

# Ethics and Emotions—Education and Enlightenment

## The Philosophy of Kristján Kristjánsson

Kristján Kristjánsson (born 1959) graduated with a PhD degree in moral philosophy from the University of St. Andrews in Scotland in 1990. He was Lecturer and later Professor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Education at the University of Akureyri from 2001–2009. From 2008–2012, he was Professor of Philosophy of Education in the School of Education at the University of Iceland. He is now Professor of Character Education and Virtue Ethics, and Deputy Director of the Jubilee Centre for Character and Values in the School of Education at the University of Birmingham.

Kristjánsson's fields of specialization are ethics, political philosophy, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of education. Of classical philosophers, he is most influenced by Aristotle and J. S. Mill and in his latest work also by Hume. Important contemporary influences include M. C. Nussbaum and R. C. Solomon.

### 1. Publications

In addition to numerous papers in edited collections and journals,<sup>1</sup> Kristjánsson has published nine books, three of which are collections of papers in Icelandic and six of which are monographs in English.<sup>2</sup> He has also translated Gottlob Frege's *Die Grundlagen der Arithmetik* [*The Foundations of Arithmetic*] into Icelandic.<sup>3</sup>

#### 1.1 Books in Icelandic

Kristjánsson's three books in Icelandic—*Proskakostir* [*Ways to Maturity*],<sup>4</sup> *Af tvennu illu: Ritgerðir um heimspeki* [*The Lesser of Two Evils: Philosophical Papers*],<sup>5</sup> and *Mannkostir* [*Human Excellences*]<sup>6</sup>—are collections of papers, most of which had previously appeared in journals and newspapers. These books are written for the educated public rather than professional philosophers, and most of their philosophical content is explained and debated in more detail in the books Kristjánsson has written in English.

In 1997, Kristjánsson published a series of ten papers on postmodernism in the weekend

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<sup>1</sup> For example: *American Philosophical Quarterly*, *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *Ethics*, *International Journal of Applied Philosophy*, *International Philosophical Quarterly*, *Journal of Moral Education*, *Journal of Philosophical Research*, *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, *Journal of Social Philosophy*, *Journal of Theoretical Politics*.

<sup>2</sup> His most recent book, entitled *Virtues and Vices in Positive Psychology: A Philosophical Critique* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) was not available until just before the final version of this paper was sent to the publisher. Therefore, it is not reviewed here.<sup>3</sup> The translation was published in 1989 by Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag as *Undirstöður reikningslistarinnar*.

<sup>3</sup> The translation was published in 1989 by Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag as *Undirstöður reikningslistarinnar*.

<sup>4</sup> Kristján Kristjánsson, *Proskakostir* (Reykjavík: Rannsóknarstofnun í siðfræði, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> Kristján Kristjánsson, *Af tvennu illu: Ritgerðir um heimspeki* (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> Kristján Kristjánsson, *Mannkostir*, (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2002).

supplement to the newspaper *Morgunblaðið*. In these papers, he described postmodernism as a conglomeration of “falsehoods” and “nonsense” and held some of the more notorious spokesmen of modern French philosophy up for ridicule. This created quite a stir among the Icelandic intelligentsia. Some saw him as a staunch and frank critic of fashionable nonsense, others as a conservative advocate of outmoded ideologies. Since then, Kristjánsson has been well known among educated Icelanders for his criticism of intellectual fads and as a spokesman of utilitarianism, cosmopolitanism, and the values and attitudes commonly associated with the Enlightenment.

