

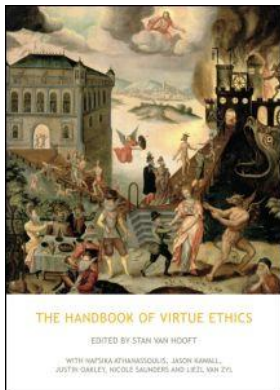
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## **The Handbook of Virtue Ethics**

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### **Virtuous leadership: ethical and effective**

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## Virtuous leadership: ethical and effective

Paul Kaak and David Weeks

Many institutional failures and disappointments within Western culture are due to bad leadership. Bad leadership may be “ineffective” or “unethical” or – as is often the case – it may be both (Kellerman 2004). The era of modernity was inclined to attribute credibility to incredible leaders, to the celebrity heroes of politics and progress. Today, the confidence and surety once placed in those who lead has perished in waves of corruption and duplicity. Expertise, charisma and competitiveness, elements of what Alasdair MacIntyre (1984) calls modernity’s “moral fiction”, have been unveiled as insufficient (at best).

As a result, scholars and citizens wonder whether a leader’s good character can be a credible source for “ethical leadership” that is also “effective leadership” (Cameron 2003; Ciulla 2012). Followers want leaders who are trustworthy. They want leaders who are authentic. Organizations need leaders who are good, leaders whose vision and performance are an outgrowth of their virtue.

In this chapter, we make a case for virtuous leadership, not only because it makes character the foundation for ethical practice, but also, we purport, because leaders who are virtuous are effective in their call to lead. What follows is the result of a dynamic dialogue about virtuous leadership based in classic literature and the current research on leadership from the behavioural sciences. The outcome is a robust argument for the development and deployment of good leaders.

We will see that the connection between virtue and leadership is most clearly delineated by Aristotle, Confucius and the authors of a leadership genre known as “mirrors for princes”, and that their insights are still applicable today. All of these authors address political leaders and those who govern institutions at the highest levels. It is not clear whether they thought their principles would be applicable to leaders of other forms of human associations, but it was inevitable that they would be.

## ARISTOTLE

In the *Republic* Plato explicitly links leadership with virtue. His philosopher-king embodies justice, courage, moderation and prudence. But Plato, representing the Socratic contention that “knowledge is virtue”, contributes less to the conversation about leadership and virtue ethics than his student Aristotle. “In terms of leadership, Aristotle’s contribution has been enormous” (Cronin & Genovese 2012: 85). A key component of that contribution is Aristotle’s notion that virtue is not simply moral knowledge; it is the development of excellent human character via habituation.

The canonical text for the Aristotelian ethical tradition is the first half of a two-volume work, typically published separately today as the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*. Both titles address telic human action, activities directed towards purposeful ends. Aristotle commences with the assertion that all human activity, whether individual or collective, aims at some good. While individuals seek a good life, good leaders seek the good of the whole, a much greater thing: “The attainment of the good for one man alone is, to be sure, a source of satisfaction”, however, “to secure it for a nation and for states is nobler and more divine” (*NE* 1094b10).

The work of the morally good leader, or *spoudaios*, is to both become good and promote the good. Aristotle describes “the highest good attainable by action” as eudaimonia, translated as happiness or flourishing. The highest good is not health, pleasure, wealth, honour or contemplation, since these are pursued for the sake of happiness. Happiness, for its part, is living in accordance with the finer aspects of human nature; namely, living rationally and acting virtuously.

The key to eudaimonia is virtue, that which “renders good the thing itself ... and cause[s] it to perform its function well”. So human virtue is “a characteristic which makes a good person”, and “which causes him to perform his own function well” (*NE* 1106a15–25). Aristotle suggests that neither intellectual virtue nor moral virtue are implanted by nature, nor are they innate; yet humans can become virtuous. Excellences are developed through habituation; what we do determines who we become.

Acquiring the right habits requires personal mastery, or self-leadership. According to Aristotle, this entails acting according to right reason, which means avoiding excess and deficiency and aiming for the mean when making choices. “Practical wisdom” or prudence (*phronēsis*) is the intellectual virtue or habit of mind that guides choice. It is the capacity for deliberating well about what is good and advantageous in human affairs.

