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Character & Leadership: Ancient Wisdom for the 21st Century

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Abstract

This paper is inspired by the sentiments of Winston Churchill, "*The further back you can look, the farther forward you are likely to see*." Notwithstanding all the work and intellectual efforts by current scholars and practitioners on the topic of good leadership and good character, there is much to be learned by drawing from the ancient philosophical tradition, notably Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Simply said, it is critically important that we learn from and apply the wisdom of the ancients to the current thoughts and practices as to how character and leadership are acquired and developed. The timeless wisdom of the ancients is even more relevant today given the ever-increasing pace, complexity and uncertainty faced by individuals, organizations and societies.

We claim that Aristotle's rich discussion of what virtuous (good) character is, and how it is acquired is extremely relevant to contemporary scholarship in leadership studies, and can cast valuable light on three questions:

1. ***Why*** is the connection between leadership and virtuous (good) character important?
2. ***What*** is (good) leadership and (good) character?
3. ***How*** do we acquire and develop both of these attributes?

Our thesis is that Aristotle's account of virtue helps to explain the deep connections between good character and authentic leadership… and leadership (of both self and organizations) with purpose.

Introduction

In a world that is inundated with failures of character and leadership and where developing these qualities in positive ways is the increasing focus of most every sector (government, public, private), industry and profession, we have so much to learn by looking back at the scholarly wisdom of the ancient philosophers in order to apply their lessons in the 21st century. Our claim is that it is critically important to understand the deep roots of virtuous (good) character and effective leadership as we wrestle with three important burgeoning questions:

1. ***Why*** is the connection between leadership and virtuous (good) character important?
2. ***What*** is (good) leadership and (good) character?
3. ***How*** do we acquire and develop both of these attributes?

This clarion call compels us to invest the time and energy to look back to some of the foundational underpinnings of the concepts of character and leadership. By then projecting these onto our contemporary environment, we may hope *to advance* (good) character and (good) leadership in order to enhance the meaning and purpose in our own lives and in the lives of those entrusted with leading all sectors of society -- so all can contribute to making the world a better place. Underpinning our review, we embrace a "growth" versus a "fixed" mindset" (Dweck, 2012), placing value on our ownership and choice:

> *"I do NOT believe we are all born equal. Created equal in the eyes of God, yes, but physical and emotional differences, parental guidelines, varying environments, being in the right place at the right time, all play a role in enhancing or limiting an individual's development. But I DO believe every man and woman, if given the opportunity and encouragement to recognize their potential, regardless of background, has the freedom to choose in our world. Will an individual be a taker or a giver in life? Will that person be satisfied merely to exist or seek a meaningful purpose? Will he or she dare to dream the impossible dream? I believe every person is created as the steward of his or her own destiny with great power for a specific purpose, to share with others, through service, a reverence for life in a spirit of love."*
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> *— Hugh O'Brian, The Freedom to Choose*

This paper is a response to the call to action more than ten years ago in the face of the increasing instances of failed leadership with increasing consequences upon an increasing number of victims due to the global and interconnected world in which we live. Recent history is replete with examples of failures in leadership and/or in character across various sectors of society, to include some of our most respected professions: military, medicine, law and the clergy. The truly notable examples of successes of leadership and/or (good, or virtuous) character, such as Captain Sully Sullenberger and the "Miracle on the Hudson", are few and far between and we understandably celebrate these rare exemplar "heroes" around the globe.

Winston Churchill once claimed, "The further backward you can look, the farther forward you can see." Accordingly, we explore the historical underpinnings of what virtuous or (good) character leadership is from the ancient philosophers – Socrates, Plato and Aristotle (aka "ancients"). Aristotle, in particular, has much to offer here and we focus on his insights relevant to habituation (i.e., instilling character in both oneself and others). Specifically, what did Aristotle have to say about "character":

- What is it?
- How is it acquired/developed?
- Does/Can it lead to flourishing and happiness?

Additionally, how does what he had to say illuminate the notion of character for the nature and practice of developing leadership? We look at this from an individual level of "self-leadership" and human capacity perspective, and also from a collective level as it relates to "organization" and social capacity (Drucker, 2005; Day, 2001; Born, Craig, & Dickens, 2016).

WHY? The Modern Context

Looking at our future through the lens of education, there are compelling survey results indicating 80 percent of high-achieving high school students admitted that they cheated at least once (Kleiner & Lord, 1999). Half of these students did not feel that cheating was wrong. Additionally, Kleiner & Lord (1999)

noted that research has revealed that 75 to 98 percent of college students admit to having cheated in college (Hendrix et. al, 2004; 2015). Why do people develop in this way? What has gone wrong in these students? Is it a failure of knowledge or a failure on the side of emotions or desires? What is the role of the environment? Has the culture of the high school and/or college failed in some way; can cultures in schools and colleges help to address this? Is this just about the individual or about the organization? On the surface, these appear to be matters concerning bad character of the students. But that may be too simplistic a response. What about leadership in the organization? Does the behavior of a college leadership team influence the students' character, and what about the development of leadership qualities in the students? Does this proclivity for dishonesty already affect their capacity for good leadership in the future?

The need to focus on leadership and character development is not limited to education. The business world deals with critical issues daily that involve ethical decision-making and moral behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Ajzen, 1985 & 1991). The consequences of failed character and poor ethical practices can be profound and lasting and are well highlighted in the recent high-profile global examples of dishonest and fraudulent corporate practices such as Enron, World Com, Boeing and Tyco and more recently Wells Fargo, VW, GE, Fox News and Uber. A report for the Asian Institute of Finance raises some similar concerns as to the attitudes of practitioners For example, "These gaps [in ethical values and practices] range from ethical standards not being upheld at all times to tolerance of less than ethical means of meeting business targets to slack concerns about receiving "gifts" to favoritism towards family and friends in recruitment and awarding of contracts."(AIF, 2017, p. 6.). From a business perspective also, character and ethics education are an incredibly important area for academic focus and research since it underpins everything we do, both personally and professionally.