The ten papers on postmodernism are reprinted in *Mannkostir*.<sup>7</sup> Other essays worthy of note in Kristjánsson’s Icelandic books are “A Defense of Utilitarianism,”<sup>8</sup> “A Paper on the Cognitive Theory of Emotions,”<sup>9</sup> “On Teaching Moral Virtues,”<sup>10</sup> “On Teaching Life-Skills in Schools,”<sup>11</sup> and “The Aristotelian Virtue of Megalopsychia.”<sup>12</sup>

### 1.2. *Social Freedom: The Responsibility View*

*Social Freedom: The Responsibility View*, published in 1996, has its origin in Kristjánsson’s PhD dissertation, *Freedom as a Moral Concept*. In this book, he develops his own conceptual theory of social freedom and explains the logical relationship between the concepts of freedom, responsibility, and power. In the final chapter, Kristjánsson gives a short formulation of his definition of social freedom:

This book has argued for a ‘responsibility view’ of negative social freedom, held to be superior to other negative-freedom conceptions. According to this view, social freedom designates a triadic relation between an autarchic agent *A*, another autarchic agent *B*, and some choice/action *x*. *B* is socially free to do *x* iff he is not constrained by *A* from doing *x*. *A* constrains *B* when *A* is morally responsible for the non-suppression (imposition, non-prevention of imposition, non-removal) of an obstacle that impedes, to a greater or a lesser extent, *B*’s choosing/doing *x*. *A* is morally responsible for the non-suppression when the onus of justification can be placed on him, that is, when it is appropriate to ask him, in the given context, why he did not suppress the obstacle, and that, in turn, is when there exists an objective reason—however overridable—satisfying a minimal criterion of plausibility why *A* could have been expected, factually or morally, to suppress the obstacle.<sup>13</sup>

One of the many interesting ramifications of Kristjánsson’s theory of freedom is that *constraining or limiting the freedom of a person is extensionally equivalent to exercising power over him or her*.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 171–222.

<sup>8</sup> Kristján Kristjánsson, *Proskakostir* (Reykjavík: Rannsóknarstofnun í siðfræði, 1992), 71–98.

<sup>9</sup> Kristján Kristjánsson, *Af tvönnu illu: Ritgerðir um heimspeki* (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1997), 63–94.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 219–34.

<sup>11</sup> Kristján Kristjánsson, *Mannkostir*, (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2002), 50–80.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 81–116.

<sup>13</sup> Kristján Kristjánsson, *Social Freedom: The Responsibility View* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 207.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 150–61

This book on social freedom has become something of a mini-classic. It is cited in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy's<sup>15</sup> entry on positive and negative liberty, and excerpts of it are reprinted in a recent Blackwell's anthology on freedom.<sup>16</sup> However, for some reason, Kristjánsson seems subsequently to have lost interest in mainstream political philosophy and has instead moved into the fields of philosophy of mind (especially emotion theory) and philosophy of education.

### 1.3. *Justifying Emotions: Pride and Jealousy*

In *Justifying Emotions: Pride and Jealousy*,<sup>17</sup> Kristjánsson adopts the dominant cognitive model of emotions, according to which an emotion involves components of four types:

- i. A propositional attitude (e.g., a belief or a judgment);
- ii. A desire or a conative component;
- iii. A feeling;
- iv. A characteristic pattern of behavior.

He uses this model and a combination of ethical and psychological arguments to “challenge the received wisdom about pride by claiming that a *certain kind* of pride, [...], is *psychologically* necessary for the formation and sustenance of personhood, and also *morally* necessary for a self-respectful person who wants to live a well-rounded virtuous life.”<sup>18</sup> He also argues that self-respect requires jealousy under some circumstances.

### 1.4. *Justice and Desert-Based Emotions*

In the introduction to *Justice and Desert-Based Emotions*,<sup>19</sup> Kristjánsson outlines his theory of justice as an emotional virtue:

