems to be something like this point that Aristotle is registering at *Topics* 105a3-8:

> It is not necessary to look every problem over, or every thesis, but only the ones that might be puzzles for someone who stands in need of argument rather than of castigation or perception. Those who are puzzled whether or not we should honour the gods or love our parents need castigation; those who are puzzled whether or not snow is white need perception.

You can't *argue* someone into knowing what oranges smell like; all you can do is present oranges to their noses. No more can you argue someone into knowing what Aristotle takes to be basically obvious moral truths —or even if you can argue them into that sort of knowledge, still argument might not be the appropriate route. What they need is what Aristotle here calls *kolasis*, "castigation" as I render it, though we could also translate it as "a whipping".

To modern ears that may sound a bit strong; perhaps it's said jokingly. In any case what Aristotle really has in mind, I think, is not so much physical violence against those whose views we disapprove of, as the disciplining and

[19] A point which may or may not be helpful when considering Kripke's Wittgenstein's famous paradox about following a semantic rule. Even if there is no further *propositional* knowledge that can help us know how to follow the rule, there still might be *knowledge-how* that helps in this way. (Though perhaps to say this is just to endorse the response to the rule-following paradox that Kripke dismisses under the name "dispositionalism".).

[20] I think I know what it means for me to say, of any two of my own experiences, that they are like each other (and so, that they are relevantly like each other by some criterion of relevance). I think I know what it means for anyone else to say this of her own experiences. I also think I know what it means for me to say that one of my experiences is like (or relevantly like) one of hers. I think that I (and indeed all of us) know all this is just a *given*. Those who think that Wittgenstein's "private language argument" tells against this given, have to explain why we should accept the argument rather than the given. In any case there are other ways of reading Wittgenstein's argument.

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schooling of the character that we can also call habituation. He means that certain kinds of ethical knowledge are available to a well-habituated person—though not necessarily to anyone else—under the description "*obviously* true". He also means that the way in which these kinds of knowledge come to be obvious truths to the person of good character is the way in which we also acquire typical examples of knowledge-how: namely, by practice.

If all this is correct then, as I say, the implications for contemporary metaethical debates about moral objectivity are striking. The focus in such debates is always, or nearly always, the possibility or otherwise of objective propositional truths in ethics. I am not denying the importance of that question; but I am suggesting that it is not the only question. If we shift our focus from objective moral truth to objective moral knowledge, and take on board the point that I have been insisting on here, that objective knowledge is not necessarily propositional knowledge, that will open the door to the possibilities of objective moral knowledge that is knowledge-how or experiential knowledge. I do not think it is exaggeration to say that recognising these possibilities would transform the debate.

What's more: perhaps these are not the only possibilities.

5 IV

I have been exploring a threefold distinction between propositional knowledge, knowledge-how, and experiential knowledge. Although it is quite possible to state this distinction in the terms of ancient Greek philosophy, I have not tried to claim that the distinction, as I have stated it, *is* an ancient Greek distinction. On the contrary, I have admitted all along that it is a characteristically modern distinction. My thesis is not the historical claim that Plato and Aristotle, actually and *de (graece reddito) dicto*, thought this way. It is the philosophical claim that it is fruitful and interesting to deploy this distinction when we are trying to make sense of what and how they did think.

I hope Sect. III has done something to make out that philosophical but not historical claim. In this last Sect. I want to close by offering a further claim about knowledge in Plato and Aristotle, a claim which I mean to be both philosophical and historical.

The historical part of my claim is this: whereas propositional knowledge appears fundamental today, and experiential knowledge appeared fundamental in Locke's time and in Hume's, and knowledge-how perhaps appeared fundamental to some philosophers in the 1950s, there was a kind of knowledge that appeared fundamental to Plato and to Aristotle which is *none* of these three kinds of knowledge, but something different, something that I will call *objectual knowledge*.[21] Moreover, I will suggest, if we see the place that objectual knowledge had in their thinking, we will see why (as I said at the beginning of Sect. II) the three modern varieties of knowledge *could not* have been basic for them.

And this brings us to the philosophical part of my claim, which is that Plato and Aristotle were on to something here. At the very least, objectual knowledge is a seriously neglected notion in contemporary philosophy. It might even be right to say what I think Plato and Aristotle, in different ways, both say (for example Aristotle is saying or implying this in my third epigraph): that objectual knowledge is the fundamental form of knowledge.

