



# Perspectives

## **What is virtue? Advancing the conceptualization of virtue to inform positive organizational inquiry.**

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**Title page:** *What is virtue? Advancing the conceptualization of virtue to inform positive organizational inquiry*

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**Authors**

Toby Newstead, University of Tasmania, toby.newstead@utas.edu.au  
Rob Macklin, University of Tasmania, rob.macklin@utas.edu.au  
Sarah Dawkins, University of Tasmania, sarah.dawkins@utas.edu.au  
Angela Martin, University of Tasmania, angela.martin@utas.edu.au

**Corresponding author:**

Toby Newstead  
  
toby.newstead@utas.edu.au  
  
Tasmanian School of Business and Economics  
University of Tasmania  
Locked Bag 1317 Launceston TASMANIA 7250

**Abstract**

*What is virtue? Advancing the conceptualization of virtue to inform positive organizational inquiry*

In order to advance theory, key concepts need to be clearly defined (e.g. Kozlowski & Klein, 2000; Suddaby, 2010). Scholars in the field of positive organizational inquiry are engaging in meaningful work on the processes, practices, and attributes which enable optimal human and organizational functioning. Much of this work incorporates the concept of virtue as an integral part of positive organizing. However, we argue that the efficacy of this scholarship is undermined by poorly defined and misconstrued conceptualizations of virtue, which vary widely in their scope and perspective (Gotsis & Grimani, 2015). This article draws on the philosophy of Aristotelian virtue ethics and the deep ontological framework of critical realism to articulate a clear definition of virtue, and a five factor framework for determining what is virtuous in which contexts. These contributions provide the foundation for a stronger virtue-based perspective in positive organizational inquiry.

**Key words**

Management education and development, Management Spirituality and Religion, Organizational behaviour, Ethics and codes of conduct, Social Issues in Management, Organizational Development and Change

## Introduction

Robust theory cannot be built on a shaky foundation; and a foundation of poorly articulated constructs will always be shaky. Building good theory starts with clearly defined concepts (e.g. Kozlowski & Klein, 2000; Suddaby, 2010). The rapidly growing field of positive organizational inquiry (POI) pursues the understanding of positive processes, outcomes, attributes, and behaviors within organizational contexts (e.g. Cameron, Quinn, & Dutton, 2003; Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012). Although virtue is often cited as central to these worthy pursuits, the concept of virtue is not clearly articulated within the field of POI. For example, virtue is sometimes conceptualized as discrete individual-level virtues such as humility, courage, compassion, or integrity (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012); and other times as macro level constructs such as organizational virtue (Heugens, Kaptein, & van Oosterhout, 2008), organizational virtuousness (Cameron, 2003) or organizational environmental virtuousness (Sadler-Smith, 2013). Furthermore, individual-level virtues have been positioned as both stable traits (e.g. Alzola, 2012; Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2005), and as fluid, changeable states (e.g. Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2010; Sison, Hartman, & Fontrodona, 2012; Weaver, 2006). Thus, while the concept of virtue is generally understood to relate to goodness or excellence, the lack of clarity regarding *what virtue actually is* ultimately hinders the advancement of virtue-based theory within POI and the contribution the field can make to management research and practice.

Therefore, this article aims to provide clarity to the notion of virtue as it applies to the field of POI. To do this, we will draw on the philosophies of Aristotelian Virtue Ethics (AVE) and critical realism. Specifically, we will discuss how the work of Aristotle and numerous virtue ethicists that have followed (e.g. Alzola, 2012; Audi, 2012; Beadle, Sison, & Fontrodona, 2015; Fontrodona, Sison, & Bruin, 2013; MacIntyre, 1999; Solomon, 1993), can provide depth to our understanding of virtue. Furthermore, we will integrate a critical realist

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3 lens to provide a deep ontology that allows us to clearly articulate the emergent qualities of  
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5 virtue in a way that captures the depth of AVE while remaining tangible enough to enable  
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7 further theorizing and empirical investigation within the socially scientific field of POI.  
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9           In the sections that follow, we will first review the value of virtue in organizational  
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11 scholarship, before exploring some problems with the current conceptualization of virtue  
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13 within POI. We then define virtue and illustrate a deep ontology to make sense of the  
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15 difference yet interrelatedness of virtue and virtues. Following which we explicate some key  
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17 features of virtue, and make clear distinctions between virtue and other seemingly similar  
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19 concepts, including values, corporate social responsibility and organizational citizenship  
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21 behaviors. Lastly, we present our five-factor framework for determining what is virtuous and  
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23 in which contexts. This framework is not intended as a mechanism for generating a list of  
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25 virtues. Rather, we position the framework as a model that can be adopted by researchers and  
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27 practitioners to determine what is virtuous, within specific organizational contexts. In doing  
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29 so, we respond to Suddaby's (2010) call to provide sharp distinctions around the defined  
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31 concept (virtue) so that it might be distilled as an understandable category. In undertaking  
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33 these functions, this article provides clarity to the concept of virtue so that it might provide a  
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35 solid foundation for the advancement of a virtue perspective and the refinement of virtue-  
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37 based theories within the field of POI.  
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### 43 **The value of virtue in organizational scholarship**

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45 Much has changed in the millennia since Aristotle philosophized about the nature of human  
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47 character and organized human activity – but as humans, we continue to engage in organized  
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49 activity, and we still look to those around us to provide moral direction and meaning to our  
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51 lives. Increasingly, our workplaces have become our contexts for identity construction  
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53 (Dutton et al., 2010), our frameworks for moral and ethical conduct (Fehr, Kai Chi, & Dang,  
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3 2015), and where we look for meaning, belonging, and opportunities to flourish (Baumeister  
4 & Leary, 1995; Michaelson, Pratt, Grant, & Dunn, 2014). Today, our *polis* is our workplace;  
5 our identities are derived less by who we are and what tribe we come from, and more by  
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7 ‘what we do’ and where we work. However, while we look for meaning, purpose and the  
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9 conditions to flourish in our organizations, all too often, we do not find them. Many  
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11 organizations fall short in providing the experience of community that is so essential to our  
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13 wellbeing.  
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18 This is a complex problem with symptoms manifest at every level of organizations  
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20 and evidenced in popular press, with a multitude of best-selling business books and blogs,  
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22 management texts, and academic literatures on topics such as presenteeism (e.g. Johns, 2009),  
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24 engagement (e.g. Macey & Schneide, 2008; Saks, 2006), employee turnover (e.g. Griffeth,  
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26 Hom, & Gaertner, 2000), ethical and unethical leadership and behavior (e.g. Brown &  
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28 Mitchell, 2010; Wart, 2014), and incivility, including discrimination, bullying, and  
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30 harassment (e.g. Anderson & Pearson, 1999; Branch, Ramsay, & Barker, 2012). While most  
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32 of these publications provide some sort of explanation or suggested solution to its issue of  
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34 focus, the underlying problem of a disparity between the meaningful human community  
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36 members desire and the modern organizations we have remains. Despite the complexity and  
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38 contemporary emergence of this problem, we suggest virtue, as understood within the ancient  
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40 field of Aristotelian Virtue Ethics (AVE), is the answer  
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44 Virtue is the core of AVE and has been a topic of philosophical inquiry for millennia.  
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46 Put simply, virtue is the ‘goodness part of us’; the essence of moral character. Virtue is also  
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48 the linchpin between individuals and groups, and the enabler of *eudemonia* or flourishing and  
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50 meaningful community. At the individual, group, and organizational level, virtue offers the  
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52 potential to address the negative consequences resulting from the mismatch between the  
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54 communities we desire and the organizations we have. The philosophy of virtue offers not  
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3 only a remedy to the *symptoms* of the problem (e.g. turnover, presenteeism, bullying,  
4 incivility, or failings of leadership) – but an answer to the *underlying problem itself*.