Leaders are faced with choices when confronted with matters where an outcome is not predetermined. The best course of action is to choose to act at the right time, for the right reason and in the right manner. There are many ways of going wrong, but only one right way. The right way results from deliberative choice, not choosing based on appetite or emotion.

Aristotle’s application of these ideas in the world of politics is important for leaders today, for it is in the tasks of governance that we see leaders legislating for the whole, directing the lives of others, for good or ill. From them we discern what leaders ought to do and what they ought not to do. When successful, leaders foster habits among their followers; they shape souls, form characters. When done well, it “makes them good and disposed to perform noble actions” (*NE* 1099b30).

Aristotle’s impact in Christendom, especially via Thomas Aquinas, is widely known. Aristotle’s influence, however, also extends into the Islamic world. For instance, the

philosopher Alfarabi, whose tenth-century commentaries on Aristotle predate those by Aquinas by three centuries, contends that the good leader is someone who has habitually cultivated intellectual and moral virtue, “someone to be copied in his ways of life and his actions”, and someone who aims to provide happiness for “the inhabitants of the city” (2001: 37, 27).

### CONFUCIUS AND THE IMPACT OF INTEGRITY

In the East another pivotal figure emerges around the same time as Aristotle. Confucius’s *Analects* serves a similar purpose to Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*: establishing a tradition of virtue to guide those who would lead.

We know virtually nothing about Confucius’s life. It seems he invested much of his time teaching a retinue of young men who follow him in his quest for a governmental post, a pursuit that consistently eludes him. We do know, however, that Confucius saw himself as a spokesman for peace, a guardian of Chinese tradition, a transmitter of ancient wisdom. In brief, he teaches that morally exemplary leaders are best suited for making the practical judgements about the well-being of the whole.

Classifying the relationship between Confucius and Aristotle is akin to a debate about taxonomic rank: are the two thinkers of the same species, genus, family or class (Sim 2007; Yu 2007)? The relationship depends on how one parses various terms and concepts. For instance, does Confucius’s notion of benevolence (*ren*) overlap with Aristotle’s conception of virtue (*aretē*)? Is Chinese ritual (*li*) the same as Greek habit (*ethos*)? Does Confucius’s way (*dao*) correspond to Aristotle’s notion of human flourishing (eudaimonia)? Does the Confucian mean (*zhong*) equate with the Aristotelian mean (*meson*)? Is appropriateness (*yi*) similar to practical wisdom (*phronēsis*)?<sup>1</sup>

Confucius prizes virtue as the pre-eminent requirement for leaders. Those who lead must take up the burden of goodness, wisdom and courage. Good leaders must cultivate moderation, loyalty, filial piety and diligence to the point where one not only knows and prefers virtue but even delights in it (Confucius 1989: VI18). These virtues should prevail both in one’s private and public life. To be lax or unreliable in one intimates that one is lax and unreliable in the other.

Society benefits when leaders lead by example, exhibit concern for others and master the rules of propriety. “He who rules by moral force is like a pole-star, which remains in its place while all the lesser stars do homage to it” (*ibid.*: II 1). Moral force enables one to maintain order without resorting to physical force. “If the ruler himself is upright, all will go well even though he does not give orders. But if he himself is not upright, even though he gives orders, they will not be obeyed” (*ibid.*: XIII 6). This does not mean, however, that moral goodness is sufficient; leaders must also be competent, economical, punctual, efficient and attentive.

In addition to these two great moral philosophers, the “mirror for princes” genre includes other teachers who provide guidance to those who lead and those preparing to lead. There are Greek treatises by Isocrates and Xenophon, Christian works by John of Salisbury, Thomas Aquinas and Giles of Rome, Islamic texts by Kai Ka’as and Nizām al-Mulk and Renaissance era handbooks by Niccolò Machiavelli and Desiderius Erasmus. These commendable manuals – with one notable exception – tell leaders and prospective

leaders what to *be* more often than what to *do*; that is, character consistently trumps conduct. Each *vade mecum*, whether Chinese or Greek, Islamic or Christian, ancient or medieval, elevates virtue to a place of centrality. This is not to say that notions of utility, duty and competence are absent. But a leader's character is pivotal when making utilitarian decisions, performing duties and achieving success.