What I mean by objectual knowledge, unstartlingly enough, is knowledge of objects, knowledge of particular things. Initially at least, there is no need to be restrictive about what count as an object or a particular thing: *prima facie* our stock of examples of objects can include molecules, mathematical structures, philosophical theories, musical symphonies, novels, poems, persons, and dispositions such as virtues, alongside perhaps more obvious cases of objects such as tables, houses, bicycles, and laptops. In any case like these, it is intelligible to suppose—and both Plato and Aristotle do suppose—that objectual knowledge of the object in question is a different sort of knowledge from all three of propositional knowledge about it, experiential knowledge of it, and knowledge-how involving it.

When I say "a different sort of knowledge", I mean exactly that, no more and no less. I do not, for instance, mean to deny the possibility that, for any instance of objectual knowledge, there might be an instance of propositional knowledge (or of experiential knowledge, or of knowledge-how) which in some sense "exactly corresponds" to that objectual knowledge. Such a correspondence (whatever its sense, and exact or otherwise) may or may not obtain. But whether it obtains is a red herring. The point is that a *correspondence* is what this will be even if it does obtain. It will be a correspondence between two genuinely different types of things, not an identity between two apparently but *not* genuinely different types of things.

[21] The centrality of objectual knowledge persists throughout the Aristotelian tradition. It is clearly there, for example, in Aquinas, for whom the *question utrum Deus cognoscat enuntiabilia* (whether God has propositional knowledge) is just one small aspect (article 14) of his 16-article treatise on divine knowledge in *ST* 1a.14. Indeed, the centrality of the paradigm of objectual knowledge persists, as a kind of heirloom from medieval Aristotelianism, in writers who themselves are well distanced from that tradition. When Descartes wants to think about what it is to know, he is at least as happy to focus on an object like a block of wax as on a proposition (see *Meditation* 2). Again, for Locke and even for Kant, the basic question for epistemologists is about whether, how, and how much we can know *things*, not *truth*.

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This point also applies with the other three varieties of knowledge (to return briefly to them). The differences between them are sometimes misstated as points about ineffability or inexpressibility: one is strongly tempted to say that there are no words to express completely and exactly a given experience, say of the smell of oranges, or one's knowledge how to, say, dance a tango.

Actually that just seems mistaken. Why isn't "It smelt of oranges", or "You dance a tango like *this*", a complete and exact verbal expression of the smell of oranges or how to dance a tango? Likewise, why shouldn't Aristotle's own ὡς δεῖ (NE 1119b17) be a complete and exact verbal expression of how to act *here*? Even if it wasn't mistaken, we could always just *introduce* new words (as Wittgenstein points out: *PI* I, 610; II, p.194).

The real point about the differences between the varieties of knowledge is not a point about inexpressibility, or about whether instances of one variety of knowledge can marshalled into line so that they match one–one with, or are perfectly parallel to, instances of another variety. More basically and simply, it is just that the lines would always be parallel and not coincident, because the varieties of knowledge are *varieties*, different operations of the mind. They are simply different things. Even if your radio is tuned to the perfect cricket commentary, where every minutest nuance of the match is picked up, still listening to a radio commentary is a quite different thing from attending a match. Likewise with the varieties of knowledge. When we think clearly about examples it is, as they say in maths, just *evident on inspection* that knowing how is a different kind of thing from experiential knowledge, and that both are different from propositional knowledge. Reductive or streamlining accounts that wish to treat the varieties of knowledge as essentially just one form of knowledge never, to my mind, overcome this very simple and basic difficulty, and never could. Even the most sophisticated and ingenious project of this sort that I know of, Stanley and Williamson's project to show that knowledge-how is just a special kind of propositional knowledge, seems to give the game away in their account of what *makes* knowledge-how special, depending as it does on their notion of a "practical mode of presentation". Once we have appreciated the very basic *differentness* of the varieties of knowledge by considering examples it is hard to know what to say to make the differentness any plainer, except, perhaps, to reiterate Butler's Law: "everything is what it is and not some other thing".