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6 Organizations are communities based on human relationships in which individuals are “given  
7 a context in which to be meaningful” (Solomon, 1993, p. 84). We suggest is that a well-  
8 informed virtue perspective might enable us to better understand how to create meaningful  
9 human connection and belonging within our organizations.  
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16 The majority of management scholarship focuses on cognitive, behavioral, and  
17 affective phenomena and understanding. But, what about the very essence of humanness?  
18 What about the soul Aristotle spoke of? What about our uniquely human desire to do *good*  
19 and live communally with others? Where does this essence fall within the triad of cognition,  
20 behavior, and emotion? In this paper we argue that failing to recognize this ethereal,  
21 intangible, uniquely human quality may be one explanation for why many organizations fail  
22 to provide the meaningful human connection members desire. Adopting a virtue perspective,  
23 both within scholarship and practice, may allow us to more effectively understand the  
24 goodness part of us; the essence of moral character; the pursuit of *eudemonia* and how to  
25 activate the linchpin between individuals and groups so as to create organizations that  
26 provide the meaning, belonging, and connection so desired by members.  
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40 However, in order to advance a virtue perspective, we must be clear about what we  
41 mean by virtue. Since the time of the Ancient Greeks, the notion of virtue has experienced  
42 periods of banishment and a somewhat tarnished reputation. The terms ‘virtue’ and ‘virtues’  
43 can carry connotations of religion, dogma, extreme conservatism, and an irrelevance to  
44 science. Reluctance to speak of virtue has been linked to the social-political separation of  
45 church and state, a dominant feature of many western societies which perhaps unfairly,  
46 assigned topics of virtue and morality to the domains of faith and religion, and thus ‘off limits’  
47 to the study of organizations (Manz, Marx, Neal, & Manz, 2006).  
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3           Compounding the reluctance to speak of virtue is the fact that within academic  
4 dialogues, the topic remains conceptually unclear. Virtue is rooted in the Latin word *virtus*,  
5 meaning strength or excellence. It is widely acknowledged that virtues pertain to moral  
6 goodness; are the elements of moral character; have a positive human impact; and promote  
7 social betterment (Cameron, Bright, & Caza, 2004). However, like other complex and  
8 malleable concepts within the social sciences, the concept of virtue does not have a single  
9 universally agreed upon definition (Luthans & Youssef, 2008).  
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12           Meaningful communication between scholars and the accumulation of knowledge  
13 depends on clear constructs; clear constructs are the basis of “improving the relevance and  
14 rigor of organizational research” (Suddaby, 2010, p. 356). Without clarification of exactly  
15 what virtue is, advancement of a virtue perspective and our ability to address the problem  
16 underlying myriad symptoms plaguing our organizations – is limited. Hence, our undertaking  
17 in this article to clearly articulate the concept of virtue so that it can be applied within  
18 organizational scholarship.  
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### 32 33 34 35 **Problems with how virtue is currently conceptualized**

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37 While AVE offers a rich understanding of virtue, we propose POI is better suited to  
38 operationalizing, measuring, and possibly developing virtue in organizations. POI is an  
39 umbrella approach that covers the distinct fields of Positive Organizational Psychology,  
40 Positive Organizational Scholarship, and Positive Organizational Behavior. A cursory survey  
41 of POI literatures reveals frequent references to the importance of virtue (Alzola, 2012),  
42 virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), virtuous (Cameron, 2013), and organizational  
43 virtuousness (Bright, Cameron, & Caza, 2006; Cameron, 2003). POI, in a somewhat fractured  
44 way, seeks to measure and develop virtue – but there remains a lack of clarity within the POI  
45 literature regarding the meaning of virtue, a gap that we suggest can be addressed by drawing  
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3 on the philosophical depth of AVE. The lack of clarity regarding the notion of virtue within  
4 the field of POI is evidenced by loose definitions of virtue or instances where an  
5 understanding of virtue is seemingly assumed and no definition provided, as well various  
6 conflicting lists of ‘the’ virtues (e.g. Hackett & Wang, 2012; Solomon, 1992; Wärnå-Furu,  
7 Sääksjärvi, & Santavirta, 2010).

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14 Using a deep ontology allows us to provide clarity to the concept of virtue, and the  
15 distinct yet interrelated concepts of *virtues*, *virtuous*, and *virtuousness*. Providing conceptual  
16 clarity also answers a fundamental critique of POI; a lack of serious explorations of the  
17 conceptual basis of key terms (Hackman, 2009). The centrality of virtue to POI has become  
18 increasingly explicit since Hackman’s (2009) critique, yet there remains a lack of consensus  
19 or clarity around the notion. Currently *virtues* are conceptualized as both individual and  
20 organizational phenomena. At the individual level, virtues are used as descriptive attributes  
21 (Whetstone, 2003), informing of moral agency and self-concept (Weaver, 2006), and  
22 elemental traits of character (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). And virtues are simultaneously  
23 applied as organizational level phenomena such as organizational forgiveness, organizational  
24 trust, and organizational integrity (Cameron et al., 2004; Williams, Kern, & Waters, 2015).  
25 Similarly, *virtuousness* is sometimes applied to individuals, and sometimes to organizations.

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Another example of conceptual confusion is the frequent blurring of the inherency  
versus instrumentality of virtue, with projects emerging which claim to harness virtue to  
increase business growth (Dokes, 2017) and performance (Donada, Mothe, Nogatchewsky, &  
de Campos Ribeiro, 2017), whereas others argue for the inherent value of virtue, that virtue is  
good for its own sake (e.g. Bright et al., 2006; Cameron, 2011, 2013). The application of  
virtue, virtues, and virtuousness varies widely in scope and perspective (Gotsis & Grimani,  
2015). We do not intend to discredit previous work or theories of virtue; much excellent  
research has been produced. However, we do suggest it is time for a more unified

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3 conceptualization of virtue so that our collective efforts might build more meaningfully upon  
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5 one another.  
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### 8 9 **Defining virtue**