This evidence of the current modus operandi illustrates there is still much to be done, both to educate our leaders of tomorrow and to instill within them sound, sustainable virtuous character and ethical principles (Sims & Felton, 2006). "We are entrusted with people's lives. They are our responsibility and

our legacy. We know that the growth mindset has a key role to play in helping us fulfil our mission and in helping them fulfil their potential." (Dweck, 2012). Given the ever-increasing complexity and massive globalization of the world in which leaders operate, a more sophisticated treatment of the nexus between leadership and character is a 21st century imperative (Sanders & Lindsay, 2009).

To emphasize the importance of this nexus we turn to another professional field which recognizes that the 21st century provides a very different and disruptive environment within which to live and lead. An acronym coined by the U.S. Army War College at the end of the Cold War, "VUCA" describes the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity in an environment (Bennet & Lemoine, 2014). Taking hold most notably after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and gaining further traction during the financial crisis of 2008-2009, VUCA attempts to characterize the "new normal" of today – a world with radical changes in technology, global disasters and crises, aging populations, and all-around structural disruption (Lawrence, 2013). This notion of a VUCA world has been further substantiated by an IBM study of more than 1,500 CEOs, with a majority stating that their number one concern is how to effectively operate within the increasing complexity of their environments (Petrie, 2014). The VUCA environment creates the need for greater for stability and direction. Our "good character", values and purpose provide part of the internal compass towards our "True North" (Craig & Snook, 2014; George, 2015; Born, Craig & Dickens, 2016).

The three fields of education, business and the military, point to the importance of connections between virtuous (or good) character and leadership, and this lends support to why we need to reflect on the acquisition of virtue and its connection to leadership. However, when considering virtuous (good) character, the trait and/or state question is important: Is it that certain people are born moral/ethical, born of virtuous (or good) character? Or is it situational and derived and shaped by the environment? Perhaps it is both. Does leadership itself play a role in the inculcation of virtue?

Some previous research has found that unethical behaviors tend to occur during certain situations rather than because a person is "unethical" by nature, or born with vices (i.e., situations, rather than good or bad character, determine what individuals do). Other research demonstrates that we start to believe our own lies, and as cheaters we get a "high" that is distinctively human (Ruedy et al, 2013) and under certain circumstances individuals may condone certain behaviors when otherwise they would condemn them (Bazerman & Gino, 2002). Contemporary discussions have suggested that a possible solution could be to educate people with an integrated approach that takes into account both an internal desire toward ethicality (values-oriented approach) and reducing external temptation (structure-oriented approach) (Zhang et al, 2014). Considering ethics in a "realistic" manner rather than idealistically, is a necessary shift to successfully teach and develop character, as well as ethical and moral reasoning (Zimmerman, 2015).

Similar discussions in the philosophical literature have seen debates between "situationist" as opposed to "character" theorists (Flanagan, 1991; Harman, 1999; Athanassoulis, 1999; Doris, 2002; Miller, 2013). As we shall see, Aristotle has insights here, recognizing the importance of situation and environment (including leadership), but still leaving room for individual freedom to choose, and for virtuous (good) character or vicious (bad) character as an important explanatory factor in human behavior.

WHY? Ancient Wisdom

From the first issue of the *Journal of Character and Leadership Scholarship*, there is a strong "*call to action"* for work "to generate new knowledge and practice of leadership and character for scholars and practitioners in contemporary societies." (Lindsay & Sanders, 2009; p. 7). The next journal iteration, *Journal of Character and Leadership Integration* and the new *Journal of Character and Leadership Development* strengthens and intensifies this argument for advancing the scholarship of leadership and character both in theory and in practice.

So, in modern discussions, the importance of virtuous (or good) character, and its relation to good leadership, has been a focus of study in reflection on education, business, and the military, as outlined above. But as we have mentioned, our purpose is to draw on ancient wisdom to determine its applicability to the current environment. Character, and, virtuous (good) character was a central issue in the ethical deliberations of three of the great ancient Greek philosophers, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Our suggestion, then, is that our modern discussions may benefit from attending to their insights. We focus here on Aristotle in particular, but also draw upon contributions from Socrates and Plato. The first question we would like to pose is: What do these thinkers add to the modern scholarship as to why the connection between leadership and virtuous (good) character is important?

To address this, let us turn to Aristotle's account of virtuous character, and begin with a terminological point about the use of the word "character." In what we have written thus far we have often used the term "virtuous character" or "good character", not just "character". This is because in contemporary English the word "character" has at least two connotations.

We can talk about a person's character where the term "character" itself is evaluatively neutral (or evaluatively open). So, we can ask "what sort of character, do you think that student has?" You might reply that s/he is "kind and thoughtful" or on the other hand s/he is "nasty and manipulative." Used in this way, the term "character" refers to a genus and there can be good and bad types of character.

Yet sometimes we can use the word "character" with positive evaluation built in – so we might say "s/he has real character – that's what makes them such a good leader". In this usage we mean that he has really good character, or that s/he has genuine virtue. So here the word "character" is being used when we are referring to virtuous character. But to explain Aristotle's approach to virtue, where he picks out virtue (or good character) as one of four types of character, we need to use the word "character" for the genus, and not simply as an equivalent for "good character" or "virtue".