Perhaps it will help a little here to think about the in some ways parallel distinction between objectual and propositional desire. To want a thing is to want *it*. Just as a matter of logical form apart from anything else, that is not the same as wanting that some proposition about the thing be true. It is quite common for philosophers to argue that for every objectual desire ("X wants O") there is a corresponding propositional desire ("X wants that O stand to him in relation R"), and therefore that the content of all objectual desires can be restated as content for propositional desires—or perhaps, more strongly, that all desires *are* propositional desires. The point is not whether the premiss of this inference is true; the point is that the inference is a *non sequitur*. The difference between propositional and objectual desire is categorical. The fact, if it is a fact, that all objectual desires can be represented in propositional form does nothing to dispel this difference. (After all, if you allow states of affairs to count as objects, then all propositional desires can be represented in objectual form too: the desire that the proposition "the cat is on the mat" be true becomes the desire for the state of affairs [the cat's being on the mat]. No one should see this as an argument for thinking that all desires are "really" objectual.)

If there is a parallel story to be told about objectual desire to the story I am telling here about objectual knowledge, that story may have a number of interesting spinoffs. One is that a standard tidy neo-Humean contrast looks to be under serious threat. (And a good thing too.) The normal tidy antithesis pairs desire and belief as propositional attitudes that relate with opposite "directions of fit" to one and the same propositional content. In what I am proposing there is no threat at all to the idea that that antithesis is *sometimes* the way things are. But that is not how the antithesis is usually presented; usually it is supposed to be a story which accounts tidily for *all* desire and belief. If I am right, the truth cannot be this tidy. (At the best of times tidiness is a suspect theoretical virtue.) If, on the so-called "conative side", desire is at least often objectual, and if what is there to contrast with it on the so-called "cognitive side" is at least often objectual knowledge not propositional belief, then the tidy Humean story is out of business, at least as a universally-applicable story. (I am fairly convinced that there are other reasons why the Humean story is out of business anyway—consider, for a start, its over-schematic and suspiciously Protean notion of "desire"; but those reasons are well-known already. The point of this paragraph is: here's *another* reason why the Humean story is false.)[22]

When I have objectual knowledge, say of the tree in my garden, what I know is *the object*, the tree: not some proposition about the tree, or some experience of the tree, or some technique relevant to the tree.[23] Certainly my

[22] For more on desire and belief objectual and propositional, see Brewer (2004).

[23] Nor, *pace* Whitcomb (2011: 86), an "abstract representation" of the tree, i.e. some system of propositions about the tree corresponding in its structure to the tree itself. First, Whitcomb's proposal just seems irrelevant: it's the *tree* we want to know/understand, not some

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objectual knowledge of the tree is fertile of, readily apt to produce, other varieties of knowledge of the tree: e.g. that it needs watering (propositional knowledge), what it smells like when it needs watering (experiential knowledge), how to look after it (knowledge-how), and so on. The objectual knowledge of the tree does not *consist in* these other kinds of knowledge about it. It is not even a necessary condition for most of them (you can know that a tree needs watering without objectually knowing the tree), and only a sufficient condition for a very few of them, if any (if I objectually know the tree then perhaps I must know that it exists and is a tree; but not a lot more, even if this much).[24] And there is a lot more to consisting in, or to identity, than necessary and sufficient conditionship.

We can see some of the reasons why I said, above, that objectual knowledge is paradigmatically the kind of knowledge that contemplation is aimed at when we consider that one striking characteristic of objectual knowledge is its *exploratory* nature. (Again something parallel might be said about objectual desire.)[25] One either knows a proposition, or fails to know it. Once one knows it, it is usually time to move on to trying to get to know some other proposition. It is much more natural to speak of intellectually exploring an object of knowledge than a known proposition. In this way objectual knowledge is always and intrinsically more like understanding than propositional knowledge is, and also, more like contemplation; in general, we might say, it is more obviously *value-loaded* than propositional knowledge seems to be. This is partly what fits objectual knowledge so well to be the fundamental form of knowledge that Plato and Aristotle took it to be.

