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The virtues of COVID-19 pandemic: How working from home can make us the best (or the worst) version of ourselves

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Abstract

The combined effect of technological innovations in the workplace and the lockdowns imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic has rapidly increased the prominence of remote working, with an undeniable impact on both business and society. In light of this organizational and sociological change, this article analyzes how this renewed work environment can be the place where workers can develop several relevant virtues, specifically moderation, integrity, and mercy. This new environment may also present the opportunity to develop a number of opposing vices, which are also explained and analyzed. The article concludes by suggesting some implications for managers who wish to promote virtuous behaviors in the new context of remote work.

KEYWORDS
COVID-19, virtues, working from home

1 | INTRODUCTION

The year 2020 witnessed, on a global scale, the experiment of quickly and massively moving work online, to the point that the World Economic Forum, in its latest *Future of Jobs Report*, identifies those working from home as one of the three categories of workers observed in the

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COVID-19 pandemic context, the other two being essential workers and people forced out of their employment because of the economic crisis generated as a combined effect of the technological innovations and the pandemic (World Economic Forum, 2020, p. 16). This experiment would have taken many years to complete under normal circumstances; however, lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic clearly accelerated this trend (Leaders, 2020).

This new phenomenon of widespread working from home, combined with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, has had an undeniable impact on both business and society (Chowdhury et al., 2021; Ilyashova et al., 2021). This new perspective on the interdependence between business and society (Bapuji et al., 2020) also raises new challenges from an ethical point of view. For example, it potentially exacerbates inequality through the creation of new classes of workers: Those who can, and those who cannot work from home, with the latter often involving lower paid and more precarious positions.[1] The renewed digital and remote workplace also raises a more fundamental challenge at the individual level: It breaks down the barriers between personal and professional life, eliminating the transition from the "home you" to the "work you" (Giurge & Bohns, 2020), which are geographically, temporally, and morally merged in a single environment, with implications that this article aims to unveil from an ethical perspective.

This problem was vividly illustrated in a number of dramatic examples that have made headlines around the world, such as the infamous zoom meetings of Jeffrey Toobin (Rosman & Bernstein, 2020) and of the Argentinian lawmaker Ameri (Gearty, 2020), or the online/offline confusion of Mexican senator Mícher Camarena (Brown, 2020). Toobin and Ameri were both protagonist of sexual behaviors—whose nature was judged as offensive by the public and the media—mistakenly streamed during online meetings, while Camarena erroneously began to change her clothes while her webcam was still on. These cases clearly show how the boundaries between private and public life are blurred due to the digitalization of work. But more subtle examples concern the experiences that many have had of the appearance of children or other family members in their colleagues' virtual meetings, or more simply, the difficulty of distinguishing the time for work from the time for leisure. Stated more generally, working from home raises new questions about how we may live flourishing lives when it is not possible to physically separate one's professional and personal lives, such that new skills are required to live these now inseparable aspects of life.

Existing research in business ethics has not focused directly on the role of virtues within the context of working from home. This question is especially important because of the growing prominence of this context. We suggest that virtue ethics, a well-established ethical framework to evaluate behavior in the context of business organizations (Sison et al., 2017), with its focus on human flourishing and the unity of life (Aristotle, 2000; MacIntyre, 2007) offers further insights concerning this emerging phenomenon. More specifically, we suggest that working from home highlights the renewed importance of three traditional virtues: Moderation, integrity, and mercy. As defined by Marcos and Bertolaso, a home is "a space open for the quiet flourishing of human essence and personal identity" (Marcos & Bertolaso, 2018, p. 35). It is not just the physical space where a person lives, but it also is an inner space which empowers the person to be herself. So, when work happens "at home," it means that it not only moves physically, but it enters an ontological and relational space where the person dwells.