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11 When discussing virtue, authors frequently cite its Greek origins and general implications of  
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13 rightness, goodness, and excellence without providing an explicit, coherent definition of what  
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15 exactly virtue is. For instance, some suggest virtue is a practice (Whetstone, 2003), while  
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17 others explain it as consisting of moral perception, emotion, belief and reasoning, and  
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19 motivation (Curren & Kotzee, 2014). Virtue is often conceptualized as an excellence, such as  
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21 “an exemplary way of getting along with other people, a way of manifesting in one's own  
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23 thoughts, feelings and actions the ideals and aims of the entire community” (Solomon, 1992,  
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25 p. 331). Virtue is also characterized as *right* or *good*. For instance, virtue is feeling and acting  
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27 “at the right times, about the right things, toward the right people, for the right end, and in the  
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29 right way...” (Sison & Ferrero, 2015, p. S84). Frequently, virtue is investigated as one or  
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31 more distinct virtues such as forgiveness (Bright & Exline, 2012; Fehr & Gelfand, 2012),  
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33 compassion (Dutton & Workman, 2011; Lilus, Kanov, Dutton, Worline, & Maitlis, 2012), or  
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35 hope (Rego, Sousa, Marques, & Pina e Cunha, 2014).  
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40 A well-constructed definition consists of a differentia plus a genus; what ‘it’ is a part  
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42 of, and by what ‘it’ is set apart (Locke, 2012). Suddaby (2010) explains that “clear constructs  
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44 are simply robust categories that distil phenomena into sharp distinctions that are  
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46 comprehensible to a community of researchers – that is, animal, mineral, or vegetables; gas,  
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48 liquid, or solid” (p. 346). A definition of virtue needs to acknowledge that it is a construct  
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50 composed of discrete virtues. Thus, we define virtue according to Locke’s (2012)  
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52 requirements, and use the three layered ontology of critical realism to illustrate how our  
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54 definition cascades to the related terms of *virtues*, *virtuous*, and *virtuousness*. In doing so, we  
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3 and virtuous actions, in turn arise from one's having nurtured virtuous inclinations or  
4 tendencies. Virtuous inclinations and tendencies are precisely those that are in  
5 accordance with human nature and its final end" (Sison & Ferrero, 2015, p. S81).

6  
7 This nested notion of virtue, as emerging from inclination and eventuating in virtuous  
8 character represents a deeper, richer understanding of virtue. It echoes Aristotle's sentiment  
9 that human nature is communal and rational, and that our final end is eudemonic wellbeing,  
10 or meaningful happiness.  
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15 We do not intend to reconcile these two robust fields. Rather, we aim to use a  
16 conventional western approach to AVE to provide richness, depth, and clarity to our  
17 understanding of virtue within the field of POI. As we will demonstrate, using the ontology  
18 of critical realism allows us to bridge the gap between philosophy and socially scientific  
19 inquiry by clarifying virtue in a way that acknowledges the richness and depth of AVE while  
20 simultaneously providing a framework for operationalizing and measuring virtuous behavior  
21 within POI. We are intentionally walking a fine line; attempting to provide clarity to the  
22 notion of virtue so that it can be understood and applied within POI while also retaining the  
23 richness inherited from AVE. We do not seek to define virtue in a way that will ultimately  
24 satisfy virtue ethicists. Instead, we seek to clarify and enrich our understanding of virtue  
25 within POI by drawing on the AVE tradition to provide a solid foundation for the  
26 advancement of a virtue perspective and the refining of virtue-based theory and empirical  
27 investigation. To capture the evolutionary nature of individual virtue and to illustrate the  
28 interrelatedness between our definition of virtue and individual virtues, virtuous, and  
29 virtuousness, we draw on the deep ontology of critical realism.  
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#### 48 **Using a deep ontology make sense of virtue and virtues**

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51 Critical realism articulates three layers of reality: the empirical, the actual, and the real  
52 (Edwards, O'Mahoney, & Vincent, 2014). We use these layers of reality to explain the  
53 distinction between virtue, and virtues, virtuous, and virtuousness in a way that acknowledges  
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3 the emergent qualities articulated by Sison and Ferrero (2015). The empirical domain reflects  
4 the subjective experience, things individuals hear, see, smell, touch, and taste. The domain of  
5 the actual is the domain of events; interactions and happenings that give rise to subjective  
6 experiences which are heard, seen, smelt, felt, and tasted. Below the domain of the actual is  
7 the domain of the real. The domain of the real is comprised of causal structures and  
8 generative mechanisms which give rise to events, which are then experienced subjectively  
9 (Edwards et al., 2014).  
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18 As shown in Figure 1, the deep ontology of critical realism illustrates that there is  
19 ‘truth’ but that ‘truth’ is that which gives rise to events and experiences. What we see and  
20 think may or may not be ‘true’, but what *gives rise* to what we see and think *is* true – truth is  
21 in the potential to have impact; those processes and mechanisms that churn away, often  
22 unseen, and give rise to life as we experience it (Edwards et al., 2014; Fleetwood, 2005).  
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29 Drawing on this layered ontology, we position virtue in the domain of the real. Virtue,  
30 we propose, is an internal locus; a fundamentally good human quality, intent, or inclination  
31 (Beadle et al., 2015; Sison & Ferrero, 2015). It is not seen in-itself but in its manifestation  
32 through thoughts feeling and actions and as expressed in behavioral events. That is, we  
33 suggest virtue is a generative mechanism; virtue has causal efficacy (Fleetwood, 2005)  
34 which gives rise to virtues. Virtues constitute thoughts, feelings, and actions that are  
35 generated by virtue (a fundamentally good quality, intent, or inclination). Virtues arise out of  
36 virtue and reside in the actual domain. Virtues are expressed and enacted as behavioral events.  
37 Events are then experienced subjectively in the empirical domain and made sense of as  
38 expressions of *virtuous* behavior or *virtuousness*.  
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3 We will use an example to illustrate. Imagine three people in a room discussing a  
4 project. Individual **A**, with fundamentally good intention or inclination, voices a concern  
5 about the project. Individual **B** regards the raising of the concern as an expression of wisdom;  
6 the concern is valid and points towards a better approach to the project. Individual **C**,  
7 however, regards the raising of the concern as courageous – doing so could cause a backlash,  
8 but the individual did so anyway. Individual **A**'s *good inclination* is representative of her  
9 virtue, her internal inclination towards moral excellence. Her virtue is the mechanism that  
10 generates the behavioral event by which she voices her concern. Thus, this event is  
11 experienced and interpreted subjectively by individual **B** and individual **C** as two different  
12 virtues; one individual makes sense of the behavior as wisdom, the other as courage.  
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24 Courage well illustrates how Aristotle characterized virtue as the golden mean  
25 between two vices. According to Aristotle's 'golden mean', courage represents the virtuous  
26 mean between cowardice and rashness. We would suggest that this iconic Aristotelian  
27 teaching compliments our layered ontology as above; the process of inclination giving rise to  
28 actions, which are then experienced. While Aristotle's description of the golden mean is  
29 intuitive – we suggest there are more factors that condition the determination of virtue and  
30 virtuous action. For instance, an individual may act at the mean between cowardice and  
31 rashness, but is he actually driven by good intent (indicative of virtuous inclination)? Or is he  
32 driven by fear or expectation of reward? And, does he act on his virtue knowingly? None of  
33 these questions are alien to the work of Aristotle (Aristotle, 350BCE/1962), yet all  
34 complicate the idea of virtue being simply a mean between two vices. Determining what is  
35 virtuous in which contexts will be discussed further below.  
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50 Using a deep ontology allows us to address what we deem a current weakness of POI.  
51 If the above scenario were assessed for the specific discrete virtue of creativity or gratitude,  
52 as is common within the field of POI, the underlying virtue giving rise to the event would  
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3 have been missed. The scenario does not read as one of gratitude or creativity, and so would  
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5 not have been assessed as either of these discrete virtues. It does however, read as an  
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7 expression of virtue. Broadening our virtue perspective to include a deeper awareness of how  
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9 virtue originates as a mechanism that gives rise to action that is then experienced subjectively  
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11 may open up the field of POI to more comprehensive investigations of virtue within  
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13 organizations.  
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### 16 **Key features of virtue**