### XENOPHON'S CYRUS AND MORAL NOBILITY

Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus* may well be the original princely mirror. Peter Drucker tagged it the "first systematic book on leadership" and claimed it remains the best book ever written on the subject (1954: 159).

A Greek historian, soldier and student of Socrates, Xenophon offers an invaluable depiction of ancient Greece. Unlike other examples from the "mirror for princes" genre, Xenophon eschews didacticism and offers a quasi-biographical work of historical fiction. *The Education of Cyrus* is a story, intended to show how leaders develop, what great leaders look like and how great leaders fail.

The story reflects Xenophon's fascination with Persia and its legendary ruler, Cyrus. Rising from a nomadic tribe east of the Tigris River, Cyrus unifies the Persian people and transforms Persia into a colossal empire, an empire that eventually threatens Greece.

As warrior and statesman, Cyrus is an able strategist, insightful administrator and a gracious diplomat. Known more for generosity than for repression, Cyrus allows conquered people greater freedom than they have ever known. He maintains local cultures and customs, practises religious toleration, grants limited autonomy to satraps and exhibits magnanimity at every turn. Xenophon portrays Cyrus as rewarding merit, leading by example, putting followers first, guarding against his weaknesses, being a "poet of stratagems", whetting the spirits of followers and preferring to be loved more than feared.

Xenophon contends that followers need leaders – like Cyrus – who "will correctly show, teach and habituate them to do [good] things until it is inbred in them" (2001: 108). To do so, Xenophon says leaders should render themselves noble and good. He portrays Cyrus as wise, steadfast and gentle. Yet anyone who reads the book cannot fail to also see him as a man of courage, justice, foresight, prudence, piety and moderation. Xenophon's explanation is clear: Cyrus acquires these virtues because of his strong moral upbringing, cementing virtue in his character via habituation.

Xenophon did not have a democratic spirit; leaders, in his mind, are born not made. Cyrus was "born a king by nature", superior in every way (*ibid.*: 43, 145). Thus the challenge of leadership is to discern who has the gift and then hone its development. Xenophon admires the Persian educational system because it recognizes and rewards superiority, inculcating virtue in emerging young leaders.

### ERASMUS ON SELF-LESS CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

The most famous Christian "mirror for princes", *The Education of a Christian Prince*, was penned by the Dutch humanist Erasmus. A Renaissance icon, he also figures prominently, though reluctantly, in the Reformation. Erasmus looks back to the New Testament Church

to correct the theological and ecclesiastical ills of Roman Catholicism while looking back even further to Roman and Greek antiquity to correct the philosophical and social ills of the medieval era.

*The Education of a Christian Prince* was published in 1516, after Erasmus was appointed as a councillor for Prince Charles, grandson of Emperor Maximilian. Sixteen years old at the time, Charles soon becomes Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. In his written gift to Charles, Erasmus clarifies two things: what princes must do to succeed and why princes fail. Both relate to virtue and, for Erasmus, Christian virtue in particular.

Erasmus reminds Charles that “the finest contest of all ... is to struggle daily to improve upon oneself” (2007: 33). Victory in this never-ending battle requires a good moral upbringing and a proper education, for “nothing is harder than to withdraw someone from behaviour which has already taken root in his character from habitual usage” (*ibid.*: 73). The one who tutors emerging leaders must “first see that his pupil loves and honours virtue as the most beautiful thing of all” (*ibid.*: 13). These leadership educators must repudiate poor moral examples and deflect the ill-influence of misguided advisers and self-interested counsellors.

The model leader is none other than Christ himself. Thus, Erasmus prizes not only the virtues of antiquity but also the theological virtues of faith, hope and love; especially love. When properly educated, a leader becomes:

complete with every virtue; born for the common good, sent indeed by the powers to alleviate the human condition by looking out for and caring for everyone; to whom nothing is more important or more dear than the state; who has more than a fatherly disposition towards everyone; who holds the life of each individual dearer than his own; who works and strives night and day for nothing else than that conditions should be the best possible for everyone; with whom rewards are ready for all good men and pardon for the wicked if only they will mend their ways ...