This digital and remote home workplace, in particular, brings three main innovations, which, as we shall see, are connected to new specific opportunities to develop the virtues of moderation, integrity, and mercy (respectively).[2] First, work happens in a changed physical environment, which is usually linked to family relationship or leisure. There are many benefits

connected to this change (which will be highlighted in the course of the article), but also what we will call the "tempting pleasures" of the home—for this reason the virtue of moderation is essential, as the virtue which enables persons to remain focused on the good in the face of such untimely pleasure (McDowell, 2013). Second, the physical space where work and family happen is the same: This makes very hard to process what Ashforth et al. (2000) call "role transition," which is the movement (both psychological and physical) that happens when exiting from a role and entering in another. In this role transition, individuals also bring their moral identity, thus increasing the need for integrity, as the virtue enabling persons to manifest the same moral character in different social context (MacIntyre, 2006). Finally, working from home unveils workers' vulnerabilities and needs, sometimes exposing them to their colleagues in a way not previously experienced. In this way, the virtue of mercy helps in addressing this new situation. Together, these virtues represent essential character traits necessary to achieve human flourishing in this context of remote working. Thus, the central question under investigation is how cultivating moderation, integrity, and mercy can enable remote workers to flourish, and to contribute to the common good of their organizational (Sison & Fontrodona, 2012), social, and familial communities in the specific context of remote work.

A connected question regards the mechanisms that companies can enable so that their employees tend to develop these virtues, instead of the connected vices. While it is beyond the scope of this article to offer an exhaustive strategy of virtue development from a corporate perspective, a final section describes the implications of these findings for managers, reviewing current best practices to enhance workers' well-being, which are conducive mechanism that favor the development of the three considered virtues and, overall, of a virtuous life.

2 | THE EXISTING DEBATE ON THE VIRTUES IN THE DIGITAL CONTEXT

Because widespread remote working is only a recent phenomenon, there is little to no academic literature considering this phenomenon from a virtue ethics perspective. Although there is no academic work explicitly addressing this topic, an industry report shows the growing interest in the role of the virtues in the context of remote work: The "Virtues of Virtual" (Philosophy at Work, 2020) highlights five virtues that need to be developed in the remote working environment (democracy, accountability, clarity, collegiality, and understanding), making explicit reference to Aristotle in framing this contribution. Given the lack of literature explicitly addressing the need for an ethical framework, which takes into account the person as a whole and her flourishing in the renewed digital and remote working space, this section looks at existing literature on virtues in the digital context. The literature regarding the virtues in the digital context is not particularly abundant, but it can offer insights for the present work, given that the home working environment is both clearly remote *and* digital.

Looking at the literature on the virtues in the digital context, Vallor (2016) makes the effort of reconceptualizing 21st century virtues, taking into account "a *new and explicit adaptation* to our emerging global technomoral environment" (Vallor, 2016, p. 119, emphasis in original). Vallor (2016) does not aim to reinvent the virtues completely but to understand how they assume new developments because of the technological context. She clearly states that "in the absence of some radical alteration to our basic psychology, there is no reason to think that humans will suddenly acquire a wholly new repertoire of moral responses to the world" (Vallor, 2016, p. 119).

In this thematic area of virtues in the digital context, other publications took the direction of adapting the virtues to the renewed technological environment. However, these other relevant efforts have not been as systematic as Vallor's, and they mainly devoted their attention to one or more virtues in different technological contexts (see de Bruin & Floridi, 2017, on the epistemic virtue of translucency for the users of cloud computing services; Grodzinsky, 2017, on the need for virtue in big data; Rocchi, 2019, on the virtues of agents working in fintech).

Of a wider breath is the work of Plaisance (2013), who aims at outlining "a neo-Aristotelian theory of digital flourishing that, rather than asserting moral imperatives, provides a standard of evaluation for online behavior" (p. 91). This author clearly believes that "virtue ethics provide a framework for articulating ethical theory for the digital world that is as compelling, and perhaps more useful, than deontological claims" (Plaisance, 2013, p. 92). Plaisance builds on Couldry (2010), who highlights the lack of a "philosophically grounded framework within which media producers and media consumers can, as citizens, debate whether the media we have are ethical" (p. 60). Couldry (2010) suggests to build this philosophical framework for media ethics on neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, aware of the fact that our global world "involved conditions of human interaction radically different from those Aristotle knew" (p. 66).

