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VIRTUE IN BUSINESS: MORALLY BETTER, PRAISEWORTHY, TRUSTWORTHY, AND MORE SATISFYING

Edward T. Cokely and Adam Feltz

ABSTRACT

In four experiments, we offer evidence that virtues are often judged as uniquely important for some business practices (e.g., hospital management and medical error investigation). Overall, actions done only from virtue (either by organizations or individuals) were judged to feel better, to be more praiseworthy, to be more morally right, and to be associated with more trustworthy leadership and greater personal life satisfaction compared to actions done only to produce the best consequences or to follow the correct moral rule. These results accord with claims made by some virtue ethicists. The current data contribute to a small but growing body of literature emphasizing both empirical soundness and philosophical rigor in the scientific study of virtue. Results also offer some guidance concerning how businesses, employees, and executives are evaluated and perceived. Implications for theory and practice are discussed.

Robert Solomon once quipped that those who talked about business ethics received a mandatory “sounds like an oxymoron” response (1992, p. 317). He then noted that we are thankfully beyond that in the theoretical study of business ethics. Nearly a decade later, however, considerable evidence suggests that while the theoretical study of business ethics may not be an oxymoron, the actual practice of business ethics in complex and uncertain markets has something left to be desired (Ferrell, Fraedrich, and Ferrell, 2000).

Traditionally, two approaches have dominated business ethics – consequentialism and deontology (Beauchamp, Bowie, and Arnold, 2008). However, virtue ethics, an ancient approach to ethics emphasizing moral character, has made resurgence in the past two decades (Driver, 2001). This resurgence has partly been fueled by arguments that virtues can account for and inspire parts of our moral experience that are often neglected by consequentialists and deontologists. In a series of four experiments, we present evidence that people sometimes have strong preferences for actions owing to virtue rather than those resulting from consequentialist or deontological principles. These data are used to highlight the need for empirical evaluation of philosophical claims as well as the need for philosophical clarity in interpreting the available empirical evidence. We conclude by discussing some valuable connections between virtue and business.

VIRTUES AND BUSINESS ETHICS

Consequentialism is a general approach to ethics where the right action maximizes the good, whatever the good may be (McNaughton and Rawling, 2006). Deontologists hold that the right action is determined by what principles ought to be followed or what duties have the most weight in a given circumstance, and those principles or duties may or may not maximize the good (e.g., Ross, 1988). Virtue ethics is often claimed to be importantly different from consequentialism and deontology. While theories of virtue are diverse, there are some common themes shared by many virtue ethicists.¹ For many virtue ethicists, “the focus is on the virtuous individual and on those inner traits, dispositions, and motives that qualify her as being virtuous” (Slote, 2001, p. 4). “It is widely agreed that virtue is a trait of character” (Copp and Sobel, 2004, p. 516). In turn, “virtue is the concept of something that makes its possessor good” (Hursthouse, 1999, p. 13). Consequently according to Hursthouse, “an action is right [if and only if] it is what a virtuous agent would characteristically (i.e., acting in character) do in the circumstances” (1999, p. 28). So, for the virtue ethicist, the rightness or wrongness of an action is determined not only by the consequences of an action or by the correct set of moral principles, but also by having the right kind of character.

As these comments suggest, the *basis* for moral evaluation is different between these three approaches to ethics (Oakley, 1996). As Swanton notes:

A virtuous agent has a standing commitment to act from virtue. This contrasts with that of the 'sophisticated consequentialist' agent who, according to Railton, 'is someone who has a standing commitment to leading an objectively consequentialist life'.... It also differs from sophisticated Kantianism, which demands that the Kantian moral agent has a standing commitment to perform her duty (2003, 28-9). Virtue ethics “makes primary use of aretaic terms” (Slote, 2001, p. 4). Virtue ethicists take the right making feature of an action as acting from virtue whereas consequentialists see it as maximizing the good and deontologists as following the appropriate set of moral rules.²

