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# Faith, Integrity, and Integral Being

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# Faith, Integrity, and Integral Being

## Abstract

Integrity – because of its connection with ethics – has always been of interest to both moral philosophy and the world’s wisdom traditions. Throughout the history of ethical philosophy there has been an emphasis on the concept of integrity in terms of its relationship to character development and morality. However, there is also a relationship between integrity, well-being, and what it means to be well-integrated within the fabric of existence—which was especially evident in Aristotle’s *Virtue Ethics*. Aristotle’s explanation of integral being is also important to understanding the connection between individual and social flourishing and the having appropriate interactions both with nature and with the primordial forces of existence.

This article argues that the term integrity has aspects that are broader than merely referring to human character traits. Integrity, because it enhances a person’s interactions in ways that enable an individual to flourish and enjoy an enhanced quality of life is connected with being well-integrated within the fabric of Being. **The basic premise of this article is that integrity is promoted by religion, philosophy, neurobiology, and social psychology with the intention of helping the individual realize a desired state. This desired state, in terms of Aristotle’s moral philosophy, is tantamount to realizing one’s highest good or helping a person to achieve his or her most desired outcome.**

**Key words:** Arête, Coadunation, Entelechy, Preordain, Telos, Reintegration, Authentic Being

## 1. Introduction

The term integrity applies to an individual's character and to a person whose character is considered admirable because the person is honest, trustworthy and reliable (Graham 2001, 234-235). A person of integrity has a highly developed sense of self and is always true to that self thus is a person who is considered to be a matured character. Such a person is able to consistently act in accordance with chosen values thus always acts in a way that enables the realization of those values. However, it is clear that the concept integrity also has implications connected with what it means to be a well-integrated person. In this sense the term has to do with a character that is able to experience and maintain well-being. Thus, integrity also has to do with what it means to be well-integrated within the fabric of being (i.e. integrity denotes a type of person who understands how to interact with the aspects of existence that are necessary for flourishing in a way that increases beneficial outcomes). If the scope of integrity is broadened it still involves an individual's self-cultivation but it is also indicative of an individual who has achieved integral being. Achieving integral being is evident as the ability to experience complementary interactions with the other aspects of one's social and natural environment. In this respect, integrity—as a trait of the ethical character—has implications that are relational.

The concept integrity is promoted in connection with helping the individual achieve a desired state of being (Loewy 2002, 56-57). The desired state is similar to what Aristotle described as the ability to experience one's highest good. It is also clear that the world's knowledge and wisdom traditions have proposed integrity as a way of enhancing the individual's life experience. The world's wisdom traditions have always indicated that integrity plays a part in providing a person with the sense of a complementary (or harmonic) connection with existence. In addition, in both the East and the West, promoting integrity is intended to help individuals live with less threats to their well-being and in a way that is less harmful to other aspects of existence. It is clear that the most recent views of science and philosophy are indicative of an attempt to generate knowledge that is able to create similar character results and a similar life experience. Thus, knowledge traditions encourage integrity because it helps the individual to realize values that have long been cherished by both Eastern and Western traditions (religious, scientific, and philosophical).

This article argues in support of the connection between integrity and the individual character however, in addition, it claims that integrity can be described in relational terms and in a way consistent with contemporary Social Psychological views on self-formation and views regarding the ontology of social existence. The article emphasizes that there is a connection between being a person of integrity, developing good character, and enhanced human interactions, thus an enhanced human experience. This, of course, means that there is a relationship between an individual with a virtuous character and a person who has an enhanced ability to obtain beneficial outcomes in interactions. However, the article stresses that enhanced human interactions occur as a result of the ability to create beneficial interactions with other aspects of one's social and natural environments thus is the outcome of being well-integrated within one's social and natural environments (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002, 1-3).

This article describes the ethical aspect of integrity by arguing that it enhances interactions in ways that increases the individual's experience of the things that he or she values highly. However, in addition, the article explains how integrity – from the perspectives of both Eastern and Western traditions – helps individuals to realize what is considered valuable for enhancing and elevating the human experience. The second section begins with an inquiry into integrity. This section focuses on the connection between integrity and one's character. Integrity is explained in a way that is in accordance with Aristotle's Virtue Ethics (i.e. meaning explained as the ability to achieve one's highest good or most desired outcome). Thus, the second section clarifies the connection between the highest good worth achieving and a self that is fully integrated. Such a well-integrated character is able to flourish, to experience that which is the most desired outcome of or ultimate aim of one's actions, plus to experience happiness and well-being.

Section three argues that integrity provides a regenerative power that enables a person to enjoy a sustained sense of well-being. Being a person of integrity also means avoiding acting in any way that diminishes one's well-being. This amounts to being true to one's natural impulse as ordained by one's neurobiological make-up and acting in accordance with the principles that have been long cherished and promoted by the world's knowledge and wisdom traditions. In other words to be true to human nature the person of integrity continuously acts in a way that is consistent with the biological principles that underlie the ontological basis of the natural order (i.e. principles ordained by the elemental life creating forces of nature). In this sense a person of integrity acts in a way that is true to (thus to realize) values that have been proposed by the world's perennial philosophical traditions. The argument is supported by proposing an expanded conceptualization of the term integrity however one that is consistent with Aristotle's description of the benefits of a virtuous character.