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18 Building on our definition of virtue as *the inclination to feel, think, and act in ways that*  
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20 *expresses moral excellence and contribute to the common good* we next move to highlight  
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22 four features of virtue. The features have been identified from our review of the western  
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24 virtue ethics literature and the literature within POI that deals explicitly with the notion of  
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26 virtue. The four features are consistent with our proposed definition and serve to deepen our  
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28 understanding of virtue – a rich philosophic term – within the social scientific pursuit of POI.  
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30 The features we outline also support our aim to provide the clarity that will allow for the  
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32 operationalization, measurement, and ultimately the development of virtue within  
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34 organizations.  
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38 First, virtue is inextricably linked with the concept of character. Virtue is the *essence*  
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40 of human character (Aristotle, 350BCE/1962; Solomon, 1993). The ontology of critical  
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42 realism helps clarify virtue's place in the domain of the real. Virtue is an internally located  
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44 generative mechanism; an individual's virtue gives rise to thoughts, feelings, and actions that  
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46 constitute events. Thus, we suggest that virtue is representative of human essence or moral  
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48 character. Virtues then, are the elemental building blocks of good character. Habituated  
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50 practices of virtues such as courage, humility, justice, fairness, and patience builds an  
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52 individual's moral character (Aristotle, 350BCE/1962; MacIntyre, 1999; Peterson & Park,  
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54 2006; Sison & Ferrero, 2015).  
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3           Second, virtue is learnable. Virtue can be learned with instruction, effort, and practice  
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5 (Aristotle, 350BCE/1962; MacIntyre, 1999). It is widely accepted that “virtues are acquired  
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7 by habituation or repetitive practice” (Arjoon, 2000, p. 162). Furthermore, “virtuous actions  
8  
9 lead to and inspire more virtuous actions” (Bright et al., 2006, p. 255). By its very nature,  
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11 virtue is good and uplifting for both the actor and the recipient. Virtues, demonstrated  
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13 through behavior, are observable and can give rise to social learning, whereby one individual  
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15 observes, learns, and imitates the behaviors of another (Bandura, 1977). Furthermore, the  
16  
17 uplifting nature of virtue and virtues can inspire positive affect which in turn results in further  
18  
19 virtuous acts in a contagion effect (Bright et al., 2006; Cameron et al., 2004).  
20  
21

22           Third, virtue is the universal linchpin between individual and community. Rigorous  
23  
24 historical analyses reveals that the discrete virtues of justice, humanity, temperance, courage,  
25  
26 transcendence, and wisdom are shared by all peoples around the world and throughout time  
27  
28 (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). And, as illustrated by our deep ontology, each of these virtues  
29  
30 arises from a shared, unitary virtue. Virtue is essential to sustained human community (Park,  
31  
32 Peterson, & Seligman, 2006; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Solomon, 1992). Indeed, “...it is  
33  
34 only through the acquisition and exercise of the virtues that individuals and communities can  
35  
36 flourish in a specifically human mode” (MacIntyre, 1999, p. 112). The pursuit of virtue is the  
37  
38 path to achieving personal nobility, goodness, eudemonia, happiness – in a way that serves  
39  
40 the common good (Wright & Goodstein, 2007). Not only does the cultivation of virtue enable  
41  
42 meaningful, flourishing human communities, virtue is also essential to the very survival of  
43  
44 human communities; we cannot coexist without virtue and the expression of virtues (Peterson  
45  
46 & Seligman, 2004).  
47  
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50           Fourth, virtue is inherently good but may also have instrumental value. Virtue is good  
51  
52 for its own sake; the very nature of virtue is its inherent goodness and moral excellence.  
53  
54 However, as a generative mechanism virtue gives rise to virtuous behaviors, events, and  
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3 experiences which have instrumental properties. *Virtues*, have myriad instrumental outcomes,  
4  
5 from allowing for sustained human community (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) to any number  
6  
7 of empirically correlated outcomes, including thriving (Spreitzer, Porath, & Gibson, 2012),  
8  
9 flourishing (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2015; Sison et al., 2012), and ethical behavior and  
10  
11 decision making (Crossan, Seijts, & Mazutis, 2013; Hackett & Wang, 2012). While the  
12  
13 inherency versus instrumentality of virtue gives pause for debate, using a layered ontology to  
14  
15 illustrate the interrelatedness yet distinctness of virtue and *virtues* or *virtuousness* allows us to  
16  
17 reconcile the debate by demonstrating that while virtue is inherent, *virtues* and *virtuousness*  
18  
19 often have instrumental value; they are both means and ends in themselves.  
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### 23 **Distinguishing virtue from similar constructs**

24  
25 One of the central criticisms of POI is that it is simply ‘old wine in new bottles’. Hackman  
26  
27 (2009) suggests that the shift to ‘positive’ organizational studies omits the long tradition of  
28  
29 organizational behavior (OB) and organizational development (OD) which already dealt with  
30  
31 a number of positive phenomenon such as internal work motivation, team efficacy, self-  
32  
33 actualization, authentic relationships, job enrichment, transformational leadership, high  
34  
35 commitment organizations, quality of work life, growth satisfaction, and T-groups. We do not  
36  
37 dispute Hackman’s (2009) position that the newer positive paradigms espouse constructs akin  
38  
39 to the old OB and OD paradigms. However, we suggest that the explicit inclusion of virtue  
40  
41 distinguishes POI from its OB and OD predecessors, and the explicit adoption of a robust  
42  
43 conceptualization of virtue would further this distinction.  
44  
45

46  
47 Hackman (2009) suggests that omitting previous research on positive phenomena  
48  
49 weakens positive organizational studies, but we argue that the incorporation of virtue makes  
50  
51 these newer paradigms more meaningful and connects them to a moral imperative. We  
52  
53 mentioned earlier the hesitation to speak of virtue in modern western organizations. It has  
54  
55 been further suggested that positive concepts within the fields of OD and OB which  
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1  
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3 ultimately reflect virtuousness and virtuous behavior have been ‘diluted’ and ‘disguised’ with  
4  
5 other terms, such as quality of work life, job enrichment, corporate social responsibility or  
6  
7 prosocial behavior (Manz, Adams, Shipper, & Manz, 2011).  
8