Intuitions or judgments about actual or hypothetical cases are important and pervasive pieces of evidence virtue ethicists use to support their arguments.³ A quick perusal of the virtue literature finds Concentration Camps (Slote, 2001), Einstein's view of his worth (Driver, 2001), sorrowing philanthropists (Hursthouse, 1999), and horrible mothers sacrificing themselves for their daughters (Copp and Sobel, 2004). These examples are meant to generate an intuition in the reader, and that intuition is used for or against some philosophical claim about virtue. Often, these intuitions are assumed to be widespread in ordinary people (i.e., the philosophically naïve folk) and not simply idiosyncratic intuitions of a few highly educated theorists (cf., Stich, 2010; 1998; Weinberg, Nichols, and Stich, 2001). Indeed, some virtue ethicists explicitly state they use the term 'we' “to mean 'me and you, my

¹ For a more detailed discussion of some common themes and how they distinguish virtue ethics from consequentialism and deontology, see Oakley, 1996.

² It is possible that some sophisticated forms of consequentialism or deontology can account for the virtues. However, many ethicists have commented that these issues are not that important (Hursthouse, 1999; Slote, 2001; Swanton, 2003; Copp and Sobel, 2004). What is important is to come up with the correct account of morality. To this end, virtues are argued to constitute an important part of our moral experience that is left out on simple versions of consequentialism and deontology (Hursthouse, 1999; Copp and Sobel, 2004).

³ Some think there is a philosophical distinction between “intuitions” and “judgments.” See Feltz & Bishop (2010) for a review. We will assume that there is no important difference.

readers” (Hursthouse, 1999, p. 8). Additionally, intuitions or judgments about thought examples are considered to constitute an important part of our moral experience: “intuitive considerations...have considerable weight” (Slote, 2001, p. 11). Hence, the pervasiveness of the intuition that virtues matter above and beyond maximizing the good or following the correct moral rule is an important feature and argumentative strategy of the virtue ethicist.

But how pervasive is the intuition that virtues uniquely matter? We set out to begin mapping intuitions surrounding virtues using situations that might arise in business. Our primary goal was to demonstrate that actions done from virtue are sometimes judged to be morally better than those described as originating from the correct moral rules or maximizing the good. But we were also interested in distinct but related issues in moral judgment concerning business. Accordingly, we provide evidence that (a) virtuous actions are related to positive feelings about the action and warrant more praise (Prinz, 2007; Haidt 2001; Haidt, Koller and Dias, 1993; Nichols, 2004); (b) virtuous people are judged to be more satisfied with life (Park, Peterson, and Seligman, 2004); (c) desirable properties of business are associated with virtue (e.g., better leadership or patronage); and (d) entities displaying one virtue are judged more likely to display other virtues (e.g., judgments indicating a “unity” or “positive manifold” of the virtues) (Hursthouse, 1999). Finally, previous work has indicated that some global personality traits are related to many fundamental philosophically relevant intuitions (Cokely & Feltz, 2009a; 2009b; Feltz & Cokely, 2009a; in press a; in press b; Schulz, Cokely, & Feltz). Evidence also suggests that there is a negative relation between self-descriptions of virtuous behavior and low emotional stability⁴ (Peterson and Seligman, 2004; Cawley, Martin, and Johnson, 2000). Our experiments were designed to allow us to extend these lines of research and test whether individuals who have low emotional stability would be less likely to judge actions done from virtue as less morally good (i.e., a positive relation between emotional stability and moral valuation of virtue).

To test these hypotheses, we used four scenarios. These scenarios describe two entities. One entity acts from what is described as the correct moral rule generating better consequences and the other only from virtuous dispositions. Across a variety of types of entities (persons, executives, organizations, employees), we examined the relationship between preference for actions done from virtue compared to actions done to maximize the good and follow the correct moral rule. Crucially, comparisons included conditions in which the virtuous action brought about more harm than did alternatives.

EXPERIMENT 1

Participants

Forty-two participants were recruited from an online webpanel and were directed to an internet survey. Upon completion of the survey, participants were given a small cash award (\$0.25). Those who indicated that their answers should not be used, who were under the age of 18, or who did not complete the survey were excluded from analyses.⁵ The mean age of

⁴ Individuals who score high on assessments of neuroticism are commonly described as people who are tense, anxious, nervous, moody, worrying, touchy, and fearful (John, 1999).