Section four argues that an individual achieves integrity when he or she is integrated with existence in a way that results in the experience of well-being and flourishing – in spite of challenges imposed by the nature of human interactions. This argument is supported by the claim that the very biological forces that gave rise to the human organism have also preordained an inherent neural value preference for integral being. In this respect clarity on the concept of integrity has to do with clarity on the relationship between the biological nature of existence and humanity's biological nature. In the fourth section human integrity is referred to as tantamount to Authentic Being. Thus, section four of the article also emphasizes the connection between integrity and authenticity, humanity's neural value preference, and cognition (i.e. the role that integrity plays in directing perception toward the life enhancing, elevating, and enriching opportunities in the environment). Section five summarizes the main points of the article and draws conclusions.

## **2. The Ethical Significance of Integrity**

The development of a virtuous character is significant because it helps individuals in their effort to creatively navigate a way through life, taking advantage of the beneficial opportunities that reality offers while, at the same time, avoiding that which is harmful. That is to say that the person of integrity – who is ethical in the sense of having a virtuous character – is inclined to be attracted to things that enhance human well-being and human interactions but avoids what would diminish one's well-being. Such a character is able to shape the necessary encounters of life (social and environmental encounters) into life enhancing outcomes. This involves learning as much as possible about the nature of things so as to understand how to interact in appropriate accord with the nature of things. In this respect, a virtuous character could be described as a person who understands and pursues that which results in his or her highest good (highest good includes the ability to maximize beneficial exchange in one's interactions).

Most ethicists point out the importance of demonstrating such character traits (usually placing the emphasis on social interactions). In this respect “The point of ethics is to codify how interpersonal and social relationships must reasonably be ordered by people who cannot help caring about the final ends that are most fundamental in the lives of all fully ethical beings” (Frankfort 2006, 198). Thus, if the goal of ethics is excellence in character and action we can think of an ethical person as one who possesses character traits that are *magnanimous*. If the central ethical question is, “How should one live?” The answer is not only a matter of providing an account of what ought or should not be done. A complete answer will also inform an individual as to what kind of person one ought to be. If the major question ethics is concerned with is *what is good* then the answer is good is that which helps one to gain insight into what is

necessary for achieving the ultimate good (Halfon 1989, 37). “An adequate ethical theory must pertain to one’s ethical character in interactions and relationships. A person who lacks this disposition, from the perspective of what it means to be [ethical as a] human being, may be properly referred to as deficient in the qualities of Virtue Ethics” (Sandler 2005, 2-5). This is the case because – as philosophers of Virtue Ethics argue – not only are social interactions essential to human flourishing but effectively interacting with the greater natural order is also essential for enhancing the human experience (Hirsh et al. 2012, 312).

Thus, increasingly Virtue Ethicists include the importance of being well-integrated within *the overall natural fabric of existence* as a significant aspect of what it means to display a virtuous character. In this sense a person fails to be a good human being if he or she disrupts that which is necessary for good interactions (either socially or in terms of the natural order). From this point of view, the highest good is not only thought of in anthropocentric terms but thought of in terms of the interdependent relationship that humanity has with other biological organisms and non-organic entities. The fact that humans exist in a complex web of interactions means that having a good understanding of the highest good includes consideration of what is involved in being well-integrated within this complex web. To live well one must acquire from nature those things that are needed for nourishment and growth. If the quality of those things is in any way threatened or diminished the quality of the human experience is threatened and/or diminished. Thus, prudence also demands that one does not harm the things that human existence depends on for survival (Sandler 2005, 5).

Defined in these terms an explanation of what it means to be ethical would be expanded to include avoiding those things that could damage one’s character, might damage one’s own physical well-being, and could damage a relationship with those things needed for flourishing. Rosalind Hursthouse supports the prospect of an expanded explanation of what it means to be ethical by pointing out that ethics and human values are all related to what contributes to improving interpersonal and social interactions thus what helps individuals to be better-integrated. She also stresses that as the outcome of a certain level of moral and character development one learns to appreciate the common bond that humanity has with all living things (Hursthouse 2007, 163-164). Such a life is worth living because of the happiness it provides, it lends to the flourishing of the individual, it contributes to generating prosperity for society, and results in a life of tranquility.

Aristotle believed that all things (especially all organic things) exist with the ontological necessity of maintaining integrity without which they will begin to deteriorate – this includes individuals but is also true for institutional systems, cultures, and societies. Aristotle’s naturalism prompted him to claim that *prudence* (i.e. a type of knowledge demonstrated by an ethical character) is intended to increase an individual’s understanding of the teleological significance of the human connection with natural processes plus enhance humanity’s participation in natural processes (Falcon 2005, 16). On the basis of this claim one could argue that realizing one’s full potential (*entelechy*) for happiness, flourishing, and well-being is based on understanding the teleological significance of human interactions (e.g. intersubjective and with nature). For, as contemporary social psychologists point out, the research regarding factors that promote or impede the realization of one’s full potential indicates that Holistic well-being is based on acting in accordance with humanity’s neurological predisposition or value preference for being well-integrated within one’s eco-niche (Scheffler 1985, 10-34 & 49).

Because concern for the self is tied to a concern for one’s ability to have beneficial interactions with other aspects of existence – which is necessary for nourishment and growth thus for

survival – good or that which is beneficial for human beings is considered to be that which enables a person to achieve his or her *telos*. According to Aristotle achieving *telos* is connected with understanding how to have an appropriate relationship with the natural order (2002, 24). Bad (or that which harms) are those things which interfere with achieving *telos* (or bad can also be considered as that which diminishes the quality of those things on which the human biological organism is dependent for well-being and flourishing). In other words, *telos* is connected with nature’s intentionality (Searle 2002, 79-88). However, experiencing the potential value that nature-human interactions have for enriching human existence is dependent on learning to shape intentionality into beneficial and life enhancing outcomes.

