# The Aristotelian Framework in Understanding Wisdom, Meaning, and Connection to Reality

## Plato and Aristotle: Laying the Foundations for Wisdom

- Plato's notion of wisdom involves aligning the psyche to reduce inner conflict and self-deception, allowing individuals to achieve inner peace and get in contact with what's real.
- The practice of tracking real patterns in the world and reflecting internally enhances self-knowledge and reduces self-deception, ultimately increasing contact with reality.
- Aristotle, a student of Plato, sought to expand on Plato's ideas by better accounting for change and growth, especially in living organisms.

# Aristotle's Concepts of Actuality, Potential, and Information

- Aristotle used the concept of change, better translated as growth or development, to explore how living things develop.
- He introduced the concepts of actuality and potential, as well

as the idea of information (putting a form into something to actualize its potential).

- Actuality refers to the structural functional organization that makes something real, such as the way a piece of wood acts like a chair, table, or ship, depending on its form.
- Potential refers to the capacity of something to take on a particular form, like wood potentially becoming a chair, table, or ship.

# Development and Change in Cognitive Science

- Cognitive science, specifically the work of Alicia Juarrero, has been inspired by the Aristotelian framework in understanding development and change.
- Newtonian model of change, which relies on causal impact and linear progression, has been successful in explaining many phenomena, but it cannot account for the self-organizing nature of living organisms.
- Immanuel Kant, who noted the power of the Newtonian model in preventing circular explanations, also identified its limitation in explaining self-organizing systems, such as trees.

# Self-Organizing Systems and Feedback Cycles

- Living organisms, such as trees, are self-organizing systems that make use of feedback cycles.
- In a feedback cycle, the output from a system feeds back into the system, allowing for growth and development.
- However, explaining feedback cycles often leads to circular

explanations, which led Kant to believe that biology, as a science of living things, was impossible.

## Revisiting the Aristotelian Framework

- Despite the limitations of the Newtonian model, the Aristotelian framework can provide valuable insights into understanding the growth, development, and meaningful connections between humans and reality.
- By considering the concepts of actuality, potential, and information, as well as the self-organizing nature of living organisms, we can gain a deeper understanding of how we connect to the world and develop wisdom.

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# The Intersection of Biology, Physics, and Aristotle's Philosophy

## The Problem with Circular Explanations

- The issue lies in understanding how living things use feedback cycles and self-organization, tracing the causation back to circular explanations.
- Circular explanations are considered vacuous and empty.
- To understand ourselves and our growth and development, we must find an answer to this problem that connects with scientific understanding.

# Causes and Constraints

- Aristotle's ideas can help us solve this problem by distinguishing between causes and constraints.
- Causes are events that make things happen.
- Constraints are conditions that make things possible; they do not make things happen.
- Aristotle's distinction helps us understand the structural functional organization (form) and potentiality (possibility).

# Living Things and Structural Functional Organization

- In living things, biochemical events cause a specific structural functional organization (form).
- This organization creates an internal environment, altering the probability of events.
- Events cause a structure, and the structure constrains the events.
- This explanation involves actuality and potentiality, rather than circular explanations.

# Science and Potentiality

- Science depends on real potential, such as the conservation of mass and energy.
- Potentiality is a way of talking about constraints on possibility.

# Two Types of Constraints

1. Enabling constraints: Increase the options for a system.

2.  Selective constraints: Reduce the options for a system.

# Darwinian Evolution as a Dynamical Systems Theory

- Darwinian evolution, a foundational theory for biology, is a dynamical systems theory that explains growth and development across species.
- It involves a feedback cycle (reproduction) and selective constraints (scarcity of resources) that reduce options for organisms.
- Variation acts as an enabling constraint, increasing options.
- The combination of selective and enabling constraints creates a "virtual engine" for growth and development.

# Connecting Aristotle to Modern Understanding

- Aristotle's ideas can be connected to modern understanding through the language of dynamical systems theory.
- Aristotle was interested in the development of wisdom and meaning, and how they are connected to personal growth.

# The Concept of Virtue

- Aristotle introduced the concept of virtue, an aspect of our being fundamentally connected to our projects of meaning and wisdom.
- Virtue involves the systematic development of our character and capacities to achieve wisdom and meaning in life.

# Cultivating Character, Wisdom and Growth: Lessons from Aristotle

## The Difference between Personality and Character

- Personality is what we are born with, the traits that we inherit from our biology and environment, which we have no control over
- Character, on the other hand, is the aspect of ourselves that we can cultivate, either consciously or unconsciously

## Acting Out of Character and Virtue

- When someone is acting out of character, it usually means they are deviating from their typical virtues or patterns of behavior
- Virtues are a set of conditions that have been systematically cultivated within a person, reflecting their moral compass

## Cultivating Character

- Aristotle proposed methods for cultivating character through the concept of the Golden Mean
- For example, courage is the mean between cowardice and

foolhardiness
- By developing a system of constraints and virtues, one can train and cultivate their character over time

# The Importance of Character Development

- Character development is essential for living a meaningful life and actualizing one's potential
- It is a process of self-improvement and growth, which can be achieved by cultivating virtues and wisdom

# Aristotle's Perspective on Wisdom

- Wisdom is the ability to cultivate virtues and develop a virtual engine of growth and development
- This process allows individuals to actualize their potential and live a meaningful life

# Weakness of the Will and Foolishness

- Foolishness arises from a lack of character, even when one knows the right thing to do
- Cultivating character can help overcome such weakness and allow individuals to make better decisions

# The Hierarchy of Beings and Living Up to One's Potential

- Aristotle's hierarchy of beings includes inorganic matter, living

things, self-moving beings (animals), and rational beings (humans)

- To live up to one's potential, one must cultivate their character and actualize their capacities for rationality and morality

# The Purpose of Life According to Aristotle

- The purpose of life is to become as fully human as possible by cultivating character and actualizing one's rational capacities
- This involves overcoming self-deception and developing wisdom

# Rejuvenating Our Understanding of Meaning and Purpose

- By revisiting Aristotle's teachings, we can deepen our understanding of concepts like purpose, potential, growth, and development
- This can help us live more meaningful and fulfilling lives, guided by the cultivation of character and wisdom

# The Importance of Worldview

- In the next part of this discussion, we will explore Aristotle's account of a worldview and its significance to our self-understanding and existential meaning