9  
10         There are, however, some key distinctions between the notion of virtue and similar  
11  
12 terms. And, as mentioned previously, part good conceptualization is clear distinctions  
13  
14 between one concept and other concepts (Suddaby, 2010). In practice, questions frequently  
15  
16 arise about the relationship between virtues and values. The simplest distinction between  
17  
18 virtues and values is that virtues are inherently good and universal, whereas values are  
19  
20 culturally derived. Many people may value career progression and salary – but neither are  
21  
22 virtues. Rather they are things we judge to have importance in our lives; they are values.  
23

24  
25         Comparisons are also often drawn between virtue and corporate social responsibility  
26  
27 (CSR). However, CSR is characterized by an organizations continued commitment to ethical  
28  
29 economic development as well as the development of their people, families, communities and  
30  
31 society at large. In short, CSR is an organization’s obligations to society (Berger,  
32  
33 Cunningham, & Drurmuright, 2007). Thus, a primary distinction between CSR and virtue is  
34  
35 that CSR exists and is understood at the organizational level, manifest as systems, policies,  
36  
37 and procedures, whereas virtue originates at the individual level, as an internal inclination  
38  
39 towards good or excellence. There is also the inherency of virtue – it is good for its own sake  
40  
41 – which distinguishes it from CSR, which is focused on instrumental outcomes for the  
42  
43 organization and society.  
44

45  
46         Similar to virtue, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) tends to be  
47  
48 operationalised at the individual level. OCB can be conceptualized as unenforceable  
49  
50 discretionary individual behavior that contributes to the effective functioning of the  
51  
52 organization and is not explicitly recognized by a rewards system (Organ, 1997). Or, more  
53  
54 simply, “discretionary employee behaviors that are helpful but not absolutely required by  
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3 employers” (Dekas, Bauer, Welle, Kurkoski, & Sullivan, 2013, p. 219). OCB was initially  
4  
5 conceptualized as consisting of five behavioral dimensions. However, over the years the  
6  
7 number of dimensions expanded to 25, before being culled back to seven ‘grouped’  
8  
9 dimensions (Dekas et al., 2013). A concern highlight by Dekas et al (2013) is the implicit  
10  
11 suggestion that the same set of behaviors will indicate OCB regardless of historical,  
12  
13 demographic, cultural, or industry context. As we discuss in more detail in the following  
14  
15 section, this issue is precisely why we propose factors for determining what is virtuous in a  
16  
17 given context, rather than promoting a set list of virtues. The construct of OCB is also void of  
18  
19 explicit reference to any moral philosophy, upon which and within which virtue is so deeply  
20  
21 rooted. The fact that OCB is helpful to the organization echoes the idea of common good  
22  
23 which is integral to the concept of virtue. However, there is a difference. The common good  
24  
25 (virtue) is about the good of people as well as the organization; the common good is about a  
26  
27 good *polis*, a good society, rather than just the good of the company. In comparison, the  
28  
29 helpfulness of OCB may contribute to reaching key performance indicators or making budget  
30  
31 but does not necessarily contribute to the good of the individuals within the organization.  
32  
33 Finally, the very name of the OCB concept, organizational citizenship *behavior* distinguishes  
34  
35 OCB from virtue, which, as we have defined emerges from an internal inclination or intent  
36  
37 towards good or excellence.  
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#### 44 **A five factor framework for determining what is virtuous in which contexts**

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46 As discussed earlier, Peterson and Seligman (2004) developed a catalogue of what they  
47  
48 argued to be six universal virtues by applying strict criteria to a survey of the ancient texts of  
49  
50 Confucianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Ancient Greece, Judeo-Christianity, and Islam. The six  
51  
52 universal virtues identified by Peterson and Seligman (2004) include: wisdom, courage,  
53  
54 humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. The overall aim of Peterson and  
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3 Seligman's (2004) classification was to provide an anti-thesis to the *Diagnostic and*  
4  
5 *Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, by developing a catalogue of wellness and those  
6  
7 qualities (virtues) that 'make life worth living'. Despite the comprehensiveness of Peterson  
8  
9 and Seligman's (2004) catalogue and extensive reference to it within the field of POI, debates  
10  
11 about listing virtues continue, with numerous conflicting efforts to enumerate which are *the*  
12  
13 virtues, or which virtues are most important within the organizational context (e.g. Solomon,  
14  
15 1992; Wärmå-Furu et al., 2010), or leadership (e.g. Riggio, Zhu, Reina, & Maroosis, 2010;  
16  
17 Sarros & Cooper, 2006; Sosik, Gentry, & Chun, 2012; Wang & Hackett, 2015).

18  
19  
20         Instead of arguing for one list over another, we suggest that no list entirely or  
21  
22 definitively enumerates which are 'the' virtues, nor which virtues are most important. Rather,  
23  
24 we propose that what is virtuous is determined by five factors: intent or inclination, agent  
25  
26 awareness, context, alignment with *telos*, and outcome. We argue that these factors can serve  
27  
28 as a framework for determining what is virtuous in different contexts, which we suggest may  
29  
30 be more practical and more contextually and culturally relevant than proposing one list of  
31  
32 virtues – especially when we consider that expressions of virtue are experienced subjectively  
33  
34 in the empirical domain. As illustrated in the layered ontology of virtue (Figure 1), those who  
35  
36 experience virtuous behavioral events will make sense of them in a number of ways,  
37  
38 including ascribing any number of virtues to same event, for example; where one sees  
39  
40 honesty, another may see tact; or, where one sees wisdom another may see justice.

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43         Our intent in outlining factors for determining what is virtuous in which context is to  
44  
45 enrich to our proposed virtues perspective. Specifically, we suggest that these factors provide  
46  
47 a method for determining virtue and virtuousness in a way that is broader and more  
48  
49 comprehensive than assessing for any singular virtue such as gratitude or compassion, as POI  
50  
51 investigations frequently do. These factors are also more complete than ascribing  
52  
53 virtuousness to any behavior seeming to fall between two opposed vices, as in a rough  
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3 application of the golden mean. In order to illustrate how the five factors for determining  
4 what is virtuous in which context relate to the three layered ontology we used to define virtue,  
5 we will integrate reference to our ontology in the discussion and example below. The five  
6 factors we propose build on the three conditions for virtue put forward by Sison and Ferrero  
7 (2015). Table 1 illustrates how each factor may be applied to a specific context.  
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14 First, and as discussed above, virtue is deeper than an action or behavior. Virtue is an  
15 inherently good generative mechanism originating in the domain of the real (Figure 1). Virtue  
16 is an inclination or intent which *gives rise* to actions or events that express virtue subjectively  
17 interpreted as virtues such as such as courage, wisdom, or humour. Therefore, similar to  
18 Sison and Ferrero (2015), we propose that for a quality or action to be considered virtuous, it  
19 must arise from virtue as an inclination or disposition. Thus, this first factor is twofold; first,  
20 it stipulates that virtue originates as a generative mechanism in the domain of the real. Virtue  
21 generates *feelings, thoughts, and actions that express moral excellence and contribute to the*  
22 *common good*. Beadle, Sison, and Fontrodona (2015) emphasise this point by suggesting that  
23 to ascribe virtue based only on observable behavior is to have failed to fully understand virtue.  
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35 Second, virtues arise from an inclination towards virtue. . As Fineman (2006) explains,