Iris Murdoch illustrates the value-loadedness of objectual knowledge beautifully using the example of objectual knowledge of the structure that is the Russian language:

> If I am learning Russian, I am confronted by an authoritative structure which commands my respect. The task is difficult and the goal is distant and perhaps never entirely attainable. My work is a progressive revelation of something which exists independently of me. Attention is rewarded by a knowledge of reality. Love of Russian leads me away from myself towards something alien to me, something which my consciousness cannot take over, swallow up, deny or make unreal. The honesty and humility required of the student—not to pretend to know what one does not know—is the preparation for the honesty and humility of the scholar who does not even feel tempted to suppress the fact which damns his theory… Studying is normally an exercise of virtue as well as of talent, and shows us a fundamental way in which virtue is related to the real world. (*Sovereignty* 89)

The point, as she says, is to approach something outside oneself, something indefinitely demanding and in some ways mysterious, and to try to be both truthful and illuminating in one's understanding of it. This exercise—the exercise of study or contemplation—is something that requires humility, patience, persistence, imagination, and resourcefulness from the inquirer. And notably, it is part of the way things are that the seeker after objectual knowledge *never* completes his quest; there is always more to know about any object, especially any complex and interesting object.

We might even see a connection here between the way objectual knowledge contrasts with propositional knowledge, and the way an anti-theoretical approach contrasts with a theoretical one. At least as often pursued, systematising and theoretical approaches to a subject, ethics for example, seem to have *mastery* as their aim. (This is explicit when a systematic approach is also a Baconian instrumentalist one: on such views knowledge really is power.) On a systematising approach to knowing, the aim is to get the comprehensive all-explanatory overview of the subject that explains everything about it, and yields complete control over it. By contrast, an anti-systematic, anti-theoretical approach to knowing a subject—whether ethics or anything else—is not and cannot be about total mastery or complete control, because no such thing is available. The most that is available is a series of more or less illuminating insights, different perspectives on a thing that never coalesce into the entire and final truth about that thing. Whereas the ideal for propositional knowledge and theorising often seems to be definitive control and

Footnote 23 continued
representation of the tree. Secondly, representations are essentially partial and selective: *ex hypothesi* not everything that is "there in the tree" can be "there in" the representation.

"So can't we correct the representation as we go along?" Indeed we can—I don't deny that such representations might be heuristically valuable. But what is the norm or ideal by reference to which we correct the representation? The tree itself, of course. Which is a third way of showing that it is the tree itself which is the object of objectual knowledge, not any image of the tree.

[24] Nor is it true, as the classical empiricists argued, that we can know the object only by knowing its (experiential) qualities; we are often far surer of the object than of any particular quality it may have (You can see a tiger in your garden without seeing exactly how many tiger-stripes are in your garden).

[25] For a marvellous discussion of objectual desire and its exploratory nature, see again Brewer (2004).

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domination, by contrast the ideal for objectual knowledge is something more like humble and unending pilgrimage towards the demands set by an external reality.[26] Perhaps this picture helps to explain why objectual knowledge is more value-loaded than propositional knowledge—or at any rate differently value-loaded from it.

Something like this notion of objectual knowledge or inquiry into objects, along with a sense of its value-loadedness, shows up in some surprising other places. For example Currie (2011: 83) quotes the German Enlightenment thinker Novalis as saying that one who understands nature is one "who almost without effort recognises the nature of all things and… in an intimate and manifold relationship mixes himself with all of nature by means of his feelings… who so to speak feels himself into them"; Currie also notes that for Frege's contemporary Hermann Lotze "a capacity to feel ourselves into things"—including inanimate objects—is the basis of our understanding of and connectedness to the world. It is thus that we enter into "'the narrow round of existence of a mussel-fish', and through a sense of bodily contortion and effort, into the 'slender proportions' of a tree, or a building. 'No form is so unyielding,' Lotze said, 'that our imagination cannot project our life into it'."

As well as being value-loaded in this way, objectual knowledge is also characteristically fertile of other varieties of knowledge, without being the same thing as those varieties. That it is fertile of propositional knowledge is something we can come to see by reflecting on at least two phenomena. One is the phenomenon of evidence. Evidence typically consists in *things*, yet (so to speak) out of those things we get propositions: how is it that a thing, or group of things, can be evidence for the proposition "The sun has set" or "The butler did it"? I suggest there is a move here from knowledge of objects (or something like it) to corresponding knowledge of propositions. But that is only a suggestion. As Timothy McGrew (2011: 59–60) points out, there is a large and obscure philosophical issue here. I will not try to address that issue directly beyond pointing out that the shape of the issue tends to corroborate my main thesis, that a purely propositional approach to knowledge looks hopelessly over-restrictive.