Bearing this in mind, we can now turn to Aristotle's main discussion of character which is in the *Nicomachean Ethics (NE)* (Aristotle, 2009). In book VII, chapters 1-3 he notes that there are several main types of character. The four central ones (setting to one side for present purposes both heroic excellence and beastlike vice) are: virtue (or good character), *encrasia* (or strong will), *acrasia* (or weak will), and vice (or bad character). So, when we talk about the importance of (good) character and leadership we are really talking about the importance of virtue. Some examples of the virtues (or types of good character) might include courage, justice, truthfulness, and kindness. These contrast with corresponding vices (or types of bad character) – cowardice, injustice, untruthfulness, unkindness.

Our focus here is on why virtue (or good character) and (good) leadership is/are important. "But the distinction between four types of character -- *virtue*, *encrasia*, *acrasia*, and *vice* – just noted, is relevant here. Aristotle distinguishes these character types along three parameters – emotions or desires, choice, and action (Urmson, 1973). The *virtuous* agent (agent of good character) wants to do the right thing, chooses to do it, and does it (taking pleasure in doing so); the *encratic* agent (agent with a strong-willed character) chooses to do the right thing, and does it, but has to overcome a conflicting desire in order to do so (so is conflicted and fails to take pleasure in doing it); the *acratic* agent (agent with a weak-willed character) chooses to do the right thing but has a conflicting desire which overcomes their choice, so fails to do it. The *vicious* agent (agent with bad character) wants to do the wrong thing, chooses to do the wrong thing, and does it (so takes pleasure in doing the wrong action).

Aristotle observes (in NE, VII, 7) that humans are pretty much all *encratic (have strength of will*) or *acratic (weak-willed).* Put another way, we all have conflicted characters, to a greater or lesser extent. The notion of the fully virtuous human (the agent of perfectly good character) who wants all the right things, chooses them, and acts accordingly is, in other words, an ideal that is never actually found amongst humans (just as Plato had to admit that his fully "virtuous " philosopher kings" were an ideal and could never actually exist). What follows from this is that when we talk about someone as virtuous, or as having a

particular virtue (e.g., courage or justice) we are actually talking about someone who is at best largely *encratic*, so closer to full virtue. But any actual leader, even the best (according to Aristotle), will still be conflicted, at least to some extent – that is at best such a leader will do the right thing with an internal struggle. S/he will have some inclination to do the wrong thing, and the existence of that inclination makes it likely that at some point it will be manifested in action. It is important to realize that this is the best that can be achieved by any human, according to Aristotle.

This is an important repercussion of Aristotle's understanding of the different types of character and it is an important implication for our appreciation of the relation between virtuous (good) human characters and (good) leaders. This requires a paper in itself, but we note for the present discussion that whilst an agent may have a conflicted character overall, this is still consistent with the possibility that on particular occasions s/he may act virtuously without conflict. But let us now return to the question of why virtuous (good) character and (good) leadership are important.

We noted above that good character (or virtue) and ethics education is an incredibly important contemporary area for academic focus and research, and this was also true for the Greeks. The questions of what virtue (or good character) is, and how virtue is acquired and developed were central for Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle ((Plato, *Laches, Meno and Republic*, J.M. Cooper (ed.), 1997)), (Aristotle, L. Brown (ed.), 2009). And they were interested in:

1. why virtue is important, and also
2. why virtue is crucial for good leadership.

The question of Why virtue (or good character) matters is also raised directly in a number of Plato's dialogues, notably *Gorgias,* and *Republic* (Plato, J.M. Cooper, (ed.) 1997). In these works, Socrates, presented as a participant in the dialogue, argues that it is indeed always better to be just rather than unjust, courageous rather than cowardly, (and so on) because being virtuous (of good character) is productive and what is really in one's interest, true happiness or flourishing. The claim that it is better to be unjust is argued

forcefully by another character in *Republic*, Thrasymachus, and the discussion here is relevant to the surveys about college students cheating which we referred to above. Thrasymachus claims that it is not in one's interests to be just or courageous or in general of virtuous (good) character… one is better off being unjust, cowardly or in general, of bad character. Thrasymachus's view depends in part on what he takes to be worth having in life (competitive goods). Socrates, Plato and Aristotle all try to meet this challenge by showing that being virtuous (of good character) does actually produce what is really worth having in life (non-competitive goods), such as a harmonious psyche.

So, the question of why virtue, or good character, matters, understood in this way as the question "why be virtuous (of good character) rather than vicious (of bad character)?" is central for these ancients. Their response is that, in order to show that it is important to be virtuous (of good character), one must attend not just to what virtue (or good character) is but to what is truly in one's interests or worth having in life. In Aristotle's NE this connection is expressed in terms of the link between being virtuous and being truly happy (having *eudaimonia*), attaining the ultimate good for individuals and society.

As already noted, the Greeks were interested in the questions of what virtue is and how virtuous (good) character is acquired. A connected question is how one conveys to someone *why* virtue (good character) is important (if it is). These questions link to our second 'why?' point about virtue (good character) and leadership. Why is virtue (good character) important for (good) leadership? But one might also add to this: why is leadership important for virtue (good character)?

To say more about the Greek and Aristotelian view here we really need to say more about our second and third questions – "*what* is virtue (good character) and leadership?", and "*how* is virtue (good character) acquired?" But it is possible to outline the ancient approach first. One place to start is again Plato's *Republic*. Here Plato argues that the best society is one that is led by" philosophers" or "philosopher kings". It is important to be careful with this term – Plato is not referring to a member of a modern academic discipline– rather a philosopher here is (literally) "a lover of wisdom". But the key point is that he argues

that these rulers, or leaders, must be developed to have all the virtues (all the aspects of good character). So, the virtues (a completely good character) are required for the leaders of the best society.