36  
37 “doing things for their own sake, such as for love, wisdom, and self-fulfilment, is  
38 virtuous. Doing them for the social betterment or advantage of others is virtuous.  
39 Seeking personal reward or recompense for ones efforts, such as profit, power, or  
40 prestige, is not virtuous....Displays of compassion and courage are, therefore, void of  
41 virtue if they are performed simply for personal recognition or applause” (2006, p.  
42 272).  
43

44  
45 The second factor in determining what is virtuous in which context is that an  
46 inclination towards virtue must acted upon knowingly. “[I]f we are to conclude that someone  
47 acted virtuously, we need to see not only what she did or said; we need to know how she saw  
48 what she was doing or saying” (Hughes, cited in Shotter & Tsoukas, 2014, p. 233). Virtuous  
49 behavior is guided by a knowing mind. Aristotle regarded prudence the primary virtue for its  
50 capacity to inform an individual how to employ the right virtue in the right way at the right  
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3 time, acknowledging that, with practice, virtuousness can become habituated (Aristotle,  
4 350BCE/1962). This second factor resides at the intersection of the real and actual domains  
5  
6  
7 (Figure 1). To satisfy the factor, an actor must be inclined by virtue (mechanism) and choose  
8  
9 to act or speak accordingly and knowingly (event).  
10

11           The second factor relates closely to the third factor, which is the contextuality of  
12 virtues. Virtue must not only be acted upon knowingly, but also enacted in a way that is  
13 contextually appropriate. While the inherently good inclination of virtue may be universal,  
14 specific enactments of virtues are contextual, experienced in and responsive to culture and  
15 time. For instance, justice in ancient Rome looked much different to justice in modern Rome.  
16  
17 The actual events (virtuous behaviors) that arise out of a virtuous inclination (real domain)  
18 vary according to temporal and cultural context, and must be enacted appropriately; "...virtue  
19 needs to account for character *and context*" (emphasis added, Bright et al., 2014, p. 445).  
20 Hence, the Roman tradition of crucifixion would not pass as justice in modern Italy.  
21

22           The fourth factor we propose for determining what is virtuous in which contexts is the  
23 concept of *telos*. *Telos* is our "point in living" (Barker, 2002, p. 1100); our *raison d'être*.  
24 Pursuing *telos* is what progresses us towards *eudaimonia*, or true and meaningful happiness  
25 (Barker, 2002). "Each individual is born or socialized (and each organization founded) for  
26 the pursuit of a specific goal or *telos*. This *telos* holds the key to deciphering the relevant set  
27 of virtues an actor must possess...relevant virtues are therefore determined by the goals an  
28 actor means to pursue" (Heugens et al., 2008, p. 102). Thus, virtuous action must be aligned  
29 with the *telos* of the actor. How does the action propel him towards his higher purpose, his  
30 'point in living'? We suggest that this fourth factor resides at the intersection of the real and  
31 actual domain, where the actor's good intent (real domain) is knowingly acted upon (actual  
32 domain) in a way that aligns with his or her *telos*.  
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3 A final consideration when judging what is virtuous in which context is the issue of  
4  
5 outcome. What *actually happens* as a result of the virtuous inclination which is knowingly  
6  
7 enacted in a contextually appropriate way and in accordance with *telos*? This factor resides  
8  
9 in the domain of the empirical, how the virtuousness is experienced and made sense of by  
10  
11 those present. Virtues represent “the most ennobling behaviors, and the essence of  
12  
13 humankind when at its best” (Bright et al., 2014, p. 445). Is the outcome of the behavior  
14  
15 ennobling? Does it uplift the actor and the acted upon in a way that contributes to the  
16  
17 common good? Is the world, in however micro a frame, a better place for the actions  
18  
19 generated by virtuous inclination?  
20  
21

22 The factor of outcome (fifth factor) does not always align with the first factor of intent.  
23  
24 Thus, although the intent may be good, the outcome may not always be ideal. For instance,  
25  
26 when a bystander acts from good intent and jumps in the water to save a drowning man, the  
27  
28 drowning man may still lose his life. A less than ideal outcome, despite good intent. However,  
29  
30 if one considers the broader outcome; that the bystander acted on his virtue, that those  
31  
32 witnessing the incident observed the event, and that loved ones of the drowned man know his  
33  
34 rescue was at least attempted – it may still be classed as good (better, at least, than if the  
35  
36 bystander had made no rescue effort) and thereby qualify as virtuous. A more mundane  
37  
38 example highlights another aspect of the misalignment between intent and outcome. If  
39  
40 someone’s good intention prompts an act of honesty, whereby he shares his true thoughts or  
41  
42 feelings with another, but, does so in a way that lacks tact or kindness and therefore hurts  
43  
44 another, then this hurtful outcome may counter his good intent.  
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50 INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE  
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3           These five factors are not a mechanism for generating a list of virtues, nor are they  
4  
5 synonymous with our deep ontology of virtue. Rather, by articulating these factors, we  
6  
7 propose a framework (Table 1) which can be used by scholars and practitioners to determine  
8  
9 for themselves what is virtuous, particularly within their organizational contexts. These five  
10  
11 factors echo our ontology of virtue and attempt to answer Suddaby's (2010) call to provide  
12  
13 sharp distinctions around the defined concept (virtue) so that it might be distilled as an  
14  
15 understandable category. For a behavior or characteristic to fall into the category of virtue,  
16  
17 we argue that it must satisfy the above factors. It must arise out of morally good inclination  
18  
19 (in the real domain), be knowingly enacted (at the intersection of real and actual domains),  
20  
21 contextually appropriate (in the actual domain), in accordance with *telos* (at the intersection  
22  
23 of actual and empirical), and have an outcome that contributes to the common good or is  
24  
25 ennobling for those involved (in the empirical domain). This does not tell us that loyalty is a  
26  
27 virtue while faithfulness is not, and we suggest that the name given to the behavior or  
28  
29 characteristic is less important than whether or not the behavior or characteristic satisfies the  
30  
31 five factors articulated above. The reason being, the events that arise out of a virtuous  
32  
33 inclination are experienced subjectively and may be labelled as any number of discrete  
34  
35 virtues.  
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39           Again, we draw on a scenario to illustrate our point. Consider the following; a project  
40  
41 manager receives a bonus for a project completed on time and under budget. The bonus  
42  
43 consists of a \$300 gift voucher, which he uses to take his team out for lunch. Team member  
44  
45 **A** sees this as a sign of loyalty; the manager has demonstrated loyalty to his team by sharing  
46  
47 his reward with them. Team member **B** sees it as humility; a demonstration that the manager  
48  
49 recognizes the expertise and input of the team. While the manager himself views it as fairness;  
50  
51 he simply couldn't have completed the project alone, and thus the reward belongs to the team.  
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3 The virtuous intent (factor 1) of the project manager gave rise to intentional actions  
4 (factor 2) which were contextually appropriate (factor 3) and in line with the manager's *telos*  
5 (factor 4) of being a decent person and a good manager, and the outcome was a rewarding  
6 lunch and an uplifted team (factor 5). Thus, the event satisfies the five factors of virtuousness.  
7 However, each person involved in the event ascribed a different discrete virtue; one as loyalty,  
8 one as humility, and one as fairness. And the project manager's actions could have been  
9 explained as any number of other specific virtues; generous, kind, just, respectful, honorable.  
10