Among all these publications, the only systematic effort to present a holistic account of the virtues in the digital era is that of Vallor (2016). However, she does not frame her contribution uniquely in light of the neo-Aristotelian tradition of the virtues, which is the one this article takes as a reference point to analyze how the post-COVID, digital, remote workplace can be a place where the worker can flourish as a person and a professional.

In concluding this section, it is important to remark that while no literature currently addresses working from home as a context for the development of virtues, many contributions regarding working from home are dedicated to topic such as work-life balance, which is certainly a component of a flourishing life. However, it is beyond the scope of this article to review all the academic literature on working from home, which is found in particular in the field of organizational behavior. While aware of the existence and relevance of this literature, and consciously relying on some of its findings, this article aims at joining the debate from an ethical perspective, opening a virtue ethics perspective on the working from home phenomenon.

3 | EXPLORING MODERATION, INTEGRITY, AND MERCY IN THE DIGITAL AND WORKING FROM HOME CONTEXT

This section explores how the working from home environment can constitute a good terrain for the development of three virtues in particular: Moderation, integrity, and mercy. Working from home sets a new lifestyle for many workers, who can benefit from the many advantages of this new work arrangement, but can also incur in some "risks," which are potential misbehaviors that can make them drift from a good development of their role as professional workers. Taking as a point of departure the different risks involved in the working from home lifestyle, adopted by many because of the combined effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and the new possibilities offered by technological innovations, this section associates to each risk the potential seed for the development of virtuous habits. As Annas (2015) affirms, "a virtue is always exercised within a situation of some kind" (p. 4).

3.1 | The tempting pleasures of the home and the virtue of moderation

Moderation, or temperance, may call to mind excessive prudishness, but because of its role in preserving good judgment in the face of excessive or untimely pleasures (Aristotle, 2000; McDowell, 2013), it is an essential virtue both for life in general (MacIntyre, 1988), and especially in the workplace (Sanz & Fontrodona, 2019). Moderation can be defined as the virtue that helps to balance the human desire for pleasure, orienting it to a good end (Aquinas, 1964; Sanz & Fontrodona, 2019). Arguably, the growing prominence of working from home has increased the importance of this virtue, especially because of the increasing need to resist diverting pleasures when nobody is looking or during online sessions, which are the only way to interact with colleagues when working from home.

There are a number of dimensions to this problem. First, online sessions tend to be more tedious than in-person meetings, triggering an increasing focus on hedonic motivations, and a search for some way to overcome the ensuing discomfort (Lindenberg, 2008). As a result, and abstracting from other considerations, online meetings are likely to exacerbate the need for moderation. Likewise, social norms (Brennan & Pettit, 2004) surrounding personal interactions provide a framework sufficient to control most impulses for pleasure or comfort, for example, desires to mull around on social media, surf the web, text with friends, or take a coffee break, when talking with someone, such that one is able to avoid these "temptations," by anticipating social sanctions rather than through self-control or virtue. When combined with the increased tediousness of online work, the relative lack of social norms governing online interactions, or the ability to more easily skirt them, makes the virtue of moderation much more important.

Finally, and more generally, when work is performed in the home rather than in the office, the social norms that govern work (Brennan & Pettit, 2004), that is, those of profession and corporation (Thornton et al., 2012), become less prominent, are more difficult to enforce, and may be superseded by those of the family or home. In other words, persons working from home face a two-pronged challenge: Their diligence and industriousness, or lack thereof, is less easily detected when at home, and the home presents many more challenges to focused work, be it distractions involving one's children, opportunities to perform diverting tasks, take breaks to eat snacks or prepare meals, the chance to nap or watch television, and so forth, such that the temptation to treat work as less than urgent may be overwhelming. In addition to all this, the absence of a proper home office setting can boost the power of these tempting elements, which might be part of the environment, as they were not in a proper office. Time may also be lost switching between work and home tasks.