Why is this? For Plato it seems mainly to do with judgement – these leaders must have good judgement to make the right laws for those they lead. Once we have Aristotle's account of what virtue (good character) is in place we will also see that having all the virtues will give the philosopher kings the necessary resources of courage, self-control, and so on, to act on their judgements. In addition, attention to Aristotle's discussion of *how* virtue (good character) is acquired can add a further point to this picture. Aristotle's account (in NE, book II and following) suggests that the acquisition of virtue (good character) is affected by exemplars, so virtuous leaders can influence those they lead as prime exemplars who help in the formation of a virtuous (good) character. Aristotle's account also suggests that conveying the importance of virtue (good character) is not simply a matter of argument, so good (virtuous) leaders can also convey the importance of virtue. So, virtue and leadership are intertwined in complex ways: virtue (good character) is important for good leadership and good leadership is important for the acquisition of virtue, including helping those who acquire it to appreciate its value. Aristotle's account of these matters depends on his view, set out in his *Politics*, as well as NE, that humans are gregarious beings, that their flourishing is inter-dependent. It is this inter-dependence that explains the complex relationship between virtuous (good) character and leadership.

What is Virtuous (Good) Character and Effective Leadership?

George Washington said, "I hope I shall always possess firmness and virtue enough to maintain the most enviable of all titles: the character of an honest man." Teddy Roosevelt claimed "A sound body is good; a sound mind is better. But a strong and clean character is better than either." Even General Dwight D. Eisenhower, when asked how he selected his commanders for the D-Day invasion during World War II answered unequivocally, "by character, only character." So, what is character and how do we develop it?

Berkowitz (2002) provides a very useful summary of what appear to be the most promising interventions for developing individuals' (good) character. He also gives an excellent discussion noting that there is little agreement about how to define (good) character and what components make up (good) character. He defines character as "an individual's set of psychological characteristics that affect that person's ability and inclination to function morally."

Tracing back to the (ancient) Greeks, the term character is derived from the Greek word *kharassein* which means to engrave or inscribe (Klann, 2007). When applied to people, it refers to the human qualities that have been internally engraved into an individual (Sheehey, 1988). Fast forward several millennia, this analogy was likely best captured by General Lincoln, West Point's legendary leader of the Social Sciences Department when explaining the importance, the military places on character when he stated, "*the engraving on monuments of stone and bronze does not mark achievement. Only the engraving on the character and competence of our cadets and our young officers counts toward the fulfillment of our mission*." We have contemporary examples in the United States with the passing of Senator John McCain and our late 41st President, George H. W, Bush where many world leaders commented on their character defining their very "essence" that defined their respective and respected lives and leadership.

For Aristotle, (good/virtuous) character was something that reflected the human function or purpose and arose when an individual actualized his/her essential potential (NE, I,7). He further noted that such virtuous (good) character is not automatic but must be socially cultivated. This is supported by work in the modern era (Bandura, 1986). Thus, purpose initiates the "action habit" – the main success ingredient, the ability to get things done (Schwartz, 1955). Purpose is who you are that makes you distinctive…it is "essence." It is the how you bring you to any job. It is what you bring that no one else brings (Craig & Snook, 2014). While Socrates is presented by Plato as believing that a person who knows good will subsequently do good (*Meno, Protagoras*), Plato's student, Aristotle, believed that we become good by

practicing good actions, and that a person may have knowledge of what is good, but lack the disposition to do good based on that knowledge (Wakin, 1976; 1996). For Aristotle, to be virtuous (i.e., have good character) was the ultimate pursuit of human fulfillment and reflected the excellence of a person's character (Sison, 2006). The value of meaning and purpose is central to life and living (Frankl, 1959) and to an integrated and meaningful life and successful organization (Born et al, 2016).

Let us focus in more detail then on the question of what is virtuous (good) character? As we have seen the question of *why* virtue (good character) matters and why virtue (good character) matters for leadership (and vice versa) can only be fully answered when one has addressed the question of *what* virtue (good character) is, and that question also needs to be answered in conjunction with our final question, *how* is virtuous (good) character acquired.

The question of *what* virtue (good character) is becomes central for Socrates' inquiries in ethics, (notably in *Laches*, *Meno*, *Euthyphro*, *Republic*), but it is Aristotle who offers the most sophisticated account, as well as developing insights from Socrates and Plato on the question *how* virtue (good character) is acquired. Aristotle's discussions of virtue have been the subject of much recent scholarship (Burnyeat, 1980; Cooper, 1999; Curzer, 2012; Gottlieb, 2009; Hursthouse, 1988; Kraut, 2012, Lorenz, 2012; Vasiliouu, 1996; Thornton, 2013; Jimenez, 2016).

So, what does Aristotle tell us about *what* virtue (good character) is? In NE II (6, 1106b35-1107a1), he offers a definition which has five features. Virtue (good character) is, "a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean …. this [mean] being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it" (Aristotle, 2009). Each of these features has received considerable attention Urmson, 1973; Gottlieb, 2009; Hursthouse, 1988; Curzer, 2012), but here it will be necessary to be brief.

First, then, virtue (good character) is a *hexis*, a settled state of character, as are *encrasia*, *acrasia*,

and vice. What this means is not that it is an unalterable state (except possibly for the unattainable ideal of the fully virtuous state), but that the mind of someone who has a state of character is disposed in a certain way. This is best understood by contrast with a small child's mind. The child has all sorts of desires and beliefs which tend to come upon it in an entirely unstructured way, one after another. By contrast once one has arrived at a *hexis,* the mind is formed to some extent so that there is a settled tendency for certain desires and beliefs, and consequently certain choices and acts, to be formed in response to particular circumstances. Since in all humans that settled state is still to a greater or letter extent conflicted, it is still an open question what choice and action might arise, and with what degree of struggle.