11  
12 The five factors we propose build upon our layered ontology and provide questions to  
13 help assess more comprehensively the virtue underpinning an action or event (as opposed to  
14 ascribing the 'correct' specific virtue). However, we put forth these factors with some caveats.  
15 The first caveat is our admittedly conventional western approach to AVE. Our efforts to  
16 advance the conceptualization of virtue within the field of POI will be enriched by future  
17 scholarship which might closely examine our suggested definition and five factor framework  
18 to assess its applicability or adaptability to other approaches. A second caveat is that factors  
19 that reside in or at the intersection of the domain of the real (factors 1, 2, and 4) are  
20 troublesome for anyone other than the actor to assess. For example, how can we say with  
21 certainty that another acted from pure intent? Or that his actions were in line with his unique  
22 *telos*? This may be a future avenue for investigation, but it is our understanding that only the  
23 actor himself, in this case the project manager, can know his true intent and the conscious  
24 alignment of his *telos* and action. However, those around him, his team members **A** and **B**,  
25 can have their own individual *sense* or *judgment* of the project manager's intent and  
26 authenticity to *telos*. Thus, the application of factor 1 (good intent or inclination), factor 2  
27 (awareness), and factor 4 (*telos*) are applied based on the witness's own subjective sense and  
28 judgment.  
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3           The simple example above, where a leader takes his team to lunch, provides a clear  
4 illustration of our five factor framework. However, we acknowledge that real organizational  
5 events are far more complex. As per the caveat above, a spectator may not correctly assume  
6 the intent, awareness, or telos of an actor. Therefore in response to a single scenario,  
7 spectator X may conclude it was virtuous, while spectator Y may disagree. For example, Gil  
8 was informed that the plant he managed would be closed in 12 months, at which point his 50  
9 employees would lose their jobs. Gil was asked by his senior executive team to keep this  
10 news confidential in order to avoid industrial action or community backlash. Gil tried to  
11 convince the executive team to inform employees of the impending closure and built a case to  
12 keep the plant open, but to no avail. Unwilling to deceive his employees, Gil leaked  
13 information to his staff of the impending closure.

14  
15           In this scenario, Gil broke confidentiality and loyalty to his senior executive in order  
16 to demonstrate loyalty and confidentiality to his employees. This tension between top  
17 management and managed employees is one commonly experienced by managers. As  
18 spectator X, we might conclude that Gil had acted on good intent by doing the ‘right thing’  
19 by his employees (factor 1), and that he was aware of his actions including that they might  
20 result in union action or the termination of his own position (factor 2). We may also assess  
21 that Gil’s actions were in accord with the current economic climate in which mechanization  
22 and globalization continue to threaten the traditional manufacturing sector and plant workers  
23 such as Gil’s employees are commonly left unemployed, and thus contextually appropriate  
24 (factor 3). We might also ascribe Gil a *telos* to be an honest, decent person which he satisfied  
25 by telling the truth to his co-workers. And, finally, the outcome of Gil’s actions, while they  
26 did not prevent the closure of the plant did at least give employees fair warning. Thus,  
27 spectator X would likely conclude that Gil’s actions were virtuous within his given context.

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3           However, we readily admit that spectator Y could ascribe Gil with a different *telos*,  
4  
5 and might assume he acted from malice, such as with the intention to hurt the senior  
6  
7 executive team rather than to help his employees. It could also be argued that Gil was  
8  
9 unaware of if or how he was acting in accord with his intent. Any of these assumptions could  
10  
11 lead spectator Y to conclude that Gil's actions were not virtuous in this context.  
12

13           Providing this somewhat conflicting but more realistic example helps us illustrate two  
14  
15 points. First, the person using our five factor framework for determining what is virtuous in  
16  
17 which contexts will bare their own preconceptions, understandings, and judgements and two  
18  
19 individuals might ascribe the same event in different ways. And secondly, in this article we  
20  
21 have developed our five factor framework as a retrospective assessment tool, something to be  
22  
23 used to consider the virtuousness (or not) of an event as an alternative to assessing for  
24  
25 singular virtues such as honesty or compassion as is common within the field of POI.  
26  
27 However, its true benefit might be in its potential to guide future action. How might Gil's  
28  
29 situation played out differently had his senior executive team used these five factors to guide  
30  
31 their actions?  
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34  
35           Despite how or if future scholarship might apply or adapt our five factor framework,  
36  
37 we maintain that it is more important to be able to determine whether an event or action  
38  
39 arises from virtue, rather than to name the specific, 'correct' virtue associated with the event  
40  
41 or action. The specific virtue ascribed to an event or behavior, comes, in part, from our own  
42  
43 subjective perspective and may speak as much to the observer's *telos* and intent as that of the  
44  
45 actor. Hence, the reason team members **A** and **B** both regarded the project manager's action  
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47 as virtuous, but ascribed two different virtues. Our point is that the name we ascribe to a  
48  
49 virtuous event is less important and more subjectively mediated than the factors identified  
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51 above. Therefore, rather than prescribe a list of virtues, we propose the five factors of intent  
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3 or inclination, agent awareness, context, alignment with *telos*, and outcome for determining  
4 what is virtuous in which contexts.  
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### 9 **Implications and future research**

10 To advance virtue perspective argued in this paper, we need a clear conceptualization of what  
11 exactly virtue is. We have provided this by exploring a deep ontology of virtue, and  
12 proposing a five factor framework for determining what is virtuous in which context. A  
13 virtues perspective could be pursued by an array of future research within both AVE and POI.  
14 Within the more philosophic field of AVE future work may dig deeper into our ontology of  
15 virtue and five factor framework, or may review historical cases to assess how the framework  
16 overlays events deemed as virtuous or not, such as instances of whistleblowing or downsizing.  
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26         Within the field of POI, future research may consider the possibilities of measuring  
27 virtue, and *virtuousness*, as distinct but also as more than the discrete virtues such as gratitude  
28 or compassion which have until now been the focus of POI assessment. Investigations of  
29 positive practice and other enablers of flourishing, thriving, and positive organizing (e.g.  
30 Burke, Page, & Cooper, 2015; Cameron, Mora, Leutscher, & Calarco, 2011; Cameron &  
31 Spreitzer, 2015; Spreitzer et al., 2012) might be reviewed in light of the clarity we have  
32 provided here to the notion of virtue. The emerging field of neuroethics possess interesting  
33 questions regarding moral enhancement (Shook, 2012), which may provide alternative  
34 avenues for understanding a virtue perspective as may the application of neuroscience and the  
35 proposed ‘engineering of virtue’ (Jotterand, 2011). We also urge a review of the virtue ethics  
36 literature in combination with the current organizational intervention literature to provide  
37 guidance on how best to select, refine, or develop virtue development interventions.  
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Following which, empirical investigation could explore the process and outcomes of attempts  
to develop virtue in organizations.