In this respect, according to Rosalind Hursthouse, experiencing *eudaimonia* requires developing the type of character that [given humanity’s biological and neurobiological nature] inclines the individual “To flourish – to do well and fare well—in this world in which we inevitably find ourselves – not just in the particular culture or society we happen to find ourselves in” (Hursthouse 2002, 65). Hursthouse goes on to say that our philosophy of ethics needs to be expanded to include a particular new trait that would specify the importance that interactions have to achieving *telos*. Humanity’s *telos* is preordained by the primordial biological forces that shape patterns of natural interchange into complex structures of beneficial exchange (i.e. the very basis of life for the human organism and for human society is the ability to form structures of cooperative interchange). The fact that human behavior is directed at (or is about) veridical interaction with the natural order means that human interactions are prompted by an ontological impulse that predisposes individuals to attempt being appropriately integrated with the natural order. Thus, the natural biological forces that generate humanity’s biological nature demand nature-human integration and perpetual reintegration.

Individuals are impelled by the impulses of their biological nature to interact with the environment. The necessity of interaction can give the impression that humans are bound by biological necessity. However, the person of integrity experiences complementary interactions with the natural and social environment thus he or she is able to act with more freedom and less impediments in the effort to gain satisfaction (Dewey 1922, 10). In support of this claim the world wisdom traditions (Eastern and Western) have asserted that it is possible to have a well-integrated connection with one’s natural and social environments. From the perspective of the world’s wisdom traditions interactions are not only the source of self-formation, nourishment, and growth but also the basis of a heightened sense of well-being and harmony. David Loy points out that Buddhism, for example, stresses that all living things are necessarily intermixed with thus interpenetrate other aspects of existence (2003, 5). Loy, in fact, believes that the Buddhist concept of interdependent origination (*pratitya samutpada* or interpenetration) is not only a fundamental concept of Buddhist beliefs but the basis of Buddhist views on ethics and Social Psychology (2003. 8, 17, & 22). Buddhism is an example of how Eastern and Western perennial philosophies have advocated a conceptual prescription for maintaining a perceptual focus on what is essential for human flourishing. Such a perspective is believed to be the basis of reliable knowledge (faith) plus the key to avoiding what is harmful for human well-being.

G. E. M. Anscombe argued that living well is firstly a matter of having an informed conceptual understanding of why improving human interactions is as important to ethics as utility and duty. Anscombe emphasized the relational aspect of ethics by claiming that it is a “brute fact” that the quality of human existence necessarily depends on the quality of human interactions. She attempted to make this point clear by pointing out the difference between ‘is’ and ‘needs’ in terms of an organism’s connection with its environment. A brute fact is that an organism needs to be well-integrated with the environment in order to flourish. In other words, to say that a

biological organism depends on its environment is to say that it won't flourish unless it is well-integrated within that environment (Anscombe 1958, 6). What Anscombe emphasized is that the need (the natural urge humans have to engage the environment in an effort to obtain nourishment and sustenance) coupled with the desire is what creates the normative *ought* (i.e. to enhance survival an individual ought to have a good connection with the environment).

The Western religious traditions describe humanity's initial naturally ordained condition as being well-integrated within the natural order. The belief is that humanity's initial immersion in nature was characteristic of the way humanity's biological nature is constituted thus was a fundamental aspect of how humans initially perceived existence. In this sense it is important to remember that the environment and the perceived experience of the environment are linked together in a way that creates co-dependency (coition or mutuality) between our bodies and things (Merleau-Ponty 2005, 373). Thus, the earliest conceptualization of the nature-human experience reflected a prescription for perceiving and experiencing "at-one-ment" with the natural order. The three Western mono theistic religious traditions clearly assert (concurring with Yoga/Vedanta, Hinduism, Chinese Taoism, and Japanese Shinto beliefs) that this is a preferable perspective from which to perceive and experience existence. They also state that the subsequent alteration of this preferable perspective is unfortunate and should be rectified. Anscombe explained that Western Civilization's foundational conceptualization of justice (although seemingly remote to us) was that justice should be commensurate with ideas of interrelatedness which can also be described as "The balance or 'harmony which keeps things going" (which according to Anscombe modern humanity seems to have lost sense of) (1958, 12).

### **3. Integrity and Realizing a Desired State of Being**

The term integrity applies to a person who has an admirable moral character and whose strength of character is reflected in his or her moral commitments (Halfon 1989, 37 & 55-57). However, the description of the virtuous character, according to Aristotle, includes an individual who experiences a sustained sense of well-being or, put more simply, a person with a virtuous character is able to live well in spite of the challenges he or she is confronted with from the social and natural environments. Based on extending the understanding of ethics to include integrity the term also has to do with a regenerative power that extends longevity thus provides an ability to sustain well-being. In this sense integrity means an ability to hold a biological organism together or to keep its system intact. It is a type of virtue of character that also promotes the integrity of those systems related to, involved with, or connected to it (Gresser 1996, ix).