Part of the reason that a virtuous agent (agent with good character) has a settled state as compared with a child's whirling psychological state is that the virtuous agent (and the other character types) has formed some conception of what is good, or worth pursuing in life and so is now capable of choices (*prohaireseis*). This is the **second** aspect of Aristotle's account. That is, rather than simply finding oneself having a desire, s/he now has desires which are responsive to that conception of what is worth doing. *Prohairesis*, translated "choice", is here a technical term for Aristotle, so that an agent only makes choices when s/he has attained some such conception of what is worth pursuing in life. The importance of this for good leadership is perhaps very clear.

Third, in the case of the virtuous agent (agent with good character) the choices (and actions) of that agent will "lie in a mean". That is Aristotle supposes it will be possible to identify them as lying at some appropriate point between two poles, an excess and a deficiency. For example, the agent who has the virtue with respect to anger will be appropriately angry in response to the situation, neither "flying off the handle" in response to something of little import, nor failing to be angry in circumstances which merit an irate response.

Fourth, the ability of the virtuous agent (agent with good character) to form appropriate emotional or desiderative responses will reflect the fact that his/her conception of the good will be rational, they will have weighed up rationally the many different considerations that are relevant to what is worth pursuing in life and thus arrived at a well-judged sense of what to pursue. And **fifth**, in so doing, they will be exercising the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom which is what one has when one is able to make these good (rational) judgements as to what to pursue. In so far as leadership is about good judgement, it may also be clear how virtue (good character), as Aristotle understands it, is important for good leadership.

However, as we noted, virtue (good character) is not just about judgement but about choice. Or put another way, *phronesis*, (or practical wisdom) is practical – it is about following through from choice into action (ideally without the struggle that manifests internal conflict). Clearly that is important for leadership too, as we noted with respect to Plato's "philosopher kings" earlier. In NE VI,13 Aristotle mentions that *phronesis*, brings with it all the virtues (all aspects of good character) so as well as justice the practically wise leader will have courage, which enables her/him to stand by her decisions, self-control, good-temper, truthfulness, and so on. Reflection on leadership suggests that it is this full set of virtues (all aspects of good character) that will often be required on any given occasion if the judgements of a good leader are to lead to required actions. Given the point made earlier about the distinction between the *encratic* (which is the most an actual human can aspire to) and the fully virtuous, it is worth noting here that even an *encratic* may be able to bring to bear all relevant virtues on a particular occasion even though the *encratic* is not capable of exercising all virtues on all occasions (because the *encratic* is psychologically divided, as explained earlier).

In what follows it will be noted how this Aristotelian account of virtue (good character) has the capacity to capture the link between good leadership and purpose that is indicated in the account of leadership. Looking back to earlier remarks, it will also be noted how this account of virtue indicates how a virtuous leader (a leader of good character) will have the resources to respond flexibly but appropriately

to the "different and disruptive environment" envisaged in VUCA world. These VUCA conditions create even greater need to stabilize, relying on our values and purpose to stay on course (Craig & Snook, 2014; George, 2015; Born, Craig & Dickens, 2016).

Next, we consider *what* leadership is, but in the final section we turn to the question of Aristotle's insights as to *how* virtue (good character), so understood, is acquired and the further implications that his account has for links between virtue and leadership.

What role does an individual's "Purpose" play on one's character and leadership?

As Stogdill (1974; p. 259) noted "There are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are people who have attempted to define the concept." One approach that resonates in this VUCA world is the notion of *authentic leadership* (Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Gardner et al, 2005; Gardner et al, 2005). Who and why are you seem to be relevant pursuits in one's personal ownership and choice (George, 2015).

Simon Sinek's recent books and TedX Talks, "Start with Why" (2009) and "Leaders Eat Last" (2014), might be onto something. Many organizations are getting back to the basics of their core purpose and thinking about service to a higher calling and their reason for being. What is your raison d'être? Do you know who you are and where you are headed? Do you and/or your organization know who you are collectively and where you are headed? Do you and/or your organization know your "why?" There is a definite sense in this world that there is increasing speed, vulnerability, complexity, and uncertainty in the 21st century. The disruptiveness of the global world we live in is impacting each and every one of us as we naturally seek stability in centeredness and grounding, and more clarity in "why we are here" at the individual to the organizational level.

Perhaps (good) character and leadership have something to do with having individual purpose and meaning and creating this for others, often referred to as building human and social capacity (Day, 2001). As Mark Twain eloquently stated, "The two most important days of our life are the day we are born and the

day we figure out why." What is our individual "why?" What is our organizational "why?" We see evidence that organizations are orienting themselves to discover and live their "why." Companies like Starbucks and Heineken have discovered the personal, professional and corporate benefits to having clear purpose at the individual and organizational level, and those that do both thrive and survive in the most challenging conditions. A sailing vessel heads out in calm or uncertain conditions as it charts its course. The center board holds it stable, the tiller is critical to steer it in the intended direction, and the sailor guides the craft toward the destination: all are essential to stay on course. The winds, conditions, crew and captain all factor into the journey, as well as reaching the ultimate destination: success. The "why" is often stated in "purpose." (Born, Craig, & Dickens; 2016). As humans, we naturally desire a sense of meaning and purpose in our lives (Frankl, 1959; George et al., 2007; Hollensbe, Wookey, Hickey, & George, 2014). "As social beings, if teams and organizations are to be great, then it is critically important to provide a strong sense of purpose that attracts and keeps employees." (Yaeger, 2015, p. 1; Dik, Byrne, & Steger, 2013; George, 2015).