⁵ Participants were recruited, rewarded, and excluded in the same ways for all experiments.

participants was 33.14 years, $SD = 10.74$, ranging from 18 to 59. There were 14 males (33%) and 28 females (67%).

Materials

Participants were given the following scenario:

Imagine two people, John and William, work in a hospital. They both witness 10 medical errors and learn that the hospital will be investigated for every error that is reported. Each investigation requires that the hospital must close for one week. When the hospital is closed, needy patients will be turned away.

Person 1: John makes moral decisions solely based on consequences and widely accepted moral rules. John thinks long and hard to help with his decision and he calculates that the best consequences and the right moral rule dictate that he should report only 1 out of the 10 medical errors. For these reasons, and only for these reasons, John reports 1 medical error.

Person 2: William does not make moral decisions solely based on consequences or widely accepted moral rules. Rather, William has the deep-seated character traits of justice and honesty that cause him to decide to report all 10 errors. Because of these character traits, and only because of these character traits, he reports all 10 medical errors.

After reading the scenario, participants were asked the following questions.

1. Who is more praiseworthy?
2. Who is more satisfied with his life?
3. Who is likely to be a better leader?
4. Who is more trustworthy?
5. Whose action is morally better?
6. Who do you feel better about?

Participants responded using a 7 point scale. One indicated a strong preference for John, 7 indicated a strong preference for William, and 4 indicated both actors were equal. After answering these questions, participants were given the Ten Item Personality Inventory (Gosling, Rentfrow, and Swan, 2003).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One sample t -tests were conducted on all variables to assess statistically significant differences as compared to neutrality (an answer of 4). The means, standard deviations, and t -tests for each variable are reported in Table 1.⁶

Emotional stability was related to judgments of the moral worth of the action (Question 5), $r(44) = .36, p = .02$. No other personality traits were significant predictors of judgments (all p 's $> .10$). To illustrate the difference, a median split was performed to separate more emotionally stable ($M = 4.67, SD = 2.11$) individuals from individuals scoring low in

⁶ Pilot studies using slightly different scenarios found there was no statistically significant difference in scenarios where John and William reported the same number of errors.

emotional stability ($M = 5.91$, $SD = 1.58$). An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showed a moderate sized difference between the groups, $F(1, 40) = 4.65$, $p = .04$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$.⁷

Table 1

Praise	$M = 5.14$, $SD = 1.98$	$t(41) = 3.74$, $p = .001$
Satisfaction	$M = 4.67$, $SD = 1.96$	$t(41) = 2.21$, $p = .03$
Leadership	$M = 4.43$, $SD = 2.31$	$t(41) = 1.20$, $p = .24$
Trust	$M = 5.64$, $SD = 1.82$	$t(41) = 5.85$, $p < .001$
Morality	$M = 5.29$, $SD = 1.94$	$t(41) = 4.29$, $p < .001$
Feeling	$M = 4.91$, $SD = 2.28$	$t(41) = 2.57$, $p = .01$

Overall, as predicted, we observed moderate to large preferences for virtuous actions in all categories (praiseworthiness, life satisfaction, trust, morality, and feeling), with the exception of perceived leadership quality.

EXPERIMENT 2

The results of Experiment 1 were consistent with our hypotheses indicating that people will sometime judge more virtuous actions as more praiseworthy, more satisfying, and more moral. However, one potential theoretical concern is that the role of the individual who performed the action was somewhat unspecified. Therefore, in Experiment 2 we defined the role of the individuals more clearly indicating the persons of interest held business leadership roles (i.e, the president of a hospital).

Participants

Fifty-three people participated in the experiment. Fourteen (26%) were male and 39 (74%) were female. The mean age was 31.72 years, $SD = 12.77$, ranging from 18 to 78.