Integrity is defined as an ability to hold all the parts together so that they are integrated in a way that promotes synergetic interactions. Integrity in this sense means that all the parts are working well in relationship to each other and together they form a well-functioning and well-integrated whole system (Carter 1996, 7). When the term is applied in this way to human actions and interactions it refers to the social value connected with the term integration. Integrity is related to the concept integration in the sense that integrity promotes social interactions that increase outcomes that are beneficial for all stakeholders and a person of integrity facilitates the ability of others to be well-integrated within society (Calhoun 2015, 149-153). Without such successful endeavors to promote integrity a society becomes fragmented, works against itself, and the very foundations of its structure are threatened as a result of its lack of integrity. Aristotle lays the foundation for such a definition of integrity with his political philosophy which states that ethics and "Sociology are elegantly combined to offer a delicate balance



between principles and structures, ideals, and reality plus, cultural values and cultural institutions” (McCarthy 2009, 20).

Aristotle grounds his understanding of the social system that best fits human nature on his understanding of *physis* (i.e. the laws of nature or the principles underlying the natural order). He viewed the desire of an honorable character to live within a friendly and thriving community as prompted by natural impulses. He thought of society as operating best when in accord with natural principles and in this regard he is credited with introducing the concept of natural law (i.e. what is also popularly known as the precursor to Human Rights). Thus, Aristotle thought of a well-integrated society as one that adheres to principles constituted on the basis of natural law as the fundamental basis of social formation. In this respect social integration reflects fundamental natural principles shaped into cultural normative principles that are best suited for promoting beneficial interactions between the members of the society and with the natural order.

The concept integrity also has a meaning that is connected with lacking nothing or complete within itself. Aristotle believed that the reward of a virtuous character is the ability to sustain the experience of happiness – which is also within itself a state ultimately desired. Aristotle regarded happiness as the experience one enjoys upon achieving self-sufficiency. Thus, Aristotle suggested that becoming a person of integrity is accompanied by realizing how to become self-sufficient. Self-sufficiency can be defined as achieving the level of harmonious interdependence that enables a person to have beneficial, reciprocal, and complementary interchange with the other aspects of one’s social and natural environment – thus the person experiences what is sufficient for happiness and flourishing. “Self-sufficiency we define as that which makes life desirable and lacking in nothing; and such we think happiness to be; and further we think it most desirable of all things, without being counted as one good thing among others. Happiness, then, is something final and self-sufficient, and is the end of action” (Aristotle 1996, 12).

Although Aristotle regarded economics as a means of maximizing benefits (i.e. utility) he thought of utility more in value terms rather than in material terms (see Ekelund & Héber 2014, 15). When Aristotle talks about *The Good Life* he is speaking about experiencing what is sufficient for well-being, happiness, and flourishing. Although referring to self-sufficiency he was thinking in relational terms. In this sense it must be kept in mind that his notion of the good life is what can be achieved within community. Thus, there is tremendous social economic value related to the self-sufficient aspect of the virtuous character. He saw each of the individuals in this arrangement as “A part in relationship to the whole” (Aristotle 1996, 14). In other words – similar to what Confucius conceived – Aristotle thought that *virtue* would be manifest in the individual character but such an individual character would lay the foundation for harmonious household relationships, economic prosperity, and as a result good social relations and a thriving polis.

Aristotle described the phenomenal objects of nature as a composite of the basic constituents of nature. He believed that the ontological nature of existence prompts interactions as part of the measures that perpetually sustain the life process. That is to say that each particular thing exists within a unique eco-niche in which it participates in a larger eco-system (or a larger sphere of essential interactions). As a composite humanity’s biological system can also be considered to be a manifestation of (i.e. or a reflection of) the basic natural constituents that contribute to its composite form. It is in this respect that the ontological nature of existence has preordained humans to exist with a neurobiological predisposition or value preference for

perpetually seeking integration or reintegration with elements that shape human existence (see Edelman 2006, 24-25). However beneficial or satisfactory outcomes can only be achieved as a result of appropriately participating in the process of integration (see the definition of integration and reintegration in the explanation of the term on pages 6-7).

Adherence to natural principles has the benefit of providing the individual with a well-integrated sense of self where “All parts of one’s nature are brought into harmony with principle” (Aristotle 1996, 24). Aristotle described the goal of a virtuous character as the experience of *arête and eudaimonia* (i.e. self-cultivation that results in happiness). Ethicists often describe such a character as a person of integrity because this trait helps one to avoid corrupting influences (in terms of avoiding those things which would diminish well-being). In this respect Aristotle also thought of ethics as related to an ability to maintain one’s health. Aristotle certainly thought of happiness, well-being, and flourishing as connected with wellness. If we analyze Aristotle’s prescription for experiencing happiness it seems that a virtuous character is reflected in or influences all aspects of a person’s life. In other words, Aristotle proposed that there is a connection between ethics, human integrity, and achieving a certain desirable state of being. Aristotle thought that the desirable state that is worth achieving is one in which the person enjoys health as a significant component of the good life. This means that the factors contributing to a virtuous character also contribute to the *soundness* of a person’s overall being. Aristotle made reference to the importance of Holistic well-being by stating that good health is one of the three types of goods. However, he also pointed out that balance (i.e. The Golden Mean) is lost by intemperance which is the outcome of *too much or too little*, which creates imbalance, and will disturb a person’s well-being (Aristotle 1996, 229).

Acts of integrity enable individuals to be true to what was ordained by the biological forces that shape humanity’s biological nature. Integrity provides the ability to resist acting in any way that would diminish or alter human nature, it triggers a regenerative power that creates healthy growth, it prompts a resistance to acts that would in any way diminish being well-integrated within one’s social and natural environments, and integrity promotes recognition of the essential necessity of continuous integration or reintegration with the basic elements of existence. The good life results from being perpetually reintegrated with life’s elemental forces in a way that maintains internal and external integrity or, in other words wholeness, growth, and regeneration is the outcome of being well-integrated within one’s eco-niche.