Indeed, purpose is a very popular focus today. Many people are focusing on their purpose and companies are reaching out to public relations/marketing firms to help them define or refine their organization's purpose. If an organization of the 21st century is going to thrive and survive (i.e. be around 10 years from now), purpose must be a core ingredient – that is non-negotiable. Yet, while trying to find purpose to rally around is nice, it misses the point of what a truly compelling purpose can do. The challenge with purpose is not to find it. The real challenge is to reconnect with the one that has always been there - but never recognized, acknowledged or appreciated. (Born, Craig, & Dickens, 2016). "Your purpose is your brand, what you're driven to achieve, the magic that makes you tick. It's not what you do, it's how you do your job and why—the strengths and passions you bring to the table no matter where you're seated. Although you may express your purpose in different ways in different contexts, it's what everyone close to you recognizes as uniquely you and would miss most if you were gone." (Craig & Snook, 2014, p. 1.).

Having sketched this account of (good) leadership, we now turn to the questions of how:

(1) to develop leadership with good character/authentic leadership, and

(2) authentic leadership/leadership and good character plays a role in the development of good character in others, and

(3) leaders of good character/authentic leaders create the conditions for development of others as good leaders?

How Do We Develop the Attributes of (good) Character AND (good) Leadership?

There is much to grasp on the very important intersection of (good) Character and (good) Leadership. Instead of continuing to examine these two concepts in isolation, we need to start to address the two concepts together and leverage that understanding to gain greater insight into each of the concepts (Lindsay & Sanders, 2009).

There is a significant relationship between the impact of transformational leadership (as a form of authentic leadership) on organizational outcomes such as satisfaction, perceived performance, commitment, altruistic behavior, and intent to remain in the organization that is enhanced by virtuous (or good) character qualities (Hendrix, Born & Hopkins, 2015) and job enrichment (Born, Hendrix & Pate, 2017). Accordingly, there is some strong emerging evidence in the observable links between leadership and (good) character, yet, the ancient philosophical material might enable more to be said of an explanatory nature about these links. So, why exactly is it that virtuous (good) character in a leader has additional beneficial effects, especially when the leader is exercising transformational leadership? What is it about (good) character that explains those effects? Aristotle's work on virtuous (good) character, including his views about how character is acquired and the relationship between character and happiness or purpose in life, might be very helpful both to our understanding of the relationship between leadership and good character and to establishing meaning and purpose for leaders themselves and others entrusted to their leadership. The explanatory account that follows contrasts with that given by Boaks and Levine (Boaks and Levine, 2014).

Aristotle recognized that any plausible account of *what* virtue (good character) is needs to be consistent with, and perhaps clearer for, a good account of *how* virtuous (good) character is acquired (and vice versa). So, in developing the analysis of *what* virtue is, he gives careful attention in NE to *how* an agent can learn to be of good character, notably in book II, but also in remarks throughout the work (Burnyeat, 1980; Vasiliou, 1996, Thornton, 2013). Aristotle (NE Book I, 3-4) distinguishes between the "that" and the "why" in ethics (Aristotle, 2009). A fully virtuous agent will both have a true belief *that* an act is the right thing to do (on this occasion), and a true belief as to *why* that is the right thing to do. So, the acquisition of virtue (good character) will involve acquiring both the "*that"* and the "*why"*.

Aristotle (NE Book II, 1-2) suggests that this process of virtue acquisition (the acquisition of good character) is analogous to the process involved in acquiring skills such as building or carpentry. He calls the process one of habituation. This involves guidance, practice or action, and (usually) repetition. Of note, this is not just a matter of simple-minded habit formation.

The first stage -- guidance -- might be provided by an explicit piece of oral advice from a parent or teacher to a child, may be embodied in rules or laws, or may be conveyed by example. In other words, initially a child will learn *that* a certain behavior is brave or just either through being explicitly told that it is, or through observing the example behavior of one in a position of responsibility (or of an admired public figure), or perhaps the diffuse examples of how a community "does things around here". It may already be clear that this first stage in virtue formation is crucial for the connection between virtue (good character) and leadership, in several ways, but before examining this point in more detail, it is appropriate to sketch, very briefly the other two main stages in "habituation".

At this first stage, the child acquiring virtue (good character) will only have a rather attenuated grasp of the "*that"*. (Virtue acquisition is a life-long project, so an adult could also be at this stage -- which is why leadership development is also a lifelong process – see Aristotle's remarks in NE Book X, 9

(Aristotle, L. Brown (ed.), 2009)). The child will believe "that" the action advised is the right action, but only in virtue of trusting the parent, teacher, or exemplar. S/He will not yet see *that* this is the case for her/himself (so only has an "external" belief). Aristotle's next important claim is that, as with other skills, s/he can only come to see this for her/himself through action. Action has a cognitive slant in the area of ethics (Burnyeat, 1980).

Once the child has come to see for her/himself (thus forming an "internal" belief), that this is the right act in these circumstances (and obviously this will depend in part on the child receiving good initial guidance and not being subject to adverse peer pressure, or the like), the child will be at the beginning of various kinds of rational reflection which enable her/him to come to have a true belief as to "*why*" this is the right thing to do. Hopefully, it is already clear that Aristotle is not talking about a process of unthinking habit formation or conditioning. One decisive reason for this is that he is analyzing the acquisition of a rational state, the proper development of a rational being (which is what a human is, on his account – see, NE I,7).

Let us, though, reflect a little more on the first stage of acquisition. Here an agent forms an initial true belief as to the virtuous act in the circumstances. This involves guidance, whether oral, or through rules, laws, or crucially exemplars. The importance of exemplars makes clear the significance of leaders in this part of the process of virtue acquisition. Children, but all of us to some degree, are very prone to picking up or copying the behavior of those who are held in high esteem, whether because they are cultural celebrities or because they are set up in positions of recognized authority/leadership. Hence leaders, through their actions, have a considerable effect on what their followers are inclined to believe to be virtuous actions (the acts of a person of good character).