*(Ibid.*: 27)

Such a servant-leader will also be fair-minded, magnanimous, self-controlled, perceptive, resolute, accessible and amiable.

Leaders with good character, pursuing the common good, stand in stark contrast to leaders who pursue personal ambition. The consequences are profound: “The corruption of an evil prince spreads more quickly and widely than the contagion of any plague. Conversely, there is no other quicker and more effective way of improving public morals than for the prince to lead a blameless life” (*ibid.*: 21). The reason is that followers imitate leaders. “Turn the pages of history”, says Erasmus, “and you will always find the morality of an age reflecting the life of its prince” (*ibid.*).

### MACHIAVELLI TURNS VIRTUE INSIDE-OUT

Erasmus was a contemporary of Machiavelli. To the best of our knowledge, neither man knew of the other, although they crisscross Europe at the same time. It is an intriguing irony of history that they wrote their respective leadership manuals around the same time. The books could hardly be more different: Erasmus wants to resuscitate the

forgotten wisdom of the ages, while Machiavelli aims for innovation. Although they are both Catholics, Erasmus idealizes Jesus while Machiavelli's hero is his contemporary, the murderous Cesare Borgia.

Machiavelli's new perspective explicitly criticizes those (like Erasmus) who promote high-minded virtues, writing that it is: "better to go after the real truth of the matter than to repeat what people have imagined. ... There's such a difference between the way we really live and the way we ought to live that the man who neglects the real to study the ideal will learn how to accomplish his ruin, not his salvation" (1992: 42). Machiavelli, like modern thinkers who follow him, turned his gaze from the "ought" to the "is". In doing so, he fixates on a world plagued with imperfection. Rather than dwelling on health, he focuses on disease. The prince is like an ancient physician, performing surgery on fully conscious patients. Moral considerations aside, the measure of goodness becomes effectiveness and efficiency, power and prowess, cunning and cleverness. In his defence, one may contend that Machiavelli rationalizes such actions in pursuit of noble ends (the unification of Italy, the return of Florentine greatness, a defence of republicanism), but he provides little argument for how one determines meritorious ends. His desired ends would certainly not be deemed noble in the eyes of the Venetians, the French or the Swiss, for example.

For Machiavelli, it is fine to be a good parent, spouse, friend or neighbour. But goodness means something different in a leader's public role. In public life, one must do things you would never do in your personal life. The leader must "learn how not to be good and use that knowledge, or refrain from using it, as necessity requires" (*ibid.*: 42). The consequences are corporate executives who do anything to improve the bottom line for investors, politicians who excuse corruption for the sake of promoting the aims of their constituencies, athletes who win at any cost and teachers who countenance cheating on standardized exams. In each instance, leaders live with bifurcation, separating their public and private lives because the public version requires, at times, prevarication, deceit, miserliness, cruelty and so on. It is little wonder Machiavelli is believed to promote the notion that the end justifies the means (a phrase he never uses).

Far from labelling such actions as vice, Machiavelli calls them *virtù*, defined as what is required in a particular situation in order to succeed. Machiavelli's truncated understanding of virtue turns the Confucian and Aristotelian world upside-down; Machiavellian notions about leadership constitute the greatest threat to applying virtue ethics to the realm of leadership. Joseph Badaracco suggests, "there is no final reconciliation of virtue and *virtù*. They remain in permanent tension" (1997: 119).

Machiavelli is now a constituent part of modern culture. The consequence is largely negative. In terms of leadership, Machiavelli encourages averting one's eyes from matters of ethics, at least in the public realm, in the name of effectiveness. In other words, performance trumps principles.