Philosopher of mind John Searle argues that – in the case of the human experience – matter is constituted in a way that value, intent and meaning emerge. He adds that the interesting aspect of this – as far as humans are concerned – is the fact that creation’s primordial forces motivate human value preferences by building in predisposed intentionality. Searle points out that one of the most amazing features of nature is the fact that organisms –interlaced with other elements of nature in a particular way – are predisposed by nature to continuously seek reintegration with fundamental elements of the environment in their attempt to obtain nourishment, to maintain health, and to grow (Searle 1983, 46). Searle calls the urge to experience regeneration, health, and growth by means of reintegration “one of the most amazing features of nature.”

Searle agrees that the human organism is interlaced with elements of nature in a particular way that shapes experience, feelings, and consciousness (1983, 37). The human urge to participate in the natural process of reintegration with the environment also prompts a cognitive understanding of how essential managing the nature-human interchange is to maintaining a sense of self. Thus, intentionality is a special feature of the human effort to incorporate various natural elements into an integrated system that will contribute to the human endeavor to shape

his or her life into an enjoyable well-integrated experience (Searle 1983, 46). Searle states that it is this “special feature” that highlights the significance of human interactions with the environment by giving them intention, value, and meaning.

Searle acknowledges that the fact that matter can be organized in a way that value, intent and meaning emerge from the particular interaction of mineral and chemical elements of nature is astonishing. The interesting aspect of this mystery (as it relates to the human experience) is the fact that creation’s primordial biological forces have built-in a value preference that predisposes humanity with intentionality. This value predisposition motivates the intention to interact in ways that create beneficial, enjoyable, and life-sustaining outcomes. Searle concludes that at present science can state with conviction that organic organisms do reflect intentionality. In the human experience the intention is evident in the value preference for sustaining a well-integrated experience within a particular environmental context. Thus, he suggests that humans exist with the ontological necessity of attempting to sustain beneficial interactions with as many other aspects of the environment as possible.

Modern research in complementarity conducted by physicists, neurologist, biologists, psychologists, and sociologists confirm that perennial philosophy provides a viable explanation of the link between the biological aspects of the human make-up, how individuals self-organize, the structuring of culture, and the human relationship with the environment (Berntson & Cacioppo 2008, 36-37). That is to say that the whole body (including the human cognitive abilities) is a biological self-organizing system that interacts with the environment in an attempt to shape out of environmental possibilities interactions that best complement humanity’s biological organism. The challenge – as it has been described by the world’s faith traditions – is to maintain a focus on experiencing the human perceptual value preference without being distracted or disturbed by other possibilities that are not preferred (i.e. without being disturbed by the possibility of viewing nature from a diabolical perspective). Integrity enhances the ability to maintain a perceptual focus on the life enriching opportunities in the environment. In other words, because integrity increases the extent to which one perceives complementarity it reduces the disturbance of nature’s ambiguity by increasing the probability of anticipation becoming experience.

Nobel Prize–winning neuroscientist Gerald Edelman explains that complementarity is a manifestation of the fundamental connection between nature’s biological principles and the value preferences naturally triggered as human cognitive skills developed. The human neurological system (an extension of the nature’s biological system) prompts a neurological value preference that reinforces the types of behavior that promise an undisturbed enjoyment of nature’s beneficial opportunities (Edelman 1992, 102). The struggle for survival in an unpredictable environment predisposes such neural value preferences. The preference is in favor of the values, proven by natural selection, that contribute to shaping fortuitous encounters into an experience of life sustaining outcomes and life enriching experiences. Ineffectiveness in this regard can bring threat or harm. The threat is maximized to the extent that individuals fail in their attempt to be well-integrated with the other elements in the environment.

Edelman’s explanation of neural value preference clarifies why integrity plays such an important role in increasing the beneficial interchange between two interdependent organic systems and why being well-integrated is the preferable way to experience the necessary interaction between nature and humanity. Humans exist with an anxiety resulting from increased awareness of the interplay between how nature is affected by human perceptions and how nature itself shapes perceptions. Because of the “feedback” or “looping” relationship

humans have with nature humans are continuously both a product of nature and producing feedback that determines the human perception of nature. In other words humans are ontologically bound to an inescapable naturalness which must be managed appropriately in order to experience the enjoyment of life. Thus, it is because of the inescapable naturalness that the human neurological value preference inclines cognition toward realizing how to be better-integrated with the environment.

Values are what determine a person's conscious reaction to and experience of the external world. As human cognitive skills developed the human value preference favored relating to the various aspects of one's environment in ways that shape interactions into a feeling of satisfaction. However, the desire for satisfaction is coupled with an appreciable aesthetic quality which also prompts a human preference for a sustained and uninterrupted experience of life enriching and life elevating experiences. Sustained enjoyment of life enriching and elevating experiences is what Aristotle described as the good life (Aristotle 1999, 173-177). Studies in perceptual psychology and neurobiology reveal that it is possible to perceive reality in a way that increases the experience of the life enriching and life elevating possibilities that nature affords (Gibson 1986, 127; also see Miller 2011, 129-144). That is to say, in terms of an anthropological and social psychological understanding of the role of conceptualization in the human experience, that cognition serves the purpose of directing perception toward possibilities for experiencing internal and external complementarity (Portugali 1996, 39-40). The urge for complementarity is based on the desire to experience nature's perpetual demand for integration and reintegration as not only beneficial but life enriching.