In addition to all these risks, which could lead to less productive remote workers, there is also the opposite challenge, which consists of employees working too much. "Lockdown brought out the workaholic in me," affirm one of the workers interviewed by BBC News during summer 2020 (Bubalo, 2020). The extension of workload and working hours for remote workers have different kind of impacts: It might lead to burnouts, which firms have sought to avoid by setting up specific support programs (Giurge & Bohns, 2020; see Section 5 for more details). It can also disrupt work-life balance, or result in a social life that is even more truncated (already limited by the pandemic, in times of lockdowns and restrictions), and it can also induce a decreasing attention to self-care. This phenomenon reaches worrying consequences for those who tend to be workaholics, not respecting "any boundaries between work and private lives" (Spagnoli et al., 2020, p. 2). In these circumstances, moderation comes into play to restore the optimal balance between the different activities a person is involved in.

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For all of these reasons, living and working well in the remote work environment places new demands on the virtue of moderation. As Aristotle (2000) argues, moderation plays a fundamental role in preserving good judgment in the face of tempting pleasures. This can be understood in terms of McDowell's (1979, p. 335) claim that virtue "silences" rival considerations. That is, the virtuous person is able to properly identify which considerations are most ethically salient in any given situation such that alternative possibilities, that is, possibilities for fleeting pleasures, while recognized, are motivationally inert, not exerting any real pressure on the agent, and not being live options that may be chosen. In this way, the virtuous person can exercise good judgment, acting for the sake of genuine goods, without being distracted by merely apparent goods.

It is important to distinguish between the existence of potential distraction resulting from these "tempting pleasures" and the flexibility that working from home allows in performing non-work-related activities. Within the limits of justice and moderation, performing a domestic task during the day can be seen as a way to make good use of both personal and professional time, when a half hour dedicated to tasks around the home (which need not be particularly pleasureable) can easily be compensated for with work time later in the day. Of course, this is possible only for those remote workers who benefit from flexible working hours; and it would be not just for workers who are legally obliged to work during specific hours to do the same. Likewise, depending upon one's profession, that is, if one is a lawyer or an academic, the performance of routine tasks around the house may give one the opportunity to think about work-related problems and, so, may not be distractions at all. This is to say that the "tempting pleasures" of the home refer to those activities which are not evil in themselves, but which represent a clear distraction from both professional and personal duties, when they are enjoyed at an inappropriate time.[3]

Given the increasing prominence of working from home, moderation is essential to enable workers to exercise good judgment in the face of the many opportunities for pleasure and comfort that the home presents, especially given the fact that such behavior is likely to be much less easily detected. In doing this, moderation supports a number of other virtues. First, and most obviously, it supports the virtue of industriousness, enabling persons to work diligently, benefiting various stakeholders, and developing their capacities for professional excellence (Moore, 2017). Likewise, moderation sustains virtues such as affability when it enables persons to genuinely focus their attention on others during virtual meetings, rather than surreptitiously surfing the web. Likewise, moderation is likely to play a role in avoiding excesses in food and drink that may be more tempting when working from home.

3.2 | Different contexts in the same physical space: Developing integrity

Working from home, despite all of its challenges, is also an opportunity to develop the virtue of integrity: This virtue enables the person to show the same moral character whatever the social context (see MacIntyre, 2006). The inability to separate the office and the home provides new space to reconsider taken for granted attitudes and assumptions about, for example, how superiors should treat subordinates, or how one should interact with family members. In this first case, harsh attitudes toward subordinates may be set in sharper contrast to the attitudes and demeanor one adopts toward family members, when this is occurring simultaneously as a result of working from home. Likewise, individuals may come to reconsider how they relate to family

members, recognizing the extent to which an inflated sense of self-importance, a sense that one's work overrides others' concerns and preferences, had led to unwarranted anger and a lack of consideration for others.