Yet even virtue ethicists can learn from Machiavelli. His view of *virtù* can be positively nuanced as effort and energy, skill and strength, valour and vigour. He reminds us that good leadership is not solely about character but also about competence. "When *virtù* and prudence (*prudenza*) could be artfully combined, the Prince could serve the common good" (Cronin & Genovese 2012: 99). Francis Bacon comments:

We are beholden to Machiavel and writers of that kind, who openly and unmasked declare what men do in fact and not what they ought to do; for it is impossible to

join the wisdom of the serpent and the innocence of the dove, without a previous knowledge of the nature of evil; as without this, virtue lies exposed and guarded.  
 ([1605] 1900: 222)

As this survey of the ancient leadership handbooks comes to a close, the work of Alasdair MacIntyre offers an important transitional note regarding “the manager, the dominant figure of the contemporary scene” (1984: 74).<sup>2</sup> In his survey detailing the rise of the post-virtue character of Western culture, MacIntyre argues that “among the central moral fictions of the age we have to place the peculiarly managerial fiction embodied in the claim to possess systematic effectiveness in controlling certain aspects of social reality”. This, he suggests, is because “managers themselves and most writers about management conceive of themselves as morally neutral characters whose skills enable them to devise the most efficient means of achieving whatever end is proposed” (*ibid.*: 74).

But the idea and practice of effectiveness is not morally neutral, as MacIntyre and this chapter contend. Leaders who would be effective at facilitating change must acknowledge the inherent integrity of ethics and effectiveness and aim at becoming and behaving in accordance with this unity. Deliberate questions, like those offered by Joanne Ciulla, challenge leaders in a way that addresses MacIntyre’s concern: “Was the change itself good? How did the leader go about bringing change? And what were the leader’s intentions?” (2012: 517–18).

Although still pervasive among many modern perceptions of leadership, the moral amnesia supported by Machiavelli’s blatant amorality seems to be wearing off (Badaracco 1997). This change is being signalled in emerging scholarship from within psychology and leadership studies. Conclusions and recommendations are appearing that are more akin to the proposals of Aristotle and Confucius than to those of Machiavelli. This field of enquiry prudently suggests that effective leadership can be measurably associated with moral force. Character virtue is not merely the ideal way, but the way of reality.

## CHARACTER VIRTUE

For those weighing in on the contemporary conversation, certain points of departure and some of the language have shifted. Immediately evident is the move from male-dominated/military views of leadership and virtue to a more inclusive perspective. From musings once rooted in philosophy, current thinking grows out of research-based psychology. The more accessible goal of well-being brings some clarification to the Aristotelian aim of eudaimonia (whose frequent translation “happiness” has been troublesome to some).

The concept of character (a maturing idea within psychology) is more expansive, thus more comprehensive, than the fragmented view of virtue that emerged during the Enlightenment. A person’s character is seen as unifying, harmonious and stable; it has a lifetime orientation. This offers a different perspective from traditional discussions of the virtues which are often more piecemeal, isolated and compartmentalized (Kupperman 1991: 15–18; Fowers 2005: 11).

Researchers in the insightful field of positive psychology have identified twenty-four developable “character strengths” as the “distinguishable routes to displaying one or another of the [six broad, universal] virtues” (Peterson & Seligman 2004: 13):



- (1) The virtues of Wisdom and Knowledge include strengths of Creativity, Curiosity, Open-Mindedness, Love of Learning and Perspective.
- (2) The virtue of Courage includes strengths of Bravery, Persistence, Integrity and Vitality.
- (3) The virtue of Humanity includes strengths of Love, Kindness and Social Intelligence.
- (4) The virtue of Justice includes strengths of Citizenship, Fairness and Leadership.
- (5) The virtue of Temperance includes strengths of Forgiveness and Mercy, Humility and Modesty, Prudence and Self-Regulation.
- (6) And the virtue of Transcendence includes strengths of Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence, Gratitude, Hope, Humour and Spirituality.

What is unfortunate, however, is that while “each strength is morally valued in its own right” (*ibid.*: 19), the moral emphasis seems to be trumped by the psychological. Blaine Fowers notices that “on rare occasions [the Peterson and Seligman text] referred to larger, richer, or more social goods, but [the] focus on individual fulfillment predominates” (2005: 10).