In the philosophical, as well as in the psychological, literature, insights have been resurfacing about the essential emotionality of justice itself: namely, that justice is—as the ancients realized—not primarily a lofty intellectual virtue, grounded in abstract, detached beliefs, but rather, at bottom, an earthbound, if complex, emotional virtue, grounded in certain compelling beliefs and desires which are deeply embedded in human nature [...] Interestingly, the trend away from justice as a grand political blueprint towards its personalization, emotionalization and (by implication) depoliticization takes us right back to the familiar and ancient territory of Aristotle's *nemesis*: an emotional and moral disposition towards pain felt at fortune, either good or bad, if undeserved, and towards pleasure if deserved: a disposition which forms an inseparable part of Aristotle's overall conception of justice [...].<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Ian Carter, “Positive and Negative Liberty” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/liberty-positive-negative/>.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Ian Carter, Matthew H. Kramer, Hillel Steiner, Eds. *Freedom: A Philosophical Anthology*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> Kristján Kristjánsson, *Justifying Emotions: Pride and Jealousy* (London: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

<sup>19</sup> Kristján Kristjánsson, *Justice and Desert-Based Emotions* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2006).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

### 1.5. Aristotle, Emotions, and Education

In *Aristotle, Emotions, and Education*,<sup>21</sup> ten common assumptions about Aristotle's moral philosophy and moral education are taken to task. These assumptions, listed in the introduction,<sup>22</sup> include the following: Aristotle neglects the role of critical reasoning in moral education; Aristotelian virtue is primarily about self-improvement but not about doing good for the sake of others; teaching is best understood as praxis in the Aristotelian sense.

Over ten chapters, Kristjánsson refutes these assumptions one by one and argues that a proper reading of Aristotle reveals a subtle and nuanced view of moral development and moral education that is highly relevant to contemporary concerns. In the final chapter, he summarizes his conclusions:

Many of the misinterpretations—or at least the seriously skewed interpretations—of Aristotle's texts that we have encountered in previous chapters can most plausibly be explained by the fact that the authors have been preoccupied with hustling their own agendas, simply enlisting Aristotle as a mouthpiece, a ventriloquist's dummy, to further those agendas. [...] I have tried to discharge some of the most common misapprehensions of Aristotle's writings into ten assumptions which are abroad in current educational discourse, and to declaim against them in as many chapters. One aim of this book has been to free Aristotle of those distortions.<sup>23</sup>

### 1.6. The Self and Its Emotions

In this splendid monograph, published in 2010,<sup>24</sup> Kristjánsson argues that emotions are central to a person's self, that is to a "person's core commitments, traits, aspirations and ideals: the characteristics that are most central to him or her."<sup>25</sup>

He argues against the dominant cognitive self-paradigm that describes the self as essentially constituted by self-relevant beliefs and the development of the self as enacted by cognitive reconstructions. Anti-realism—namely, the position that one must believe that one's self is what one thinks it is and nothing else—is central to this paradigm and is something that Kristjánsson seeks to demolish. According to the alternative paradigm, as Kristjánsson defends it, a person can be mistaken about his or her own self, for the self is composed of emotions and there may be psychological truths about the emotional life of an individual (e.g., dispositional emotions, background emotions) that he or she is not aware of.

In the final chapter, Kristjánsson quotes the Scottish philosopher John Macmurray, who wrote that "[t]he emotional life is not simply a part or an aspect of human life. It is not, as we often think, subordinate or subsidiary to the mind. It is the core and essence of human life." Kristjánsson's response to Macmurray is significant:

Translated into today's jargon about selfhood, this quotation pretty much sums up my 'alternative' self-paradigm: Emotions are not simply a part or an aspect of the self. They are not subordinate or subsidiary to some other cognition-dependent processes. Rather, emotions are the

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<sup>21</sup> Kristján Kristjánsson, *Aristotle, Emotions, and Education* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2007).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 4–5.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>24</sup> Kristján Kristjánsson, *The Self and Its Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. 2.1.

core and essence of the self.<sup>26</sup>

Kristjánsson rejects anti-realist accounts of the self. He describes two different forms of realism—Aristotelian hard realism and Humean soft realism—and advocates the latter:

Let me quickly mention a number of reasons why Humean soft realism could recommend itself to people on both sides of the realism–anti-realism divide, not so much by blunting the force of that distinction as by ironing out some of the irritating problems attached to both hard self-realism and soft anti-self-realism. *First*, it preserves the commonsense notion of the self as a unique entity: [...] *Second*, the appropriateness of our self-concept as moral beings will—along realist lines [...]—depend on correlation with objective reality. Our self-concept is thus essentially fallible and other-dependent; mere internal coherence does not guarantee its truthfulness [...] *Third*, all this is achieved without any strong ontological commitments [...] The Humean moral self is no mysterious mini-Me. It is simply on a par with ‘the voter’, ‘the citizen’, ‘the tax-payer’ and ‘the consumer’: oneself as seen from a certain perspective (here: emotion-driven and moral). Yet, this self is, like Aristotelian ‘character’, a ‘full-blooded self—a self outfitted with its qualities, possessions, relations, likes and dislikes’ [...]. *Fourth*, the Humean self-hypothesis explains the intimate link between moral selfhood and emotions [...].<sup>27</sup>

## 2. Ethical Theory

Although Kristjánsson rejects the elitism of *Ethica Nicomachea* and advocates a more equitable view, his outlook is about as Aristotelian as any modern ethical theory can be. He even endorses Aristotle’s account of ‘megalopsychia’ as a supreme virtue.<sup>28</sup>

This Aristotelian outlook is in sharp contrast with much of what is taken for granted by modern liberals:

Perhaps the modern obsession with people’s equal human worth is, à la Nietzsche, characteristic of the degeneracy of modern morality. Or perhaps it is simply, à la Bernard Williams, one more example of people conflating what they think they think with what they really think [...]. In any case, Aristotelian assumptions about the different levels of people’s moral excellence seem here more realistic and productive: furnishing us, for example, with the necessary conditions for moral educators’ ability to teach their protégés by example. Otherwise, the latter would have little to learn from the former.<sup>29</sup>

This outlook is also opposed to most forms of ethical rationalism and dualism from Plato through Stoicism to Kant and Rawls:

Theorists have through the ages (*pro* Plato but *contra* Aristotle) misdescribed the emotions as gatecrashers in the realm of reason, and emotionally inspired beliefs as disruptions of rational thought, but in doing so they wrongly tore the subject matter of morality in two. We must now

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, chap. 10.5.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, chap. 2.5.

<sup>28</sup> Cf., e.g. *Ibid*, chap. 2.2; and Kristján Kristjánsson, *Justifying Emotions: Pride and Jealousy* (London: Routledge, 2002), 130.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 133.

revise this all-too-common conceptual account and return to a moral-sentiment theory of morality which considers the basis of morality to be found in our natural dispositions to have certain emotions.<sup>30</sup>

According to the theory Kristjánsson elaborates in *Justice and Desert-Based Emotions*, the virtue of justice would be impossible without the common human tendency to feel compassion, righteous indignation, and several other emotions that arise as we find the good or bad fortune of another person to be either deserved or undeserved.

After Kristjánsson has explained his theory of justice, he tackles the received wisdom that utilitarianism cannot accommodate common sense beliefs and intuitions about desert and sums up his results as follows:

This, then, is the utilitarian theory that I promised: (1) While justice is a virtue, it is not tantamount to moral rightness, (2) desert forms an important element in justice as an essential good conducive to pleasure, and (3) sometimes desert outweighs entitlement and sometimes it does not. Moreover, (1) pleasure is a reasonable criterion for deciding when the just is also the morally right and when it is not, (2) pleasure is a reasonable criterion for deciding when desert should prevail over entitlement and vice versa, and (3) after a certain threshold of undeserved outcome is reached, desert will prevail over other considerations of justice in our judgments about [...] what is, on the whole, just and what is unjust. Justice, in general, and desert, in particular [...] are not weak links in the utilitarian programme; rather utilitarianism provides a sound and plausible moral justification for both of them.<sup>31</sup>

In chapter 9 of *Aristotle, Emotions, and Education*, Kristjánsson continues in the same vein and argues that Aristotle's version of virtue ethics is compatible with J. S. Mill's utilitarianism and that "Aristotle steers clear of the objection of self-centredness that has been levelled at contemporary virtue ethics."<sup>32</sup>