Contemporary research in science, philosophy, anthropology, and religion substantiate the claim that the integrity of complex organisms is enhanced by fulfilling the inherent urge for beneficial interchange with nature and in the human case this helps individuals experience a fuller sense of the self. Cooperative interchange can be thought of as a natural biological value preference that establishes the inclination for social cooperation and culture. This means that the continuous *commingling between the human organism and various aspects of one's social and natural environments* can be thought of as "a tie that binds" all of existence into integral relatedness. Thus, humanity's inherent neurobiological value preference has been conceptualized by the world's wisdom traditions as the conviction that harmonious interaction with the environment is consistent with what was ontologically ordained to be best for human well-being and for the human experience in nature (Miller 2012, 6-15).

The perennial philosophies of the East and West claim that viewing and experiencing existence from the perspective of humanity's inherent value preference is personally beneficial, intellectually beneficial (heightens cognitive abilities), and is socially beneficial. The world's wisdom tradition claim that such a realization is more likely to result in the experience of what might be called "elevated being." Perennial philosophy adds that the fundamental biological principles of creation have encoded the organic elements of nature with intention that can be decoded by humans into an understanding of the teleological significance of existence. From the perspective of the world's wisdom traditions the teleological significance of existence is realizing how to enjoy the sense of "elevated being." This article argues that complex organisms sense this encoded ontological intention as a natural urge to be even better-integrated with one's social and natural environment plus to experience enhanced beneficial interactions. In this respect prudence demands considering that the world's wisdom traditions are right to admonish reconciling the breach between humans and nature in order to enjoy a more elevated human experience.

#### 4. The Human Neural Value Preference for Integral Being

Aristotle explained his perspective on the highest good achievable by human action in a way that established a conceptual connection between *eudaimonia* and views on Social Psychology. In *Nicomachean Ethics* (section ten the first phrase) he stated that a virtuous character results from affirming what is best in an individual (Aristotle 1999, 173). Renowned psychologist Carl Rogers, who emphasized the significance of the relationship between affirmation and authenticity, stated the matter in similar terms, “The most important question for the individual is am I living [in] a way that truly expresses me” (Rogers 1961, 119). This indicates the similarity between Aristotle’s views and those of contemporary Social Psychology in that both propose that being a person of integrity is tantamount to achieving authenticity.

Authenticity is related to integrity in the sense that both have to do with the extent to which one is able to shape his or her life pursuits, identity, and actions into an accurate expression one’s intrinsic values – given the necessities, possibilities, and constraints of reality (Ferrara 1998, 28). Because acts that are authentic are the basis of experiencing one’s chosen values authenticity is also related to acting to express and maintain one’s integrity. That is to say that, according to Aristotle, a person of integrity—when making judgements on how to satisfy the demands of human nature – is committed to acting authentically thus indicates how the demands of reality can be met in a way that maintains integrity. Authenticity is acting in a way that is faithful to one’s intrinsic value commitment thus are acts that are consistent with one’s ultimate values. The consistency confirms the result in that acts of integrity authenticate the person’s connection with his or her ultimate values. In Aristotle’s own words, “By choosing the right means to achieve the End causes the End to be realized” (Aristotle 1935, 305; also see *MacIntyre 2007, 149*). In this sense a person with a virtuous character chooses to act in a way that is authentic in an effort to be true to oneself and keep the integrity if his or her being intact.

Berkeley University Professor of Philosophy Charles Guignon states that authenticity is becoming the person you are which is the ultimate task of life (2004, 2). Guignon goes on to stress that he believes – in accordance with Plato’s writings – that when Socrates referred to “know thyself” he was thinking of self-knowledge but in terms of realizing the connection between the essence of one’s own being and The Essence of Being. Hinduism refers to this interconnection as the relationship between the individual self and the universal principle—or the laws of nature which are superimposed on every individual. In this respect self-knowledge is accompanied by an awareness of the complementary connection between the self and the natural forces that shape human existence. That is to say that Authentic Being results from opening one’s normal level of consciousness to the essence of one’s being – which is the basis of self-knowledge (see Sartre 1978, 73-85, 92-95, & 617 for an explanation of discovering the true essence of one’s being, transcending the ego, the role of valuation in being true to oneself, ethics and morality, and his notion of purity as essential aspects of Authentic Being).

Integrity – a character trait connected with being true to values—helps a person to realize and experience the things that he or she values. Thus, integrity promotes the experience of happiness by enhancing an individual’s ability to satisfy both the value preferences that are shaped by *ethical rationality* and those that are biologically motivated. This means not only experiencing the instrumental things a person values but it also means experiencing the fullness of one’s being. In this respect integrity is related to reliable knowledge (i.e. what Aristotle referred to as *epistēmē*) because it helps a person to understand how to uncover or realize the authentic nature of his or her being. Acts of integrity are acts that are authentic in that they affirm the person’s identity and value commitments (Sartre 1978, 58-59).