More broadly, working from home can help to overcome the compartmentalization typical of so much of modern life. As MacIntyre argues,

> Compartmentalization goes beyond that differentiation of roles and institutional structures that characterizes every social order and it does so by the extent to which each distinct sphere of social activity comes to have its own role structure governed by its own specific norms in relative independence of other such spheres. (MacIntyre, 2006, p. 197)

MacIntyre (2006) presents a hypothetical example of a compartmentalized bureaucrat, reminiscent of Adolf Eichmann (see Arendt, 2006), whose myopic focus on efficiency allows him to contribute to atrocities, while denying culpability. But even less extreme cases of harm involving, for example, unethical supply chains or negative externalities, may stem from compartmentalization. Managers and employees may focus myopically on their tasks at work, without realizing the impact that their firm's activity may have on families, communities, and other stakeholders. Working from home provides an opportunity to connect work, family, and one's own local and social community (i.e., if the extended time spent at home gives rise to unexpected opportunities for connecting with neighbors and participating in local activities), to think about how various stakeholders may be impacted by one's decisions, and to make greater efforts to provide feasible solutions to conflicting interests. Integrity also plays a central role in overcoming the fragmentation of identity that may result from the multiplication of online personas, both those involved with working from home, and others related to personal interests, allowing one to "show the same moral character in different digital contexts" (Rocchi, 2019, p. 35).

The virtue of integrity, as described in its development in the face of challenges of working from home, also stimulates the development of other virtues, such as truthfulness and honesty. Truthfulness enables the person to describe herself (and others) without falsehood, adhering to the reality of who the person really is, uniting different digital, professional, social, and family identities. Honesty consists in truth in words and deeds, and this virtue works synergically with integrity, enabling persons to be consistent in what he or she says and does in different professional, social, family, and digital contexts.

Showing the same moral character in different contexts while working from home also requires the virtue of justice: Personal and professional resources are interchangeably used, and this makes it hard to draw fixed lines in the correct and just use of them. The classical examples, outside the working from home environment, would be related to a person who spends her money very carefully, but when buying something with office funds uses substantially less care in looking for the best solution. Working from home exacerbates the complexities surrounding the closeness of personal and professional resources: Is it just to use the computer given by your office to surf your personal social media pages or to buy items for your home from your Amazon account? While it is true that employees provide their own electricity, internet connection, and space at home for work, some companies provide reimbursement for the expenses related to the setup of the home office, or provided the necessary resources and equipment; some countries have specific measures to support the additional expenses involved in working from home (in terms of tax reduction, for example). However, it is still very important

to use discretion regarding the use of company resources, and not to mix up personal and professional equipment, exercising common sense and the virtue of justice when working from home.

3.3 | New vulnerabilities and the virtue of mercy

Mercy is not often included among the canonical list of business virtues, though its importance within organizations has been noted (Bernacchio, 2018), as has the importance of care ethics, more generally (Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012; Wicks et al., 1994). Mercy is a form of care "whereby we supply what is needed by our neighbour" (MacIntyre, 1999, p. 125), that is, a virtue that enables persons to respond to the urgent needs of others. The growing phenomenon of working from home has created new forms of vulnerability and new needs that virtuous agents must be responsive to, if human flourishing is to be possible.

Aside from the obvious threats surrounding the pandemic, the new vulnerabilities are twofold. First, they concern the increased demands for technological competence (for example, learning how to use Zoom), and the increased potential for technological problems to thwart communication and task completion. This new context requires a greater willingness to tolerate others' limitations, that is, fumbling with technology in various ways, for we likely have similar shortcomings, and a willingness to accept contingencies, a coworker's camera or sound does not work, etc., without animosity or placing blame. More than this, mercy requires an active willingness to reach out to others, providing assistance with new technological requirements whenever we are able to. Only in this way, will our digital communities be flourishing.