Being selected as a leader implies to us that the person in question must have attributes which make him/her worthy of that office. Not only that but the position of a leader tends to mean that they are set

before their followers more frequently, so their style of behavior is more repeatedly "consumed". More subtly, leaders tend to influence, by their example. the characters not just of all their followers, but more specifically of other leaders, within a community or organization. It is natural to assume that if this is the way a person who is a leader in this organization behaves, then other leaders, and those who aspire to her position need to behave in that way too.

Thus, in a whole range of ways leaders influence the formation of virtue (good character) in their community. They are doing so all the time because of their high profile (and of course bad leaders have a similar degree of impact, but negatively). Their leadership behavior will be observed by followers not just in obviously public activities, or in the rules they lay down for the organization, but in the way, they are behaving even when supposedly out of the spotlight. Leaders are influencing the virtue formation (or lack of it) of the other leaders and the future leaders of that organization. Because of the roles of those other leaders, the example from the topmost leaders becomes echoed (or duplicated), increasing its power of influence on character formation in the whole organization. Put simply, leaders not only influence the first stage of virtue formation directly, but also have a significant indirect influence on an organization's sense of "how we do things around here", which is another important element in the first stage of virtue formation.

A second important connection between (good) character and (good) leadership has also been alluded to here. The formation of virtue in future leaders is significantly affected not just by those who lead them, but by the organizations in which they are formed. If an organization is rotten, and the conception of "how things are to be done around here" is rotten, then it takes considerable independence and strength of mind for a future leader to be able to see for him/herself that what is being passed on is misguided, that what virtue (good character) requires is a different type of behavior.

Furthermore, and by contrast, when a leader exemplifies virtuous behavior in an organization (does what is just, courageous, and truthful, her leadership example will be more compelling. This is because what her example is passing on to those led (in terms of their beliefs about right action), is correct, something

a rational agent is adapted to recognize as worthy of pursuit. When a leader is genuinely virtuous (genuinely of good character) this will be easier for followers to recognize because they are recognizing what is genuinely desirable or worth doing, which they are adapted to recognize when functioning well as a rational being. This is not like a case where a follower mistakenly takes herself to see something as desirable or worth doing when subject to malign peer pressure, for example. This case can be contrasted with that of someone who is being led by a vice-ridden leader, charismatic, but unjust and dishonest. Such a follower is more likely confused because she is inclined to believe that such behavior is right, and yet struggles to see for herself what exactly is desirable, or worthy of pursuit, in it, since it is not in fact desirable or worthy of pursuit.

This leads to two further points linking (good) leadership and (good) character. First, earlier we touched on the way in which one can be convinced that it is better to be virtuous (of good character), and whether that was entirely to be achieved by dialectical argument. Plausibly a genuinely virtuous leader will convey, through the way in which s/he instantiates good character, the value of that kind of life. Because they are doing what does in fact have a point (is in fact worthwhile), their example will show, or convey that truth directly. Thus, we now have an Aristotelian account of virtue formation (the formation of good character), which involves guidance (including from exemplars), practice, and often repetition. We also have his account of what virtue is – a state of character involving choice (*prohairesis*), which lies in a mean, in accordance with a rational principle, that principle which the practically wise agent would hold.

The second and deeper link then, is that, taken together, Aristotle's analysis of what virtue is and how it is acquired may also provide an explanatory link to the idea that good leadership is leadership that has real purpose, so that good leaders will identify and convey to others the worthwhile purpose of the organization or community they lead.

On Aristotle's account, truly virtuous leaders will see for themselves the point of right or virtuous action (the acts of a person of good character) and know why it is virtuous. Virtuous behavior is thus rational, and the fully virtuous agent will act in accordance with rational principles as Aristotle suggests. But then in the case of a virtuous leader (a leader of good character), the purpose of the organization s/he leads must be one which is consistent with his/her virtue and it must indeed be a purpose which a virtuous agent can recognize as having a point so there is reason to pursue it. The fact that it is articulated and pursued by a virtuous leader is also, therefore, more likely to make that purpose compelling to those who are asked or encouraged to pursue it within the organization.

In sum, we can begin to see a nest of ways in which, given the ancient Greek discussions of virtue, and particularly Aristotle's account of what virtue is and how it is acquired, virtue and leadership intersect fruitfully, and in a manner that shows why virtuous leadership matters.

Conclusion

We began this paper with two observations. First, citing Winston Churchill, we highlighted the potential value to leadership studies of drawing on insights from past intellectual history, and the ancient Greeks in particular. Our claim was that looking back to Aristotle's nuanced and sophisticated account of (good) character, or virtue, could provide a valuable understanding for contemporary leadership scholarship and practice.

Specifically, we argued that attention to his analysis can provide explanatory depth to contemporary work suggesting that good leadership and good character are attributes that intersect in fruitful ways. Taking as a starting point the widespread call for better leadership and more examples of good character in leadership, we claimed that Aristotle shows why good character and good leadership are important by pointing to complex ways in which they intersect -- from the influence of leadership on the development of good character to the necessity of good character for enabling leaders to judge and act with purpose. The

convergence and importance of these two qualities was recently highlighted by the passing of America's last great soldier statesmen and war hero president. National and world leaders alike were resounding in their praise of the late President George H. W. Bush and what defined his success on the national and international stage. Despite his world changing accomplishments, what defined him most was his "essence" his grace, civility, honor, dignity and social conscience which defined his character and in turn his leadership.