Albert North Whitehead asserted that “The whole is co-mingled with the various particulars. [That is to say that] what is realized is interwoven into the texture of realization” (Whitehead 1948, 89 & 96). Whitehead argued that there is a connection between the essence of one’s inner-most being and a life generating force that he described as the essential aspect of one’s inner-most being which provides individuals the ability to experience sensation and cognition – for without it a person completely lacks awareness and feeling. For Whitehead self-knowledge is defined as the cognitive realization of the essential interconnectedness between one’s unique corporal being and the universal essence that sparks the awareness of one’s life experience. In other words, according to Whitehead authenticity, integrity, and awareness result from connecting with the essence of one’s inner-most being. Whitehead asserts that as a result of reflecting on “Our concrete experience, we see at once that the element of value; of being valuable, of having value, of being an end in itself, something which is for its own sake, [and must be counted as] the most concrete actual intrinsic reality” (Whitehead 1948, 95). “Being a value that is an end within itself” is a statement that indicates Whitehead’s understanding of the connection between ethics, integrity, being true to oneself, and what has ultimate value. In other words, Whitehead described self-knowledge not only as authentic being but also as a type of epiphany that culminates in the realization of one’s true self. That is to say that he equates self-realization or the experience of authentic being with awakening to the “Brooding presence of the whole onto its various parts” (Whitehead 1948, 88-89; & 1996, 100).

The mythological, anthropological and scientific theories describing the elementary stages of the human experience assert that the fundamental urge that prompts the endeavor to sustain life enhancing relationships with other elements in existence is driven by the impulse toward self-preservation and growth (James 208, 368 – especially the footnote numbered 348). Because of this, in many world cultures and faith traditions integrity is thought of in terms of an ability to experience a sense of wholeness that transcends the individual ego and self-other dualism. In such terms acts of integrity are acts that flow from one’s innermost being or they flow out of the inherent nature of one’s being. These acts are expressions of the innermost self or, in other words, acts of integrity are acts that flow out of one’s inherent inclination toward being one’s authentic self. This is the basis of the claim that integrity promotes authentic being or sincerity. When an individual acts with integrity the person is afforded the realization or the actualization of his or her innermost convictions. It is in this sense that human integrity is a manifestation of faith (or what American Pragmatists call reliable knowledge).

Thus, the experience of integral being can be defined as successfully establishing at-one-ment between oneself and the essence of being. Integral being – tantamount to authentic being (thus the reward of integrity) – is the realization of harmony with *The Essence of Being*. We understand from Whitehead that existence is in a state of flux (a process of constant reintegration, regeneration, and growth) which give rise to infinite creative possibilities. Because the process of life persists perpetually (life cannot be static thus the fact of life demands constant process, growth and [inter]change) each moment is the full, immediate, and complete expression of life (in terms of essential interaction or perpetual reintegration). According to Whitehead acts of integrity shape the possibilities provided by natural forces into life enriching, sustaining, and elevating outcomes. “Creativity is the ultimate principle by which the many enter into complex unity” (Whitehead 1978, 21).

Diasetz Suzuki explained the realization of the connection between the essence of one's own being and The Essence of Being in terms adopted by the Japanese from the "Science of the Tao" (Tao-hsüeh) – which Suzuki considered to be the most valuable product of the ancient Chinese worldview. The Tao-hsüeh came to Japan primarily by means of Confucianism but also accompanied with reflections on Chán Buddhism – as practiced in ancient China but developed in a unique way in Japan. This aspect of Japanese culture clarifies the Japanese understanding of the connection between integrity, authentic being, sincerity (without pretense), and the ability to sense what the Japanese refer to as *Yugen*. The ability to sense *Yugen* is described as an awareness of one's essential connection with a force that sparks consciousness and sensation or a type of epiphany that is triggered by sincerity. Sincerity is otherwise described as a type of purity which results from avoiding anything that would tarnish one's character (Suzuki 2010, 349; also see Trilling 1972, 2-14). Thus, sincerity (authenticity) is connected with the highest principle of the Japanese worldview and has connotations involving the highest personal quality or character trait. "Translated in terms of ethics, [authenticity] is defined as sincerity (ch'eng), and the ideal life consists in cultivating the principle of sincerity" (Suzuki 2010, 51). Such a person develops an intuitive awareness of "the brooding presence" of *Yugen*.

## 5. Conclusion

Integrity has been promoted as an essential aspect of self-cultivation, social psychology, and political economy because of the role it plays in increasing individual well-being and social flourishing. However, Aristotle's perspective on ethics, social psychology, and social-economics (i.e. his political economy) proposes that integrity has an expanded meaning that is relational and inclusive of increasing possibilities for beneficial, life enriching, and life elevating interactions. This article has focused on explicating the connection between Virtue Ethics and developing character traits that enable a person to be well-integrated within one's social and natural environments. The world's traditional belief systems lay the foundation for the experience of integrity by promoting being in harmony with the primordial forces of existence and by associating this with what it means to be in harmony with the self ([Kierkegaard 1992](#), 115). They prescribe achieving integrity because it leads to aligning human values and human actions with what has been intended by the forces shaping the natural order.

Many of the world's faith traditions (e.g. Eastern – Yoga, Taoism, and Shinto for example and Western – the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions) have always asserted that harmonious, cooperative interchange with the environment is essential for realizing humanity's fundamental individual and social values. Today contemporary neurobiologists, social psychologists, and philosophers of mind agree that inherent value predispositions are ordained by the fundamental forces shaping the biological aspects of existence (i.e. inherent human values are ordained by the ontological nature of existence). Eastern philosophy asserts that by realizing the essential connection between humans and the natural order of things a person is more likely to experience what might be called "elevated being." Such a realization benefits health, sparks regeneration, increases human vitality, and heightens mental abilities. Thus, it prompts the realization that in order for human actions to fulfill the natural urge to experience a satisfactory outcome one must strive to act in a way that is consistent with humanity's inherent neurobiological value preference.