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In one of his books, Kristjánsson describes his own ethical theory as "Millian utilitarianism with a generous helping of Aristotelian naturalism."<sup>33</sup> Later in that same book, he writes the following:

The demand that a morally justified emotion is one which makes our world a better place in the long run seems to be an admirable springboard from which to launch an exploration of the moral worth of particular emotions [...] For me, the appeal of utilitarianism here lies in its retaining the best of Aristotle's insights into the salience of the emotions while averting the mess created by modern-day virtue ethics.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Kristján Kristjánsson, *Justice and Desert-Based Emotions* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 82.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 149.

<sup>32</sup> Kristján Kristjánsson, *Aristotle, Emotions, and Education* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 134.

<sup>33</sup> Kristján Kristjánsson, *Justifying Emotions: Pride and Jealousy* (London: Routledge, 2002), 49.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 85.

### 3. Methodology

Kristjánsson works within the Anglo-American tradition of analytical philosophy. In his introduction to *Justice and Desert-Based Emotions*, he describes his method as ‘critical conceptual revision’:

As our starting point, we need to collocate people’s common conceptions about the given concept, then work through the puzzles of contradictions in usage and beliefs, and finally formulate a new account which we bring back to the conceptions, trying to retain the truth of the greatest number and, in particular, the most authoritative of these. In the end, we may be doing more than just tidying up ordinary usage: it does happen that common usage fails to honour distinctions which themselves emerge from an analysis of common usage; or, possibly, we find that distinctions entrenched in ordinary language are in fact redundant. [...] I do not claim any special originality for this method of conceptual inquiry and the aspirations associated with it. I chose the title ‘critical conceptual revision’, rather than simply ‘conceptual analysis’ or ‘philosophical analysis’, merely in order to distinguish it from abuses of such analysis which have tended to give it a bad name [...].<sup>35</sup>

Many of Kristjánsson’s arguments can be divided into three steps:

- i. Trimming of ordinary usage;
- ii. Defining a concept;
- iii. Supporting a normative conclusion.

One example of this can be seen in the three following quotations from *Justifying Emotions: Pride and Jealousy*:

[...] [A]n informal survey that I recently conducted among fifty first-year students in nursing and occupational therapy, where they were asked to write down standard examples of envy and jealousy and then to define briefly the two concepts, revealed a confusing disarray of ideas. [...] These results confirmed my hunch that in order to say anything morally constructive about envy and jealousy, more than a little trimming of the ragged edges of ordinary language would be required: trimming which aims at conceptual clarification and economy, coherence and serviceability, while still trying to retain as many considered judgements of laymen and experts as possible.<sup>36</sup>

After elaborating on ordinary usage he goes on to define the concept of jealousy:

[...] *jealousy* can most usefully be specified as the sort of envy where *A* believes *B* has got or is about to get some favour from a third party, *C*—a favour which *A* believes he deserves just as much or more than *B*. *A* is righteously indignant towards *B* because of *B*’s undeserved good fortune, and specifically angry towards *C* as a violator of moral deserts. *A* is *concerned* about this state of affairs, and he desires that justice be done: namely, that *A* gets the deserved favour from *C*, while *B* does not get it (or is deprived of it if it has already been given).<sup>37</sup>

Finally, Kristjánsson uses this definition to show that jealousy can

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<sup>35</sup> Kristján Kristjánsson, *Justice and Desert-Based Emotions* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 11.

<sup>36</sup> Kristján Kristjánsson, *Justifying Emotions: Pride and Jealousy* (London: Routledge, 2002), 137.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 144.