Positive organizational behaviour (POB) is a sub-discipline of positive psychology. This scholarly movement studies the role of moral and psychological well-being in thriving organizations and their leaders. Principal researchers explain that POB goes “beyond just the prediction of performance and into support of a causal relationship between POB states [constructs akin to virtue] and desired performance outcomes” (Luthans *et al.* 2007: 15). Subsequently, the theory of authentic leadership development (ALD) has emerged from the work of long-time POB scholars Avolio and Luthans. They describe ALD as:

The process that draws upon a leader’s life course, psychological capital, moral perspective and a “highly developed” supporting organizational climate to produce greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviors, which in turn foster continuous, positive self-development resulting in veritable, sustained performance. (2006: 2)

At the merger of these streams of scholarly thought it can be shown that flourishing character supplies the overall psychological and moral materials that make an effective leader. Two ideas converge: (a) good leaders are persons of overall excellent character; (b) good leaders are morally virtuous in their role as leaders. A third idea – (c) that good leaders have developed the virtues particular to leadership – arises naturally from the ancient conversation about good leadership and melds with these perceptive streams of enquiry from the behavioural sciences.

### **GOOD LEADERS START AS PERSONS OF EXCELLENT CHARACTER**

For Aristotle *prudence* is like the global positioning system of the virtuous person and *temperance* is the steering wheel. Prudence indicates the right direction, temperance (understood as moderation, restraint, self-discipline) takes it there. “A self-controlled man ... follows right reason” (*NE* 1119a20). Leading thinkers in the field of emotional intelligence offer this connection: “Self-management ... which resembles an ongoing inner conversation ... enables transparency, which is not only a leadership virtue but also

an organizational strength. Transparency ... allows integrity, or the sense that a leader can be trusted” (Goleman *et al.* 2002: 47). Self-leadership provides the apprenticeship for effective leadership of others.

Careful study confirms that the ancient philosophers and the modern researchers agree: it is implementing appropriate “habits” (*NE* 1103a15–20), “the restraints of ritual” (Confucius: VI 25), repeated practice (Luthans *et al.* 2006: 390) and “experimentation” (Boyatzis & McKee 2005: 101–3) that create psychological, emotional or “soulful” virtues within a person. The question remains, what kind of character development should the leader pursue?

POB researchers suggest psychological capital (or PsyCap), which they define as “a higher order positive construct comprised of the four-facet constructs of self-efficacy/confidence, optimism, hope and resiliency” (Luthans *et al.* 2007: 4). Strictly speaking, the PsyCap constructs are not moral virtues. If, however, the *aretē* of a leader finds its foundation in “the overall quality of a person’s life” (Fowers 2005: 5), then PsyCap proposes personal excellences that support good leadership.

For example, leaders who embody self-efficacy inspire confidence in followers. Leaders who are optimistic see the inevitable criticism that comes their way as an opportunity to get additional perspectives from those impacted by the leader’s decisions. Criticism is generally not taken as personal affront, but as an educational opportunity. A leader who is characterized by hope, as defined by those engaged in positive organizational scholarship, is a leader with clear goals and plans to achieve those goals. And leaders who are resilient are less likely to stay down when they have experienced failure. They push through hardship towards the success for which they aim.

The POB researchers say “[state-like] PsyCap can be developed through a micro-intervention ... [which is] a highly focused, very short training session” (Luthans *et al.* 2006: 388). These interventions are intentionally not focused on developing stable trait-like dispositions. Rather, they are designed to cultivate capacities that are open to development and also hold promise for successful performance (Luthans *et al.* 2007: 14–16). Accordingly, the causal relationship between these positive capacities and workplace performance can be more easily measured than by attempting to correlate a person’s more stable traits with their effectiveness on the job (*ibid.*: 15). Aristotle would say that if these short-term interventions lead to long-term habits they would eventually become permanent capacities.

Whether acquired by oneself or as a result of outside intervention, whether they are established traits or malleable states, authentic leaders who put effort towards personal well-being are likely to lead better. They will be more self-aware and temperate and therefore less likely to trip over their own dysfunctions. They will be conscious about becoming more grateful and thus more likely to create teams and organizations that appreciate the work people do. As Noel Tichy and Warren Bennis put it: “Leading with character gives the wise leader clear-cut advantages” (2007: 84).