## Conclusion

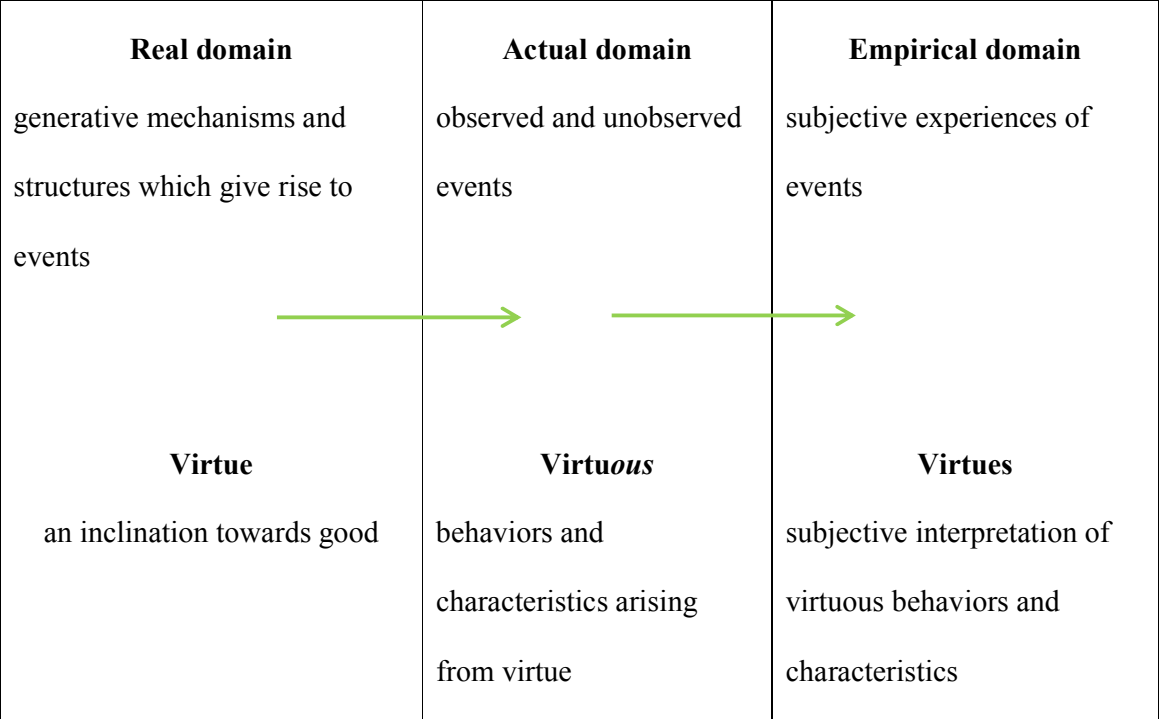
When we go to work, many of us look for more than just a pay-check. Increasingly, we seek purpose, meaning, and connection in the work we do, among the people we do it with, and within the organizations we do it for. Business is first and foremost a human practice (Solomon, 1993). The virtue perspective argued in this article might allow us to better understand the essence of our humanness; our *virtue*. A virtue perspective might allow us to account for more than cognition, emotion, and action – to capture the very essence of our humanness and how it might be activated to foster the sense of connection and meaning we desire in our workplace communities. We have laid the foundation for the advancement of virtue perspective by defining virtue as *the human inclination to feel, think, and act in ways that express moral excellence and contribute to the common good*; illustrating the deep ontology of this definition; discussing some key features of virtue; and articulating a five factors framework for determining what is virtuous in which contexts.

In short, we hope that a virtue perspective, underpinned with the conceptual clarity provided in this article, might foster a cross-disciplinary approach to better understand the very essence of those human practices which underpin organizations. We call for future scholarship to adopt and advance a virtue perspective which might broaden the focus of management scholarship to include a more meaningful consideration of the very essence of our humanness. Aristotle taught that to live a great life, one must live in a great *polis*. Today, our workplace is our *polis*, and the wellbeing of the organization and its members are inextricably linked (Solomon, 1993). Virtue is the ‘goodness part’ of the individuals that compose organizations, and it is the linchpin that allows individuals to meaningful organize and form community. Better understanding virtue within organizations is key to providing the community and meaningful connection members so desire.

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**Figures and tables**

*Figure 1 – the deep ontology of virtue*



**Table 1 – Factors for determining what is virtuous in which contexts**

Factor 1: intent/inclination	Does the actor seek recognition or reward for his or her feeling/thought/action?  Does the feeling/thought/action arise out of intent towards moral excellence?
Factor 2: awareness	How does the actor see his or her feeling/thought/action?  Did the actor knowingly act in accordance with good intent?
Factor 3: contextual	Was the actor's feeling/thought/action appropriate to his or her temporal and cultural context?
Factor 4: <i>telos</i>	Does the feeling/thought/action align with the actor's higher purpose?  Does the feeling/thought/action move the actor closer to the person he or she wants to be?
Factor 5: Outcome	Is the outcome of the feeling/thought/action ennobling of the actor and the acted upon?  Does the feeling/thought/action uplift the actor and the acted upon?  Does the feeling/thought/action contribute to the common good?

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## Author biographies

**Toby Newstead** ([toby.newstead@utas.edu.au](mailto:toby.newstead@utas.edu.au)) is a doctoral candidate at the Tasmanian School of Business & Economics, University of Tasmania and a leadership development consultant. Toby's research and consulting practice draw on virtue to inform the development of effective and ethical leaders.

**Rob Macklin** ([rob.macklin@utas.edu.au](mailto:rob.macklin@utas.edu.au)) is a senior lecturer in management and business ethics at the Tasmanian School of Business & Economics, University of Tasmania. Rob writes on business ethics and is researching virtue in organizations, mental illness at work, management and leadership in residential aged care, and management from a theological perspective.

**Sarah Dawkins** ([sarah.dawkins@utas.edu.au](mailto:sarah.dawkins@utas.edu.au)) is a clinical psychologist and lecturer in management at the Tasmanian School of Business & Economics, University of Tasmania. Sarah's research focuses on the development of psychological resources in employees and teams for enhanced performance and wellbeing. She also investigates workplace mental health and the interface between work and family.

**Angela Martin** ([angela.martin@utas.edu.au](mailto:angela.martin@utas.edu.au)) is an adjunct professor at the Tasmanian School of Business & Economics, University of Tasmania, and a consultant. Angela's teaching, research, and consulting are focused on understanding and facilitating employee health and wellbeing at work.