[...] be seen as exemplifying a moral virtue—that is, if we define a virtue (à la Aristotle) as a character trait that a human being needs to flourish and live well. Jealousy qua virtue (2) would then constitute a mean between two vices: (1) too much sensitivity to undeserved treatment which overshadows other appropriate responses, such as forgiveness, benevolence, etc., and (3) too little sensitivity to such treatment which is the sign of excessive magnanimity toward others or servile sheepishness. Persons guilty of (1) are too quick to make mountains out of molehills; those guilty of (3) make themselves sheep by stomaching any undeserved treatment. Thus, neither of the two lead lives of *eudaimonia*.<sup>38</sup>

Another salient feature of Kristjánsson's methodology is his frequent crossings of disciplinary boundaries. He often uses findings from psychological and sociological research as data when discussing people's common conceptions and beliefs about moral subjects such as desert, justice, or jealousy. Crossings of disciplinary boundaries thus form an integral part of the method of critical conceptual revision. He also urges social scientists to take philosophical studies into account:

Social scientists [...] need to accept, and accommodate, the unavoidability of normative conceptual bases for their studies, just as philosophers need to accept, and accommodate, the unavoidability of empirical evidence for justifying normative theories. [...] [O]nly a two-way exchange can here deliver the rich understanding of moral concepts that we are after. Why are social scientists often so eager to fight shy of normative considerations, to create an (illusory) appearance of standing above the normative fray? Probably for fear of importing 'impure' elements into their studies. In this case the 'impurity' would consist in allowing essentially relative evaluative elements to defile the brute facts of their research matter. This fear, however, rests on the belief that normativity necessarily implies relativity. But that is simply not true.<sup>39</sup>

In *The Self and Its Emotions*, Kristjánsson goes further in the same direction:

I fear that philosophers' lack of interest in empirical evidence leads, at worst, to conclusions that are irreducibly relative or hopelessly trivial—and that social scientists' lack of interest in conceptual work fosters deceptions and logical errors. It is thus wise to remain equally sceptical of philosophical armchair psychology and of conceptually sloppy and morally barren 'moral' psychology.<sup>40</sup>

In this same monograph he also offers new explanations of why he thinks that empirical research into the moral views of ordinary people provides important data for moral philosophy:

Taking my cue from Aristotle's advice that we need to heed the counsel of the many and the wise, and John Stuart Mill's advice that what matters most in moral inquiry is the verdict of experienced and competent judges—with the best reason for something to be deemed morally desirable being that it is actually desired by such judges—I point out that whatever moral

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 163.

<sup>39</sup> Kristján Kristjánsson, *Justice and Desert-Based Emotions* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 118.

<sup>40</sup> Kristján Kristjánsson, *The Self and Its Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), chap. 1.2.

experience and expertise there exists is out there in society. The actuality of a large number of people having converged upon the same moral view does not in and by itself provide a reason for giving that view a constitutive role in the justification of moral principles, for one cannot assume that those ‘we’ (sadly, more often than not in current psychological research comprising only a subgroup of *homo psychologicus*: first-year psychology students) constitute wise and experienced judges. Nevertheless, one should reject the imperial outlook that philosophers can discover truth by means that are, in principle, unavailable to lay people. In that case, the actuality of a large number of people having converged upon the same moral view, *combined* with the fact that the research into their opinions is conducted in accordance with the best available standards (such as sufficient formal and substantive determination of research design and measure procedures, careful choice of respondents) provides good reason for giving this evidence a justificatory role in moral theorising. Their view may still be wrong, as shown after further scrutiny by philosophers or lay people; but then again, the possible fallibility of all theories (moral, political or otherwise) is no novelty in post-Popperian times. I contend therefore that well-designed research into the moral views of ordinary people provides important *triangulating evidence* of the appropriateness of moral theories, evidence that can be overridden only by dint of convincing arguments showing that those views are somehow incoherent or misguided.<sup>41</sup>

#### 4. Criticism of Liberalism and Philosophy of Education

Kristjánsson’s criticism of postmodernism has already been mentioned. In his philosophical writings he also finds faults with liberalism. In the final chapter of *Aristotle, Emotions, and Education*, he writes that