> How can a fingerprint or a bloodstain be evidence for something? The question is more tricky than it looks. After all, fingerprints by themselves do not say anything, and the sense in which a bloodstain can be said to accuse the defendant is clearly metaphorical. Trying to parse this out, some philosophers have been attracted to the view that, strictly speaking, what counts as evidence is not a set of physical objects or even experiences, but rather a set of believed propositions; the bloodstains [etc.] are relevant because somehow they underwrite… our belief in the relevant propositions that *this smudge is a bloodstain* [etc.]… But it might seem that philosophers who take evidence to be propositional have just traded one problem for another. If the bloodstain cannot serve as evidence but the proposition *this is a bloodstain* can, then what counts as evidence for the belief about the bloodstain? If it must always be another proposition, we seem doomed to an infintie regress that never makes contact with experience. But if the bloodstain itself, or even the experience one would describe as one's seeing the bloodstain, can serve to justify the proposition *this is a bloodstain*, then why be squeamish at the outset? Why not admit the stain, or the experience, as evidence in its own right?

The other phenomenon is a familiar grammatical point (Chappell 2005: 30). On one way of speaking in classical Greek, "I know that Socrates is snub-nosed" is literally "I know {Socrates snub-nosed}" (*oida ton Sôcratên simon*). This sentence (so to speak) has the sentence "I know {Socrates}" (*oida ton Sôcratên*) as a proper part, just as "Tim runs quickly" has "Tim runs" as a proper part. It is by knowing the object Socrates that I know also this quality of Socrates, snub-nosedness; in this way my propositional knowledge that Socrates is snub-nosed arises directly from my objectual knowledge of Socrates. Similarly, if Socrates is (say) warm to the touch, I will (at least typically) come to the experiential knowledge of Socrates' warmness by way of my objectual knowledge of Socrates himself. "Metaphysics", in the words of Peter Hacker (expounding Wittgenstein; cp. *PI* I, 371), "is the shadow of grammar". It is not hard to see how these grammatical phenomena could lead the classical Greeks to think that the first and fundamental variety of knowledge is knowledge of objects, and that other kinds of knowledge depend upon this fundamental variety in various ways.

6 V

The ancient Greeks' belief in the primacy of objectual knowledge helps us to see why Socrates in the *Meno* thinks that if we can first get a clear knowledge of *virtue itself*, then everything else about it, e.g. whether it can be taught,

[26] "Study is a specific kind of experience in which through careful observation of objective structures we cause thought processes to move a certain way. Perhaps we study a tree or book. We see it, feel it. As we do, *our thought processes taking on an order conforming to the order in the tree or book*." (Richard Foster, "The discipline of study", in his *Celebration of Discipline* (London: Hodder and Stoughton 1980), p. 55; his italics.).

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will become clear too. Socrates is trying to respect a certain order of priority in his inquiries, because he thinks that that order of priority holds in knowledge itself. Objectual knowledge of virtue is the fundamental thing. It is only once we have that objectual knowledge that we can expect to be able to spell out its consequences at the levels of propositional knowledge (first the definition of virtue, and then other truths about virtue), of experiential knowledge (what virtue "looks like", how it strikes us in practice: the kind of thing a poet might describe when praising virtue), or of knowledge-how (what kinds of pattern of action virtue leads to).[27] I suspect it is for very similar reasons that Plato in the *Republic* thinks that a clear view of The Good Itself is an essential preliminary to all other understanding of what particular actions or policies are good for the *polis*. (Moreover, Plato is less tempted than Socrates sometimes seems to be to mistakenly equate objectual knowledge of anything with the ability to produce a definition of that thing.)