From the perspective of Eastern philosophy and Western traditions (Judeo-Christian and Islamic) in the earliest human experience integrity afforded the feeling of a nature-human seamless complementarity (a particular sense of being well-integrated within the *garden*). The

feeling of unified wholeness (referred to as *coadunation*) is the basis of an organism's feeling of integrity and in the human case helps individuals experience a fuller sense of self and what it means to be human (see Adorno 1973, 105-106; & also see Coleridge 1983, 168) . The world's scientific, mythological and philosophical traditions explain this by asserting that all things exist as a composite of natural elements. Ancient Chinese philosophy (Taoism) teaches that humans—as a composite of natural elements – can achieve a higher level of health and vitality by maintaining essential natural elements in a yin-yang balance. Western science affirms this and adds that – in the human case – when natural elements are formed into a particular composite self-consciousness emerges and when the human organism is held together in integrity higher consciousness (or increased mental ability) is the outcome along with the enhancement of physical abilities, or in short, a fuller appreciation of and experience of nature's regenerative powers.

Wisdom traditions advocate acts of integrity in order to promote the experience of being harmoniously integrated with necessary elements in such a way as to increase the person's enjoyment of life. This is the key to experiencing the highest good worth pursuing (Aristotle 1999, 172-173). Thus, human integrity plays an essential role in successfully participating in the natural process of shaping the integration of life's elements into complex structures that are more fully well-integrated. We know that ineffectiveness in this regard can threaten health and human well-being. The threat is maximized if humanity fails in an attempt to be properly integrated with the other elements in the environment. All of human knowledge has been contrived with the intention of helping humanity act with such integrity.

This article has described the nature of phenomenal existence as a perpetual interchange between natural elements. In the case of human existence, a person's physical being can be described as a composite of the elements of nature. In addition, health, nourishment, and growth demand a constant interchange between the individual and various aspects of nature in the effort to achieve reintegration. This fact makes it evident that the world is not made up of atomistic entities juxtaposed to each other but the nature of reality is essentially relational. In other words – in accordance **with Aristotelian teleology – as biological an organism's survival, growth, nourishment, and well-being are dependent on being well-integrated. Because of the fact of interdependence humanity's neurobiological value preference has evolved in a way that urges enhanced interactions. In this** respect integrity is important to enhanced interactions because it inclines behavior and perception toward recognizing the life-enhancing, life enriching, and life elevating opportunities in one's social and natural environments. Thus, this article defines integrity as “Learning to view the parts in such a way that we perceive them as *Holistically* integrated, thus the particular quality of the total increases in aesthetic value” (Peirce 1974, 84). Such a perspective on the nature of existence takes us beyond a sense of dualistic contention into improved relationships. It takes us beyond a subject-object split into cooperative union.

Aristotle believed that there is an aspect of appearance that is Universal (i.e. foundational, regenerative, and perpetual – even though forms or its appearance change). He recognized that being true to oneself or being a person of integrity is a matter of being true to one's nature, being authentic, and being sincere. In other words, Aristotle proposed that humanity's highest good (experiencing well-being, happiness, and prosperity) is based on becoming a person who is *Holistically* well-integrated. In this respect prudence can be defined as making use of one's rational capacity to perceive and experience complementarity (i.e. *coadunation*). Thus, by



becoming a person of integrity one develops the cognitive ability to shape the disparate phenomena of one's existence into integral being (Williams 1975, 491).

Faith traditions, philosophy, and social psychology have promoted living with integrity in an effort to help individuals increase the possibility of enjoying beneficial interactions with others and with the environment. Such beneficial outcomes for individuals and society is based on integrating the knowledge available from faith traditions, the social sciences, and the natural sciences. In this respect enhancing the future of human existence will be based on increasing the amount of integral knowledge available to help "Humanity enjoy a more complementary view of human interactions. Thus, [making] it is possible for humanity to enjoy an enhanced perspective on human existence and human interactions" (Miller 2011, 131). Western and Eastern wisdom traditions claim that the perceptual perspective—that initially afforded humanity a harmonious view of the relationship between self and nature—was shaped by the primordial forces of existence. In both the Western and Eastern traditions the initial harmonious view was partially due to the human natural ability to actually sense compatibility between nature, the self, and culture (Durkheim 1995, 85-86, 100, 133-135, & 208). There was, as well, recognition that nature's abundance provides resources that provide for shaping cultural development in desirable ways. This gave the earliest humans the sense that in spite of the disturbances there were possibilities that nature-human interactions could be supportive of the neurobiological effort to experience a sense of complementarity with natural forces.

Professor Edward Younkins points out that a person who holds rational values, selects ends and means consonant with the nature of existence, and with the integrity of the essence of his or her own being increases the possibility of achieving his or her desired outcome (1998, 2). For this reason, it can be argued that acts of integrity are acts that are life enhancing, elevating, and enriching. Such acts help individuals to be true to what was ordained by the forces of creation thus be true to the essence of their own being. In other words, such acts enable individuals to experience a harmony (or complementarity) between the biological principles comprising human nature and the biological principles that shape the human experience in/of nature. That spark of life that enlivens human being also stimulates awareness that the nature of Being (i.e. a composite of natural elements) is in essence a co-mingling of natural elements. Thus, for a person of integrity internal and external balance and harmony reflect each other.

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