[m]ost of what counts today as mainstream political philosophy is unmitigated *liberal* political philosophy; much the same holds for mainstream educational philosophy. Liberalism has become something of a latter-day Leviathan that disregards or squashes every idea that it cannot appropriate for its own aggrandizement.<sup>42</sup>

In what follows, he criticizes five liberalist contentions and argues for the superiority of a more Aristotelian outlook. Briefly stated, these five faults of liberalism are:

- i. Inflating the value of autonomous choice and disregarding the value of choosing what is morally right;
- ii. Emphasizing the value of self-esteem instead of self-respect;
- iii. Wanting people from different cultural backgrounds to gather around too small a common core of values and disregarding that people from all over the world share the same basic virtues and emotions;
- iv. Refusing to acknowledge that people are of unequal moral worth depending on how virtuous they are;
- v. “Liberals reject desert as a morally salient concept because it implies (1) a thick, substantive ideal of the good, (2) a strict sense of personal moral responsibility and (3) the idea of

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, chap. 3.2.

<sup>42</sup> Kristján Kristjánsson, *Aristotle, Emotions, and Education* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 178.

unequal moral worth.”<sup>43</sup>

Kristjánsson’s opposition to liberalism is sharpest and most vigorously argued for when he writes on topics that relate to the philosophy of education:

When confronted with educational issues, liberals tend to tiptoe around controversial issues. On the one hand, they will, at least in their more earthbound moments, accept that education, be it moral education or that of the traditional school disciplines, must aim at making students good citizens and help them to function both as natural and social beings. On the other hand, they will deny that this requirement entails instilling in students any substantive conception of the good life: any conception of the proper way of acting or reacting. At times, liberals seem to be at a complete loss about what should be taught in schools, apart from the ‘three R’s’ and other bare basics; at any rate, whatever is taught must be conducive to the students’ ability to choose without telling them what to choose.<sup>44</sup>

Later he writes that

Aristotelian naturalism suggests a radical departure from existing practices of traditional liberal education, by condoning a much deeper and richer programme of character formation than does liberalist, not to mention postmodernist, pluralism.<sup>45</sup>

This “deeper and richer programme” includes cultivation of the whole person—emotions, virtues, attitudes, manners, competencies and abilities—and calls for greater emphasis on art in school curricula:

Unfortunately, in modern times we have seen art being sidelined in the school curriculum: relegated from its ancient role as a fundamental school subject to that of being a happy diversion from, or an embellishment on, the things which really matter at school. [...] Artistic activities at school, such as music, painting, creative writing, imaginative play, and drama, can I think make at least a threefold contribution to emotional cultivation: they help pupils express and come to grips with emotions [...]; they enable them to put themselves in other people’s shoes [...]; and they have a general balancing and organising effect on pupils’ emotional life.<sup>46</sup>

The final chapter of *Justice and Desert-Based Emotions* is about moral education. In it, Kristjánsson advocates what he calls ‘non-expansive character educations’. This approach to moral pedagogy is cosmopolitan yet still substantive—that is, with a normative content unlike the empty formalism of some liberal ideals. It is also close to the spirit of *Ethica Nicomachea*, emphasizing that children should be taught to feel the right emotions towards the right people under the right circumstances.

Two of his other books, *Justifying Emotions: Pride and Jealousy* and *The Self and Its Emotions*, also conclude with a discussion of how the tenets, supported by the text, can be applied to moral education. Indeed, Kristjánsson has become one of the world’s most prolific

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 179.

<sup>44</sup> Kristján Kristjánsson, *Justifying Emotions: Pride and Jealousy* (London: Routledge, 2002), 51–2.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 62.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 194.

writers on issues in educational philosophy (having published extensively in all the major periodicals in the field), a still relatively small subfield of inquiry situated somewhere between mainstream philosophy and mainstream education.

Although his works, especially the five books written in English, are academic in the best sense, Kristjánsson is, in all his philosophical writings, concerned with education and the good of society. These concerns invigorate his texts, imbuing even the longest twists and turns of analyses and complex arguments with practical wisdom.

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