### GOOD LEADERS ARE MORALLY VIRTUOUS IN THEIR ROLE AS LEADERS

*Credibility*, by James Kouzes and Barry Posner, offers a research-based orientation to the premise that a leader’s integrity is highly desired and valued by followers. Building trust

is the key to leadership effectiveness; breaking trust is the quickest way to ruin. To maintain a trustworthy character, these authors suggest leaders ask four questions (Kouzes & Posner 2011: 79–80):

- Is my behavior predictable or erratic?
- Do I communicate clearly or carelessly?
- Do I treat promises seriously or lightly?
- Am I forthright and candid or deceptive and dishonest?

More than good character in general, moral virtue in particular is necessary for leaders if they are to have the credibility that breeds loyal and committed followers, without which effectiveness is undermined.

Furthermore, virtuous leaders can do their work with authenticity: what you see is what you get. There is no energy put into pretending or posturing. They do not have to keep track of their intentional or unintentional deceptions because (even if they don't say everything to everyone) truth-telling is their natural recourse. Erasmus explains it this way: "While there is no denying that being a good prince is a burden it is much more of a burden to be a bad one. Natural and reasonable things take far less trouble than simulations and deceptions" (2007: 47).

This does not mean that the morally virtuous leader is faint-hearted. Courage, informed by the virtue of prudence, may require that the leader make difficult or unpopular decisions. Making a just call (or, practising fairness) is a strength that builds a leader's moral authority.

It is vital that leaders pursue moral excellence so that moral behaviour becomes second nature. John Sosik's 2006 book *Leading with Character: Stories of Valor and Virtue and the Principles they Teach*, for example, offers self-directed interventions (practical principles) for leaders who want to develop each of the positive psychology character strengths.

### GOOD LEADERS HAVE DEVELOPED THE VIRTUES PARTICULAR TO LEADERSHIP

If cutting well reflects the *aretē* of the knife and if there is something about "the excellence of a horse [that] makes it both good as a horse and good at running, at carrying its rider and at facing the enemy" (NE 1106a15–20), then there must also be qualities that are particular to the leader in terms of the functions of leadership. There are characteristics that all leaders epitomize and there are specific characteristics that certain kinds of leaders will be known for. They are persons first, therefore overall character and individual morality is a crucial value. But they also hope to manifest characteristics that engender effective leadership.

What are the functions that characterize a leader? If we take a clue from Drucker and look back at Xenophon's mirror for princes, we can identify some perennial themes from the story of Cyrus. For example, as a leader Cyrus was empowering, an inspiring visionary and a perceptive decision maker.

Some may recognize such a list as *traits* that are found in certain people who are born leaders. Xenophon himself essentially promoted the so-called "great man" theory of

leadership which has cycled in and out of style for as long as people have studied leaders. Throughout the 1900s researchers identified dozens of traits that make an effective leader, only to realize that no single leader has them all and nor does any one leader–follower situation require them all (Stodgill 1948, 1974).

Yet ordinary experience indicates that there are leaderly traits. A trait is not necessarily an inherent aspect of personality. But it is something more than a transient state. Perhaps it would be most helpful to think of leaderly traits as virtues that have been developed through habitual engagement and consequently have become stable in the character of a person who leads. A careful read of the *Nicomachean Ethics* supports this proposal.

Long ago, Aristotle recognized that practising virtue does not mean that the one practising it is virtuous yet. In terms of leadership, the philosopher can be paraphrased this way: it is possible for a man to lead a group of people effectively by chance or at the direction of another; but he will be a leader only if he leads people in a leaderly way and that he does it in accordance with the skills of good leadership which he has in himself (see 1105a20–25). It is when these skills become intrinsic that men and women have the traits that are functional for leading.

POB researcher Kim Cameron is interested in studying “the role of positive leaders in enabling positively deviant performance” (2008: 4). Specifically, these leaders support extraordinary performance by:

- fostering a positive work climate
- fostering positive relationships among members
- fostering positive communication
- associating the work being done with positive meaning (*ibid.*: 97–103).