Materials

Participants received a slightly modified version of the scenario used in Experiment 1. The first sentence of the scenario was replaced with the following sentence: "Imagine two people, John and William, who are presidents of a hospital." The beginning of the first sentence of the second paragraph was replaced with "John is president of hospital X and..." and the beginning of the first sentence of the third paragraph was replaced with "William is president of hospital X and..." After reading the scenario, participants answered the same

⁷ This result replicated the relation between emotional stability and judgments of moral value of the action in a pilot study with similar scenarios $r(136) = .17$, $p = .04$.

series of questions as participants in Experiment 1 and completed the Ten Item Personality Inventory.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analyses proceeded in the same fashion as in Experiment 1. Means, standard deviations, and *t*-tests are reported in Table 2. As in Experiment 1, emotional stability again was positively related to judgments of the moral worth of the action, $r(53) = .38$, $p = .004$. No other personality traits were reliably related to judgments of moral worth (p 's $> .10$). An approximated median split was created for emotional stability. An ANOVA indicated a moderate sized difference between judgments from individuals with low emotional stability ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 2.13$) and those with high emotional stability ($M = 6.00$, $SD = 1.68$), $F(1, 51) = 7.56$, $p = .008$, $\eta_p^2 = .13$. Overall, as predicted, we again observed moderate to large preferences for virtuous actions in all categories (praiseworthiness, life satisfaction, trust, morality, and feeling), with an exception for perceived satisfaction with life.

Table 2

Praise	$M = 5.36$, $SD = 1.85$	$t(52) = 5.34$, $p < .001$
Satisfaction	$M = 4.28$, $SD = 1.93$	$t(52) = 1.07$, $p = .29$
Leader	$M = 5.04$, $SD = 1.97$	$t(52) = 3.83$, $p < .001$
Trust	$M = 5.94$, $SD = 1.71$	$t(52) = 8.25$, $p < .001$
Moral	$M = 5.23$, $SD = 2.05$	$t(52) = 4.35$, $p < .001$
Feeling	$M = 5.49$, $SD = 1.94$	$t(52) = 5.60$, $p < .001$

EXPERIMENT 3

The previous two experiments concerned the evaluation of individuals. Experiment 3 attempted to demonstrate that the same pattern of responses holds for “collective entities.” Collective entities are organizations that are made up of individuals. Some evidence suggests that the folk are willing to make some mental state attributions to collective entities (Knobe and Prinz, 2008). For example, many people are willing to attribute intentions or intentionality to collective entities (Huebner, Bruno, and Sarkissian, 2010). In Experiment 3, we extend this line of research to incorporate collective entities described as more or less virtuous.

Participants

Forty-seven people participated in the experiment. Twenty-two (47%) were male and 25 (53%) were female. The mean age was 34.09 years, $SD = 11.88$ and ranged from 18 to 67.

Materials

Participants received a slightly modified version of the scenario used in Experiment 1. The first sentence of the first paragraph was replaced with: "Imagine two hospitals, Hospital X and Hospital Y." Then throughout the scenario, 'Hospital X' was substituted for 'John' and 'Hospital Y' was substituted for 'William'. After reading one of the scenarios, participants answered the following questions on the 7 point scaled used in Experiments 1 and 2.

1. Which hospital performs a more praiseworthy action?
2. Which hospital has better employees?
3. Which hospital would you rather go to?
4. Which hospital is more trustworthy?
5. Which hospital performs a morally better action?
6. Which hospital performs an action you feel better about?

Two questions were necessarily changed in this experiment as compared with the first two experiments. The questions "Who is more satisfied with his life?" and "Who is likely to be a better leader?" were replaced with "Which hospital has better employees?" and "Which hospital would you rather go to?". This substitution was required because asking the former questions made little sense when applied to a collective entity. These new questions were asked because virtue would likely influence people's judgments about employees as well as which organization they would prefer to patronize. Finally, participants completed the Ten Item Personality Inventory.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analyses followed the previous two experiments. Means, standard deviations, and *t*-tests are reported in Table 3.

