

Phronesis and the Gappiness Problem

In their recent book (2024), Kristjánsson and Fowers (henceforth “K&F”) argue for a neo-Aristotelian model of *phronesis* (“APM”) comprising four components:

- i. *Constitutive* (moral perception)
- ii. *Emotional regulative*
- iii. *Blueprint* (a general justifiable conception of the good life)
- iv. *Integrative* (adjudication between conflicting virtues).

K&F explain that their project is best understood as an attempt to solve the “gappiness problem” – that is, to plug the gap between moral knowledge and moral action (Darnell et al., 2019). This conceptual paper explores the extent to which they are successful.

K&F critique two single-component solutions – *moral identity* (e.g., Blasi, 1980) and *moral emotions* (e.g., Batson, 1991) – before making two claims about the APM in relation to the gappiness problem:

1. by including moral identity and moral emotions as components (qua (iii) and (ii), respectively), the multi-component APM is more likely to be successful (p. 287);
2. the APM incorporates moral action by definition (p. 153).

These claims are rather confusing. First, if moral identity and moral emotions fail to guarantee moral action individually, then there is no immediate reason to suppose that they will be more likely to succeed together. Second, if the APM includes moral action by definition, then talk of “likelihoods” seems out of place. Third, solving the gappiness problem by defining *phronesis* as including moral action seems like cheating. Fourth, if this strategy is permitted, then there seems to be little work left for *phronesis* to do, because the moral virtues already include behaviour as a component (Kristjánsson, 2017). The only work left for *phronesis* would be to adjudicate between conflicting virtues. However, while conflicting virtues might account for some instances of moral inaction, the gappiness problem is meant to describe a much broader problem.

It seems that K&F might have missed the mark.

References

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