The second new form of vulnerability concerns the increasing difficulty that many face in separating the demands of home and family from those of the workplace. Some coworkers may have small children or other family members in the background; and as a result, they may be unable to maintain a quiet and nondisruptive environment for online meetings. Likewise, being in the home, in closer proximity to others, may result in other forms of disruption, for example, when something is needed by a child or elderly family member. These familiar situations both manifest the vulnerability of many in the new context of working from home and give evidence of the importance of the virtue of mercy. To cope with this new context, it is imperative that coworkers are more generous, overlooking these forms of disruption or inconvenience, forgiving others who may become distracted as a result, and even extending genuine compassion to persons who are in these situations. It is all too easy to forget that such disruptions may be a frequent source of anxiety for workers who desperately want but are unable to maintain a workspace that minimizes these disruptions. We must also refrain from imputing bad motives to others, for example, when they fail to connect or when they are distracted, giving them the benefit of the doubt, as far possible and in the limits of justice.

Finally, working from home tends to reduce meetings to efficient exchanges of information to keep the workflow active and smooth. Everything that usually surrounds a meeting goes missing: During online sessions, it is harder to spot a particularly worried face or to detect an unusual behavior. In an in person meeting, these and similar attitudes would induce a kind and discrete "How are you? Do you need to talk about something?"; while the online setting does not have the same benefit of informality and discretion. Because of this, in an online context, mercy requires greater attentiveness to those one is interacting with, and extra effort to discern how they are doing. Burnouts and technostress are detrimental factors in the life of many remote workers (Spagnoli et al., 2020). And even if much attention is rightly given to work–

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family balance, many people working from home have experienced increased loneliness as a result of stay-at-home restrictions (Killgore et al., 2020). A number of corporate efforts are directed toward supporting workers in this situation, but they are not a substitute for the interpersonal exercise of the virtue of mercy in meeting the needs of coworkers and cohabitants. Of course, it is also important to acknowledge one's own needs and vulnerabilities (MacIntyre, 1999).

Exercising the virtue of mercy also encourages the development of other virtues. The virtue of humility has a great opportunity to be developed: Humility is the virtue that enables a person to develop an accurate and sincere vision of oneself and of others. Even if usually associated with the virtue of moderation (see Aquinas, 1964, ST II-II, q. 161, a. 4), it is also considered to be the other side of the love and care for the neighbor (Rodríguez Luño, 2012). A truly humble person knows his or her strength and also his or her weaknesses, and it is thus able to recognize the points of strength of others and to mercifully accept their weaknesses.

Argandoña (2015) considers both the intra-personal and the interpersonal component of the virtue of humility in business: This virtue leads to personal improvement thanks to the essential component of self-knowledge, as it is based on the objective consideration of the truth about oneself, so inspiring a more truthful and realistic evaluation of the others. On an interpersonal level, the humble person is more available to be known by others, and so is more available to listen to the other and seek their counsel (Argandoña, 2015). Given the less evident physical presence of one's colleagues while working from home, the virtue of humility is fundamental to remain objective and realistic about one's perception of one's own work and competence, and of the work and competence of the others. Those who are able to be merciful toward themselves (because of an objective and truthful self-knowledge) are more willing to be merciful toward the others.

Patience is another virtue connected to mercy. The more a person is able to accept others' vulnerabilities and weaknesses, the more this person develops the virtue of patience. Patience enables us to bear hard circumstances, even those caused by other people, without abandoning the realization of the good, in this case, of our work. It is usually associated with the virtue of courage (Aquinas, 1964, ST II-II, q. 136), as it is a virtue that helps overcome obstacles while striving for the good; however, it is easily associated also with the virtue of mercy: Those who are able to accept others' vulnerabilities are also able to bear these vulnerabilities while the others try to develop new skills or new work-family balance.

The following table (Table 1) presents the fundamental traits of these three virtues, in a synthetic and comparative view.