The primacy of objectual knowledge is also, I think, implicated in the genesis of the *Meno* paradox (80d).[28] If you have objectual knowledge of virtue (the paradox runs), then you do not need to go looking for it. But if you don't have objectual knowledge of virtue, then—since objectual knowledge is the primary and basic kind of knowledge—you will lack any reliable clue, at the level of any other kind of knowledge, about where to look for this objectual knowledge of virtue; indeed, there is no reason to think you will recognise what you have found, even if you do find it. And Plato's response to this paradox depends even more clearly on the supposition of the primacy of objectual knowledge. His response is *not* that it doesn't matter if you start off without the relevant objectual knowledge. It is that it does matter—so we need to suppose that you have had the relevant objectual knowledge all along. Again, I suspect a very similar line of thought is part[29] of what motivates the puzzle that Plato later presents, at *Theaetetus* 188a-c, as to how someone can know an object, yet be unable to tell it apart from some other object. If objectual knowledge is fundamental and primary in epistemology then, Plato thinks, we need an explanation why having that knowledge does not bring all other knowledge with it.[30]

As for Aristotle, he takes over Plato's concept of objectual knowledge and turns it into his own concept of *substantial* knowledge. Like (the mature) Plato, Aristotle does not of course think that substantial knowledge is what, as a matter of chronology, we get hold of first; but he does think that, as a matter of metaphysics, it is the primary thing that we get hold of. Contrast experiential knowledge, which according to *Posterior Analytics* 100a3-9, is before every other kind of knowledge in order of discovery, and after every other kind in order of explanation:

> As we say, from perception there comes memory, and from memory of the same thing often repeated comes experience (*empeiria*), since the memories which are many in number form a single instance of experience. And from an experience, that is from the whole universal coming to rest in the psyche—the one alongside the many, the one thing which is identically present in all of them—there comes about the starting-point of *techne* and scientific knowledge (*episteme*): *techne* in the case of bringing things about, scientific knowledge in the case of what is.

It is when you have knowledge of substance that knowledge in the other categories finds its place within the overall system of human understanding. Propositional knowledge, of the kind that we can make the basis of a logical system such as Aristotle's own in the *Prior Analytics*; experiential knowledge, such as perception of qualities and experience of emotions; the knowledge-how that we get from powers of the mind such as *techne* and

[27] There is a tension between these remarks and my remarks in Sect. II, which were more in line with the usual picture of Socrates as seeking not objectual knowledge but knowledge of definitions. It is, I think, a plausible diagnosis of some of Socrates' difficulties that what he seeks is really objectual knowledge of any thing; but he also thinks that the only way to secure this objectual knowledge—or at any rate to demonstrate that you have secured it—is to be able to state the *logos* of the thing. We might say that Socrates is inclined to doubt anyone who claims objectual knowledge of a thing, but cannot demonstrate that he has any propositional knowledge about it. But why *should* objectual knowledge lead anything like automatically to propositional knowledge?

[28] And also, no doubt, in the paradox of *Euthydemus* 285d7 ff., which we might precis in the question: if we do not have objectual knowledge of the same object, how can we have conflicting propositional beliefs about it?

[29] But only part. Plato, I should say, is engaged in the *Theaetetus* in a large-scale critique of a view of knowledge. He shares some assumptions with that view, but it is not his own view. For more on this see Chappell (2005).

[30] In a sense, then, my account of this and the following part of the *Theaetetus* and Catherine Rowett's, in her essay in this volume, run in exactly opposite directions. I think that the problem with the discussion is meant by Plato to be that Socrates and Theaetetus agree on the distinction between propositional knowledge and objectual knowledge, but that they fail to see how propositional knowledge needs to be rooted in objectual knowledge. Rowett, by contrast, thinks that Plato intends us to see the difficulty as this: that Socrates and Theaetetus agree on the distinction between "conceptual knowledge" and "knowledge of particulars", as Rowett calls them, but fail to grasp fully how empty "knowledge of particulars" is on its own, and without the kind of spelling-out of it that conceptual knowledge makes possible. But on my view of the passage, knowledge of particulars is not necessarily empty of conceptual loading in the kind of way that Rowett has in mind, even if the kind of knowledge of particulars that Theaetetus and Socrates consider often is; *proper* knowledge of particulars comes with conceptual loading built into it, and so brings conceptual knowledge in its wake.

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phronesis–all these are for Aristotle ultimately secondary and derivative kinds of knowledge; the primary kind is knowledge of substance, which I am arguing means objectual knowledge.

One glimpse of the priority for Aristotle of the knowledge of substance is afforded by his remark at *Metaphysics* 1006b10, in the course of his discussion of the law of non-contradiction, that "it is impossible to think without thinking *a unity*"; the primary unities he has in mind here are clearly not unitary propositions, as modern philosophers would naturally expect, but unitary objects.