Like Sosik, Cameron’s book, *Positive Leadership*, makes a direct contribution towards the development of leaders who will be ethical and effective. In ALD, Avolio and Luthans are doing the same. They propose:

to make leadership development more real and genuine and to focus on the moments that matter. We are trying to get it as close – but not too close – to what leaders actually have to do in order to develop and achieve positive, sustainable results ... Remember that we are talking about authentic leadership and not functional leadership knowledge and techniques. (2006: 4)

“Close to what leaders actually have to do” is resonant with Aristotle’s endorsement that virtue “actualizes itself fully in those activities to which it owes its origin” (*NE* 1105a15). But for Avolio and Luthans to say they are not talking about “functional leadership” is somewhat misleading. They do expect ALD to move emerging leaders to their “more authentic *and effective*” self (2006: 105, emphasis added). Being proficient at leadership is, naturally, important for their understanding of leadership. What they do hope to avoid is in line with an idea attributed to Confucius (1989): “A gentleman is not an implement” (*ibid.*: II 12).

“Moments that matter”, say Avolio and Luthans, “can come from the natural course of life’s events or can be proactively created or accelerated for one’s self-development and/or that of others” (2006: 19). Self-leadership is therefore one means for internalizing the

virtues particular to leadership. Erasmus tells Charles V, “Do not think you may do anything you please. ... *Train yourself* in such a way that nothing pleases you which is not permissible and remember that what is quite in order for private citizens is not necessarily suitable for you” (2007: 21, emphasis added).

Exposure to case studies of good leaders, like those Sosik (2006) provides in his book, is another way to get a moral education. Having a relationship with a mentor, coach or teacher is yet another useful strategy. This is the role that Aristotle, Machiavelli and Erasmus imagined for themselves with their respective royal patrons, Alexander the Great, Lorenzo the Magnificent and Charles V.

Part of what moves a person towards virtuous leading is connected to Aristotle’s concept of the mean. Prudence, again, is the key to discerning the mean between excess and deficiency related to the functions of effective leadership. Consider the examples noted earlier from the life of Cyrus:

**Table 31.1** Virtues of good leadership and the Aristotelean mean.

	Deficiency	Mean	Excess
Visionary communication	Uninspiring	Sensible and motivating	Unrealistic
Empowering supervision	Controlling	Freedom with accountability	Irresponsible delegation
Good decision-making	Thoughtlessness	Perspicaciousness	Analysis-paralysis

When a leader shows awareness of a particular situation and recognition of what is proper in a given context, that leader is displaying the virtue of prudence. As Aristotle says, “to experience all this at the right time, toward the right objects, toward the right people, for the right reason and in the right manner, that is the median and the best course, the course that is a mark of virtue” (*NE* 1106b20–25).

While leaders (as noted above) need integrity and resoluteness of conviction, it is wise, not arbitrary, to be aware of situational dynamics. This can serve the leader who wishes to call upon the most contextually appropriate virtues and leadership behaviours. Park and Peterson speak of “tonic” strengths which “can be displayed on an ongoing and steady basis” in contrast to “phasic” strengths that “rise and fall according to the demands of specifiable situations” (2003: 46). Virtuous leaders, as persons, will flourish in the tonic virtues (such as temperance [self-regulation], integrity or humility) and they will call upon the phasic virtues (such as presenting a new vision in an inspirational way or facilitating peaceful resolve to an organizational conflict) based on the needs of particular leadership situations. The point is that they will be developing these virtues through habitual practice so they are available when called upon.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Good leadership is effective, and sustainable effectiveness is linked to virtue. This correlation is supported by the enduring insights of ancient thinkers and the conclusions of contemporary researchers. Cameron, wary of overstating causal connections, summarizes

it this way: “one explanation for the findings [based on the empirical research he cites] is that virtuousness possesses an amplifying quality as well as a buffering quality. It tends to amplify positive outcomes and buffer organizations from negative outcomes” (2003: 64).

There will always be debate on this point because there are exceptions; there are persons of delinquent character who are considered successful leaders. But such verdicts are usually associated with short-term, one-dimensional valuations. In truth, it is difficult to think of an “exception” that history has named a great soul. What the world has always affirmed, and will always need, is men and women of virtuous character, moral excellence and leadership competence. Such are the individuals who will achieve the *telos* of good leadership.

#### NOTES

1. These themes are explored more fully by Hui-chieh Loy, this volume, Chapter 25.
2. Although scholars of leadership quibble about the distinction between managers and leaders, there is overlap and MacIntyre must be considered.