Second, we have noted the widely-held belief that many of the rather widespread recent examples of poor leadership, in diverse fields, reflected poor character in those leaders. On the other hand, examples of good leadership, like the case of "the miracle on the Hudson" manifested virtuous (or good) character – courage, honesty, self-control, and wisdom. Furthermore, rigorous empirical academic work also points to important connections between (good) leadership and (good) character for human and social capacity on important outcomes within and for organizations (Hendrix, Born & Hopkins, 2015; Born, Hendrix & Pate, 2017).

These beliefs of "the many" and "the wise" constitute the *phainomena*, (Nicomachean Ethics, VII, 3), the way things seem to be, which Aristotle takes as a starting point for further inquiry. His aim in such an inquiry is to preserve as many of those beliefs as possible, confirming their truth, but more fundamentally, to arrive at a deeper understanding through providing an explanatory account for those beliefs.

Thus, in Aristotelian vein, what we have sought to do here is to draw on insights from the ancient Greeks, and Aristotle in particular, in order to provide an explanatory framework which enables us to begin to understand the complex network of connections between virtuous (good) character and (good) leadership. In doing this, we aim to develop a deeper appreciation of the nature of both character and leadership.

We then called upon insights from Socrates/Plato, as well as Aristotle, to indicate some of the reasons why the connections between (good) character and (good) leadership are important. The exercise

of good leadership requires the good judgement or practical wisdom which Plato identified as a central attribute of his ideal political leaders. However, good leadership also involves the practical application of that judgement, which requires its manifestation in ethical virtues such as justice, courage, and self-control so as to produce appropriate action. On the other hand, the formation of character in future leaders (and others) depends crucially on the environment created by good leaders, which becomes clearer when we attend to the "how" question.

Our answer to this "why" question was then developed further by the next explanatory stage, namely setting out a deeper explication of what both good character and good leadership are. In doing this, we have seen suggestive links between the dependence of (good) character on an agent's conception of what is good or worth pursuing in life, and the account of (good) leadership as leadership with purpose (whether it be leadership of the self or leadership of others).

Aristotle was clear that a satisfactory account of what good character is should cohere, in explanatorily rich ways, with the best account of how virtuous (good) character is acquired. So, the third stage of our argument took the explanatory framework yet further by drawing on Aristotle's favored account of virtue acquisition and using that to indicate a complex network of explanatory connections between how (good) character is developed and how good leadership is nurtured. Beginning to unpack the key concept of habituation shows that these connections are bi-lateral, with good leadership helping to develop good character, and the acquisition of good character being a component in the development of a good leader.

Illustrating the applicability of this explanatory framework to the contemporary world, the military in particular has long recognized this strong interdependence of the Why-What-How, the importance of good character to good leadership, and the notion of practice and habituation as fundamental to acquiring special moral virtues (honor, courage, truthfulness, loyalty, selflessness, etc.). These virtues are the keys that define the service's ethos and enable the military profession to carry out its mission. Furthermore, these virtues are encapsulated in each of the military services Core Values, and their lifelong practice is absolutely

crucial to the Profession of Arms developing leaders of character. Simply stated, when asked the question "How do service members acquire these virtues?", it becomes second nature to give the Aristotelian answer "Habit and Practice!"

Considering this explanatory framework, we are now in a position to understand more fully the widely held belief that (good) character is significant to (good) leadership in concrete situations such as the "Miracle on the Hudson". Our Aristotelian account of virtuous character explains how a virtuous agent is disposed to make good judgements in challenging circumstances, judgements which reflect the leader's purpose. Virtuous character involves, on this account, the appropriate desires and emotions that enable a good leader to behave in ways that adhere to his judgement and purpose.

Likewise, given our Aristotelian account of vice, corresponding to the account of virtue, we can now explain more fully the widespread belief that "bad" character led to recent examples of poor leadership in areas as diverse as banking, medicine, politics, and religion. Bad character (or vice) in leaders leads to poor judgement and corresponding behavior, that is at odds with appropriate purposes for such organizations. Indeed, poor judgement can give rise to a loss of the sense of appropriate purpose altogether. The analysis reveals how the inappropriate desires, emotions, and behavior of leaders with bad character can set examples which adversely affects the behavior of those they lead (who follow their example), and thereby the culture of the entire organization or community.

Whilst we believe that this Aristotelian explanatory framework, enriches our appreciation of both character and leadership, we see this paper as a stepping stone for further interdisciplinary research. There are many connections across especially the humanities and social sciences, yet also the basic sciences and engineering. First, this outline analysis of good character points to interesting connections between a good leader's desires, emotions, and judgement, on the one hand, and their purpose(s), on the other. Second, the teleological nature of this complex Aristotelian explanatory framework is powerfully suggestive, but there is more to uncover about the significance of purpose in both leadership and character and its connection to

purpose in human life more broadly. It would be prudent to look more rigorously at the impact of our individual and collective purpose (meaning) in the process to educate, train and develop leaders of character.

Third, there is much more to be said about the structure of organizations and character formation as a life-long process, developing the connections between individual character formation and the communities within which characters are formed. Within that framework, there is a need for more careful analysis and understanding of the role and nature of good leadership, at various levels within a community or organization, in the formation of virtuous (good) character in all the members of that community or organization. There is also room for a more detailed explanation of the way in which the formation of good leaders depends on the culture of the organizations in which those leaders are formed, because of the complex role of that culture in forming virtuous (good) character in those developing leaders themselves.

In sum, we aim to have shown, both through the explanatory framework set out here, and the potential for future work, the enormous value of attention to our rich intellectual heritage when addressing the pressing and diverse issues in contemporary leadership, both practical and theoretical.

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