Table 3

Praise	$M = 5.43, SD = 2.02$	$t(46) = 4.84, p < .001$
Employees	$M = 5.51, SD = 1.87$	$t(46) = 5.52, p < .001$
Go To	$M = 6.15, SD = 1.46$	$t(46) = 10.10, p < .001$
Trust	$M = 5.51, SD = 2.00$	$t(46) = 5.18, p < .001$
Moral	$M = 4.83, SD = 1.36$	$t(46) = 4.19, p < .001$
Feeling	$M = 5.38, SD = 1.98$	$t(46) = 4.78, p < .001$

Consistent with the previous results, there was a moderate to strong preference for organizations that were described as acting from virtue compared to those organizations that were described as acting from the correct moral rule and generating better consequences. The fact that the attributions were made about a collective entity made little difference to the

pattern of judgments. Interestingly, unlike the previous two experiments, emotional stability was not related to judgments of the moral worth of the action $r(47) = .08, p = .60$. No other personality traits were reliably related to judgments of the moral worth of the action (p 's > .05).

EXPERIMENT 4

In Experiment 3, employees of virtuous organizations were thought to be better employees than those of alternative organizations. Experiment 4 was designed to more fully explore the effects of being employed by a virtuous company. Again, we expected a similar pattern of responses to persist even when the only information available about the individuals was that they were employed by a virtuous organization.

Participants

Forty-four people participated in the experiment. Seventeen (39%) were male and 27 (61%) were female. The mean age was 35.34 years, $SD = 13.77$ and ranged from 18 to 73.

Materials

Participants received the same scenarios as participants in Experiment 3 received with one change. The following sentence was added to the end of the scenario: John works for Hospital X and William works for Hospital Y. Participants answered the following questions about John and William on a 7 point scale:

1. Who is a better employee?
2. Who is more satisfied with his life?
3. Who is likely to be a better leader?
4. Who is more trustworthy?
5. Who is a morally better person?
6. Who do you feel better about?

Because some questions used in the previous experiment make little sense in the present context, some questions were new to this experiment. "Who is a morally better person?" replaced "Whose action is morally better?" because the person being evaluated did not perform an action. "Who is more praiseworthy" was replaced with "Who is a better employee?"

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Means, standard deviations, and t -tests are reported in Table 4.

Table 4

Better Employee	$M = 4.93, SD = 1.47$	$t(43) = 4.21, p < .001$
Satisfied	$M = 5.09, SD = 1.52$	$t(43) = 4.75, p < .001$
Better Leader	$M = 4.98, SD = 1.52$	$t(43) = 4.27, p < .001$
Trust	$M = 5.50, SD = 1.42$	$t(43) = 7.00, p < .001$
Moral Person	$M = 4.59, SD = 1.52$	$t(43) = 2.59, p = .01$
Feeling	$M = 4.71, SD = 1.59$	$t(43) = 2.93, p = .005$

Consistent with the previous results, there was a moderate to strong preference for employees that were described as working for organizations that acted virtuously compared to those organizations that were described as acting from the correct moral rule and generating better consequences. No correlations with personality were examined in Experiment 4 because participants were not asked about the moral worth of an action.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

In four experiments, we have shown that acting from virtue, as opposed to acting to generate the best consequences or follow the right moral rule, can strongly influence people's moral judgments and feelings about (1) individuals, (2) heads of organizations, (3) collective entities, and (4) employees of organizations. In the current studies, virtuous actions were widely judged to feel better, to be more praiseworthy, to be morally better, and to be indicative of trustworthiness and higher life satisfaction. These results suggest that some everyday intuitions support the view that virtues matter above and beyond consequences and following the correct moral rule.

Our results also suggest that some judgments about virtue are related to emotional stability, a global and partially heritable personality trait. When a person is described as acting from a virtuous disposition (as opposed to maximizing the good or the correct set of moral rules), more emotionally stable individuals judged those people more favorably. That we find this association between emotional stability and virtuous judgments was predicted based on previous research (Peterson and Seligman, 2004; Cawley, Martin, and Johnson, 2000). But understanding *why* emotional stability is related to moral judgments involving virtue is much more difficult. One tentative explanation rests on the special sensitivity that less emotionally stable individuals have to stressful situations – situations that such individuals tend to prefer to avoid. That is, not following the rules often results in additional stress. In fact, individuals with lower emotional stability are more likely than emotionally stable individuals to follow rules. For example, individuals with less emotional stability are more likely to follow traffic laws than highly emotionally stable individuals (Furnham and Saïpe, 1993). Since our experiments asked participants to compare an individual who acted from virtue and an individual who followed the correct moral rule, less emotionally stable individuals (because of their aversion to not following rules), may have a bias favoring those individuals who do follow moral rules and thereby are more likely to judge those actions as morally better.