4 | VIRTUES ... OR VICES? AN EXPLORATION OF THE DARK SIDE OF WORKING FROM HOME

The previous section explains how working from home can be a fertile terrain for some virtues to develop, in particular moderation, integrity, and mercy, and other virtues associated with these three. However, depending on the attitude of the agent and on his or her history and personal moral disposition, working from home can be the ground for the development of bad habits. This section explores the vices that working from home can generate when the person does not respond to the circumstances by revealing the best version of herself, but the worst.

We presented each of the three virtues (moderation, integrity, and mercy) departing from the risks that each virtue helps overcoming. However, exactly the same situations can generate

TABLE 1 The virtues of moderation, integrity, and mercy in the working from home (WFH) environment

	Moderation	Integrity	Mercy
Definition	The virtue of preserving good judgment in the face of excessive or untimely pleasures.	The virtue of showing the same moral characters in different social contexts.	The virtue of responding to the urgent needs of others.
Definition of the virtue in the WFH context	Preserving good judgment in the face of the tempting pleasures of the home during the working hours.	Showing the same moral characters at home and at work and in different digital contexts.	The virtue of responding to the urgent needs of others in light of their technological and family vulnerabilities.
Why WFH can boost this virtue	- Online meetings are more tedious than in-person meetings, easier to look for diverting activities; - Lack of social norms for online interactions and lack of control; - Home as a challenging environment for distractions.	- Family members and colleagues are in the same environment; - Multiplication of online personas.	- New forms of vulnerability (technological and family-related); - New needs to be responsive to (e.g., WFH burnouts); - Loneliness.
Example: The virtue in action	Resist the many comforts of the home, like the easy access to food and sofa.	Behaving in the workplace and in the family with the same moral standards.	Tolerate others' limitations. Detecting others' need following up after efficient online meetings.
Connected virtues	Industriousness Affability	Truthfulness Honesty Justice	Humility Patience

the opposite responses. The danger that working from home presents is first that the increased opportunities for comfort, minor pleasures, and satisfactions will lead to a situation where one becomes fixated on hedonic motives rather than the shared goals of one's organization (Lindenberg & Foss, 2011). Such an outcome is not only likely to frustrate one's professional life but, in this way, also to frustrate one's pursuit of human flourishing (Moore, 2017). This disordered pursuit of home-related pleasures while the agents should be focusing on their work builds up the habit that goes against the virtue of moderation, that is, the vice of intemperance. If habitually cultivated, this vice disrupts the agents' capability of being focused on their work, and disposes them to cede to the tempting pleasures of the home, such as the easy availability of food, casual net surfing, and disordered mix of family, social, and work-related duties.

As industriousness and affability are the virtues connected to moderation, so laziness and rudeness are, respectively, their opposite vices, and they are connected to intemperance. Laziness happens when one fails to appreciate the importance of work, both for one's development and for the common good (Sison & Fontrodona, 2012), and so the person develops an unwillingness to perform her daily activities. The first symptoms of the development of laziness when working from home are unjustified extended breaks, habitual procrastination, and use of time for irrelevant activities. Work-related laziness can easily extend to family-related matters, so those who tend to be lazy during their working hours can transfer this vice to their family

duties. Rudeness is the vice directly opposed to affability, and it replaces the attitude of openness and benevolent collaboration with less polite manners or with an absence of empathy when engaging with online coworkers.

The second virtue mentioned in the previous section, integrity, is crucial to overcome the vice of compartmentalization; without this virtue, agents are likely to disintegrate into a variety of different roles, or digital identities, with no core moral identity (MacIntyre, 1979). A compartmentalized personality can easily develop the vices of mendacity, falsity, and injustice. Mendacity is the negative extreme of truthfulness and, in the working from home setting, it can be developed by not disclosing one's real workload and availability to managers or teammates. Falsity, the vice opposed to honesty, is cultivated when there is a discrepancy between what the person declares she will do, and what she is actually achieving. The lack of supervision can encourage this attitude, which is easily detectable if good leadership and management practices are in place. Finally, in the realm of vices connected to compartmentalization, there is space for injustice. Injustice can be developed because of an improper use of work materials (for example using the office printer, now at home, for personal purposes), over-reporting expenses related to the setting of the home office set-up, or even just the fact of stealing time from the regular working hours—these are classic individual misbehaviors in business (Ferrell et al., 2019), which can be exacerbated by the working from home setting. The vice of injustice is listed as related to compartmentalization because the compartmentalized person tends to use different value judgments in different contexts: An employee would not waste her own personal resources, while she has another attitude toward her office's resources, showing a different moral character depending on the context (Freeman, 1994; MacIntyre, 2006).

