

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Howard Harris, Gayathri Wijesinghe, and Stephen McKenzie

The founding proposition of this book is that virtue ethics theory has the potential to create and sustain ‘good’ enterprises. That potential has yet to be fully realised. A common concern for the maintenance of the virtuous purpose within organisations unites the contributions in this volume, bringing together theoretical explorations of the role of virtue in collective human endeavour with a concern for the executive role of managers.

### Outline

This book takes as its starting point the proposition that virtue ethics – a theoretical system regarding the role of virtues in collective human endeavour, expressed by Aristotle and Confucius in ancient times, revived by Phillipa Foot in the middle of the last century, developed by Alasdair MacIntyre in the 1980s, and reshaped by many subsequent writers – has potential for leaders and managers trying to create and sustain ‘good’ organisations and institutions. The proposition is explored through a series of 12 individual and collaborative contributions across a range of disciplines. Some articles are purely theoretical, while others have been drawn from recent research data. The volume is international in scope, having contributors from Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Italy.

At the heart of MacIntyre’s theory is the notion of a ‘practice’: that is, a collective human endeavour in which individuals strive for excellence and are bettered in the process, both technically and morally. Generally, all the papers in the collection

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contend, in one way or another, that 'good' management is based at least partly on the maintenance of a 'practice', as a 'good' organisation must strive for excellence rather than focusing solely on external outcomes such as financial success.

But can management itself be considered a practice? The papers by Geoff Moore and Tony O'Malley are deliberately positioned in the first section to draw the reader into a detailed argument over MacIntyre's conviction that management can never be a practice, as it is focused solely on external goods. Here the reader is introduced to nuances in MacIntyre's conception of a practice, with Moore arguing that it may at least be considered a moral activity if it centres on a practice, and O'Malley arguing that in most respects management may be counted as a practice according to MacIntyre's own definition.

Another major issue the book tackles is one of judgement. A common tenet of virtue theory systems is that rule-based methods for decision-making are insufficient to deal with the moral complexity of organisational life and that in many cases moral judgements are individual and personal, and cannot therefore be made by rote. Chris Provis' paper progresses the opening section with an argument about the importance of moral reasoning in decision-making processes within organisations. Such moral reasoning often requires managerial courage, and Howard Harris explores this virtue within both management and virtue theory to conclude the section.

This triad of themes – management, practice and virtue – are explored more thoroughly in the second section, which looks directly at leadership, vice and virtue within organisations and within practices more generally. Several papers explore the way in which particular kinds of organisations can encourage vice to flourish, in some cases alongside virtue.

Erich Fein's paper opens the second section with a review of existing literature on leadership theory and discusses the potential role of virtue ethics research as an exciting means of capturing key elements of reflection, planning, and decision-making within person-based approaches to leadership. Turning to practical application, Mario Carrassi's paper describes how a business can adapt the strategic planning process to engage members of the organisation in an exploration of the moral reasoning behind major decisions and corporate intent. Patricia Grant and Peter McGee look directly at vice, examining the role of narcissism in the recent collapse of two New Zealand financial organisations. Finally, Helen Rusak and Stephen McKenzie's paper broadens the definition of both practice and organisation, looking at issues of dishonesty in copyright attribution on YouTube, ultimately arguing that YouTube is not a practice, as excellence is not commonly pursued there, but has potential to become a practice if standards of excellence are developed.

The inclusion of a paper on YouTube should alert the reader that the volume in hand is innovative in its applications of virtue theory to fields of study beyond business ethics. The three papers in the third section use virtue-driven conceptions of organisational sustainability, moral agency, and internal goods to find the path to the heart of the good institution. Tracy Wilcox, in an example from human resource management, examines the complex question of whether a potentially vicious activity (downsizing) can be conducted in a virtuous way if the manager seeks internal

goods rather than external gain for the institution. Gayathri Wijesinghe notes the demise of hospitality in traditional societies from a social institution based on practice to an economic activity based on a desire for external goods, and explores how the cultivation of a virtue ethics driven pedagogy of hospitality practice can provide a positive solution. This need to consider internal goods is also the focus of Stephen McKenzie's paper in relation to triple bottom line considerations of social sustainability. McKenzie concludes this section with a case study of Toyota Australia's TBL reporting, noting the contribution that virtue ethics theory can make to extending social sustainability theory.

Each section has a short introduction noting key points in the chapters to follow. A paper by Michael Schwartz on virtue theory and narrative forms the book's conclusion. Footnotes to this chapter draw out the connections between the other papers in the volume.

In summary, this is an innovative collection, gaining theoretical strength from papers by established scholars in the fields of management ethics and organisational psychology, and developing new territory through other contributions from writers outside these fields, who use virtue theory as a lens for their own specific concerns; papers on human resources, music and information technology and hospitality make this a truly multidisciplinary collection, unified by a common concern for the maintenance of the virtuous purpose within organisations.

## History of the Project

In 2007 a small group of academics, each of them interested both in virtue ethics and teaching in a management school, joined in a proposal for a United Kingdom-Australia project to explore their common interests. Funding was not forthcoming but the project continued. At the 2008 annual conference of the Australian Association for Professional and Applied Ethics (AAPAE) in Brisbane there were a small number of papers and a workshop, with industry participants. Throughout the project has sought the involvement of organisations and managers because one key intention has been that the project should produce some tools which could be used in enterprises to enhance performance and virtue.

The following year there was a mini-conference on virtue ethics and business at the Association for Practical and Professional Ethics (APPE) annual meeting in Cincinnati, once again with an emphasis on engaging practitioners. Geoff Moore and Howard Harris, both subsequent contributors to the volume, took leading roles at the mini-conference, along with Leslie Sekerka who participated in a number of subsequent activities but is not a contributor to the volume itself. A 5-year plan for the project, now with the title 'Virtue ethics as a framework for responsible management', had been developed at the time of the Brisbane conference. That plan included a series of publications and continued industry involvement. (David Dawson from the Cheltenham Business School played a key role in the development of that plan and in the initial grant applications.)

In 2009 Moore and Sekerka visited Australia, at the invitation of the Group for research in Integrity and Governance based in the School of Management at the University of South Australia. That group, with a wide discipline base including tourism, philosophy, management, ethics and education, had taken up the idea of a virtue ethics book as a project which would engage many of its members. There was a full day workshop in Adelaide attended by Moore and Sekerka, at which draft chapters were presented, followed by participation at the AAPAE conference in Sydney. By now the focus was clearly on an Aristotelian virtue ethics and on MacIntyre's notion of 'practice'. The relevance of this approach was confirmed when a number of participants in the Sydney conference sought inclusion in the book, extending the authorship beyond the United Kingdom, United States and Australia to New Zealand. Later there would be a contribution from Italy.

The international nature of the project is further demonstrated by noting that the first meeting with our publisher was at the conference in Trento, Italy, a meeting of the European Business Ethics Network. The larger plan remains, and although it is well behind schedule, the mini-conference, workshops and the book are evidence of progress.