Of note, the relation between emotional stability and moral judgment was not observed in judgments about collective entities. Perhaps when those who are emotionally stable are not provided information about the deep-seated, stable dispositions of another *person*, they may be just as likely as others to judge virtuous action as being morally better. It may be somewhat less natural for individuals to attribute virtues (i.e., character) to collective entities. Indeed, there is a non-significant numerical shift where virtuous collective entities are judged less morally good than virtuous individuals.⁸ Whatever the correct explanation of these results, they suggest some systematic bias wherein some people may have a tendency to judge that virtue is more important to right action than other individuals in particular instances. If there are different intuitions about morally right action and those intuitions reflect one's concepts, results may reflect different conceptions of moral rightness. Hence, there may be no single folk concept of right action, but several.⁹

More generally, these results have several theoretical and practical implications. First, most virtue ethicists are open to the fact that empirical considerations can and should play a role in theorizing about virtue (Anscombe, 1958; Aristotle, 1984). For example, some theorists argue that empirical science is necessary for virtue ethics because many virtue ethicists are committed to the view that virtues are something that (a substantial number) of human beings can have (Doris, 2002; Harman, 1999). In addition, many theorists make reference to “our” conception of virtue indicated by the judgments that “we” make about hypothetical or actual cases. Often philosophers take many of their own intuitions to be typical of the wider population (Jackson, 1998a; Kauppinen, 2007). But this assumption has been challenged by empirically minded theorists.¹⁰ This challenge is bolstered by the existence of systematic individual differences in philosophically relevant intuitions. As we have observed, some people may have predictably different intuitions about virtuous behaviors. These considerations indicate that virtue ethicists' intuitions run the risk of not reflecting intuitions that are widely shared. Empirical science is necessary to map the areas where philosophers' intuitions are widely shared and what factors influence those intuitions. While the empirical investigation of philosophical intuitions often criticizes the use of those intuitions, it need not. Our data indicate that some central claims made by virtue ethicists appear to be true for some adult residents of the United States.

But sound empirical investigation is not sufficient for making contributions to philosophical issues. Empirical investigators must also do precise and rigorous philosophy. To illustrate, Stich (2010) has argued that empirical evidence can play different roles in different philosophical projects. For example, empirical evidence can play a different role in conceptual analysis than in Neo-Platonic projects. Concepts are often thought to be mental representations or classificatory schemes (Ramsey, 1998). People have concepts of knowledge, rightness, and virtue that they use to classify and identify items encountered in the world. It is often thought that person *S*'s intuitions or judgments that a *Y* is an *X* helps indicate *S*'s concept of *X*. Neo-Platonic projects attempt to understand the nature of non-linguistic, non-conceptual things. For example, Neo-Platonic projects attempt to understand what knowledge, rightness, and virtue *are*. So the distinction is roughly that conceptual

⁸ Comparing moral rightness judgments from Experiments 1 and 2 ($M = 5.25$, $SD = 2.00$) with moral rightness judgments from Experiment 3 suggested a small effect of individual versus collective entity $F(1, 140) = 1.72$, $p = .19$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$.

⁹ For similar arguments about political organizations, see Graham, Haidt, and Nosek, 2009 and McCrae 1996.

¹⁰ For a review, see Feltz, 2009; Nadelhoffer and Nahmias, 2007; Knobe and Nichols, 2008.

analysis deals with things in the head and Neo-Platonic projects deal with things out in the world. Importantly, it is not obvious or direct what results from conceptual analysis have to do with Neo-Platonic projects – conceptual analysis may or may not have any bearing on what “the world is, at bottom, like” (Jackson, 1998b, p. 483).¹¹

Our data help illuminate folk *concepts* of virtue by exploring folk intuitions. These intuitions suggest that in some situations actions from virtue are judged morally preferable, virtue is related to desirable qualities in business (e.g., leadership, trustworthiness, feelings), and different groups of people have predictably diverse intuitions about virtue. These data help identify how people go about categorizing items. However, our data do not directly or obviously bear on what virtue *is*.¹² Understanding what empirical data bear on is crucially important to avoid making theoretical errors that are common in the psychological study of ethics. For example, it is not obvious that self-reports of one's behavior indicates one's concept of virtue or what virtue is (Peterson and Seligman, 2002; Cawley, Martin, and Johnson, 2000). There is no question that these self-report scales are interesting and valuable for some projects, but they may be less so for issues in conceptual analysis or Neo-Platonic projects. Hence, clarity about implications for specific philosophical projects is important to understand the implications of one's data.