Another sign of the priority of knowledge of substance is Aristotle's use of the *ergon* argument in ethics. In order to understand what is right and wrong, good and bad (he tells us), we have to start by understanding the ethical status of a particular kind of object: the individual substance which is the human being. And in order to understand this object's ethical status, the first thing to understand is its ontological status. The *ergon* argument tells us that what is good for a human individual substance, what is owing to it, what it owes, and so on all depend on what it *is*, and that understanding what a human is is a matter of understanding the life-cycle and life-style of the human animal. (At least, it is in NE Book 1; Book 10 notoriously tells a different story, more about which later.)

The priority for Aristotle of knowledge of substance, even when it is knowledge of rather lowly kinds of substance, comes out in a remarkable and justly famous purple passage of protreptic to biology that Aristotle produces as *de Partibus Animalium* 1.5 (644b22-645a27):[31]

> Of things constituted by nature some are ungenerated, imperishable, and eternal, while others are subject to generation and decay. The former are incomparably excellent and divine, but for us, less accessible to study (*theôria*), because the evidence that might throw light on them, and on the puzzles about them that we long to solve, is altogether paltry because of [our dependence on] sensation. About perishable plants and animals, on the other hand, we have abundant information, because we grow up among them. Anyone can find out all sorts of things about every one of the species of plants and animals, provided he will only make enough of an effort…
>
> Having already treated of the celestial world, as far as our conjectures could reach, we proceed to treat of animals, without omitting, to the best of our ability, any member of the kingdom, however ignoble. For if some have no graces to charm the sense, yet even these, by disclosing to perception guided by contemplation (*theôria*) the craftmanship of their nature, brings immense pleasure to all who can recognise causes at work, and are naturally philosophical…
>
> We therefore must not recoil with childish aversion from the examination of the humbler animals. Every realm of nature is marvellous. As they say Heracleitus said, when the strangers who came to visit him found him warming himself at the furnace in the kitchen and hesitated to go in, "Don't be afraid to enter; there are gods here too". So we should enter into the inquiry into all sorts of animal without inhibition; for in all of them there is something of nature and of beauty.

According to Aristotle as I am interpreting him, objectual knowledge even of such humble objects as molluscs and insects is value-loaded. Any species of beetle or cuttlefish is a kind of object which we can come to know; coming to know it means grasping a structure that is there in nature, apart from and external to us, and which demands from us the intellectual discipline to try and understand it "as it is in itself", and apart from our own preoccupations and biases. (Cp. Lotze on mussels, as quoted above.) Like Iris Murdoch (1970) in *The Sovereignty of Good*, Aristotle evidently thinks that such an exercise is among other things an exercise in *virtue*.

And there is of course an *a fortiori* in the offing. If this is true of the objectual knowledge involved in the contemplation of such humble examples of substance as beetles and cuttlefish, how much more is it true of the contemplation of prime substance—of God. (To classical-Greek speakers Aristotle does not need to spell it out that there is also an aesthetic *a fortiori* in the offing, since tragedies are the object of a kind of *theôria* too: *theôros* is, after all, one ordinary classical Greek word for "spectator", and *theatês* another (*Ion* 535d9); the activity of being a spectator is, in equally ordinary classical Greek, *theôria*; and then, of course, there is the word *theatron*, theatre, itself.) Aristotle's emphasis on knowledge-how as the key to practical ethics is only part of the picture of his beliefs about value; a much more central and important part is his emphasis on objectual knowledge as the highest kind of knowledge, indeed the highest kind of activity *tout court*, that is available to us.

As he argues in *Metaphysics* IV.1-2, it is knowing things in the first category, the category of substance, that is primary and underivative knowledge, just as substance is the primary and underivative being. And as he argues in *Metaphysics* XII and elsewhere, the more truly and fully the items that we consider are *substances*, the truer and the more underivative is our knowledge of them. We have seen that Aristotle sometimes displays (e.g. at NE 1103b26-9) a tendency to want to discount *theôria* in practical ethics. Despite that tendency, it seems clear that he also believes

[31] My translation of this passage follows William Ogle's in the Loeb.

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that there is nothing more valuable than objectual knowledge, and that the zenith, and the *telos*, of objectual knowledge is divine *theôria*.[32]

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