Second, these studies point to some proximal mechanism that may influence intuitions about virtue. For example, these studies suggest that personality may be one important factor in some judgments about virtue. But in addition, one's emotional reaction could also be an important part of moral and related judgments (Prinz, 2007; Hume, 1978; Nichols, 2004; Haidt, 2001; Haidt, Koller, and Dias, 1993; Knobe, 2010). Across all the experiments, participants had a more favorable emotional reaction to the entity that acted from virtue. This favorable emotional reaction may contribute to favorable moral judgments. Acting from the correct moral rule may be too abstract or disembodied to activate an emotional reaction in many people. The feeling related to virtuous behavior may be so strong that it overpowers the effect of bringing about better consequences in vignette studies. So, virtue, unlike following rules or generating better consequences, may sometimes be responsible for positive feelings that lead to favorable moral judgments. Further research is required to determine the relation between emotion, virtue, and moral judgments across a wider range of psychological testing conditions.

Finally, the current studies offer some possible prescriptions for business organizations. First, to the extent that our results generalize, virtuous organizations seem more likely to garner patronage and may be likely to be judged to have better employees (e.g., good places to work and to do business with). Given that these are often thought to be important business goals, business may often benefit when they are judged as acting virtuously.¹³ And to the extent that virtue helps increase ethical behavior and boost business, then there are even more benefits to communities. Additionally, virtues are often thought not to be motivationally inert (Swanton, 2003; Aristotle, 1984; Hursthouse, 1999). If business ethics is interested in

¹¹ Conceptual analysis *may* have important implications for Neo-Platonic projects (see, for example, Prinz, 2007). But to show that conceptual does have important implications for Neo-Platonic projects requires some sophisticated and sustained philosophical argument.

¹² For an example of how differences in intuitions related to personality may have implications for Neo-Platonic projects, see Feltz & Cokely, in press.

¹³ Or at least appearing virtuous. The irony that business should act or appear virtuous for non-virtuous reasons (e.g., self-benefit) is not lost on us. However, it is not uncontroversial that benefiting one's self is not sometimes a virtue (Aristotle, 1984; Swanton, 2003)

improving actual moral decision making, then virtues may offer a valuable and needed avenue for this improvement. Recommending that people in business follow abstract rules or merely maximize good consequences may not be optimal because these considerations may not be motivationally effective. Because virtues are thought to carry along with them motivation to act in accordance with those virtues, and because we see that virtuous expressions can carry good social and judgmental consequences, we have good reasons to continue attempting to instill virtues or design environments and organizational structures that are more likely to generate virtuous action.¹⁴

These are just first steps toward identifying the potential role virtue can play in everyday thoughts about businesses. There are of course a number of limitations with the current set of studies. Given that the current set of studies deals with fictional characters and organizations, it is unclear whether judgments made about real organizations would display a different pattern. Nevertheless, the marriage of empirical science and theoretical precision is important to virtue and virtuous behavior in business. Future research should employ more ecological decision making tasks (i.e., show predictive validity in terms of sales, recommendations, etc.). In summary, careful integration of the strengths of both philosophy and psychology may provide the theoretical rigor along with the required empirical evidence for a responsible and sustainable science of virtue and virtuous business.

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¹⁴ It may take a lot of time to instill and cultivate virtues – perhaps longer than many businesses have time to do. But if acting by correct moral rules are too computationally complex and difficult, it may be wiser to at least begin to develop those tendencies or create environments that have the greater chance to do so (see Gigerenzer, 2008, 2010; Marewski and Krol, in press).

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