Likewise, the absence of mercy is likely to lead to a selfish vindictiveness, involving an unwillingness to accommodate others' needs and, over time, an inability to detect them. The absence of frequent interactions in person is likely to increase the opportunity of developing selfishness, as the person does not realize the presence of the others in her life, and tends to absolutize her efforts, feeling that she is the only one actually doing hard work. This attitude may also lead to presumption, or an absence of humility, where one downplays one's own vulnerabilities (MacIntyre, 1999), and displays impatience with the vulnerabilities of others.

Table 2 sums up the vices that can be originated in the working from home environment, taking as a reference point the virtues they oppose, and pairing all of them with a synthesis of the concrete opportunities which can leave space for the development of these vices.

5 | IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGERS: SUPPORTING THE VIRTUES OF WORKING FROM HOME

In the face of these challenges, some firms have implemented new systems designed to mitigate their negative impact. Some of these practices further contribute to the development of the virtues of moderation, integrity, and mercy, though others may crowd out virtue.

Looking at corporate practices that might support the virtue of moderation, some companies are making available tools to keep track of workers' productivity, so that the rhythm is never too low—and opportunities for distractions are avoided, as time constraints are set, and goals set and checked. There are different ways through which companies are doing this. A "soft" measure is the suggestion of apps for a better organization of work-related tasks, which allows collaborative project management and tasks execution lists. The "hard" measures have a more policing style, requiring workers to log the tasks that they have completed at different times of

TABLE 2 The vices of working from home

Virtue	Opposite vice	Opportunities to develop the vice
Moderation	Intemperance	Social media surfing; absence of a regular timetable; no fixed times to commute.
Industriousness	Laziness	Lack of professional and social control; prolonged breaks; time wasted in irrelevant activities.
Affability	Rudeness	Lack of empathy in email and screen-mediated relationships.
Integrity	Compartmentalization	Cultivation of different professional, personal, and online identities.
Truthfulness	Mendacity	Failure to disclose real workload capacity and availability.
Honesty	Falsity	Lack of correspondence between declared intentions and actual deeds.
Justice	Injustice	Improper use of office resources and time.
Mercy	Selfishness	No attention to the needs of others. Absolutization of one's own efforts and feelings.
Humility	Presumption	Overconfidence in one's own capabilities and prejudice toward the capabilities of the others.
Patience	Impatience and insensibility	Incapacity to deal with others' limitations in the use of technology.

the day. At an even greater level of surveillance are software like Sneek or InterGuard, which allow managers to review pictures of their employees taken even every minute, in order to monitor them (Holmes, 2020). Sneek promotes itself as a form of "human contact for remote teams," and it allows for a constant video feed (https://sneek.io/). Similarly, InterGuard is an employee monitoring software (https://www.interguardsoftware.com/employee-monitoring-software/). As Laker et al. (2020) highlight, these practices are raising privacy concerns among workers and are also making workers looking for antispying solutions, such as alternative software that can make them appear always active on their Slack communication channel. Laker et al. (2020) argue that there are measures that can be put in place so that this monitoring attitude is ethically sound, such as equal monitoring level for junior and senior employees. For our thesis, it is interesting to highlight that high levels of surveillance and monitoring is likely to crowd out especially the virtue of moderation. An alternative path for promoting the virtue of moderation without resulting in excessive surveillance, and still maintaining high levels of productivity, is to establish high levels of trust, avoiding authoritarian leadership styles, which are known to be less effective in terms of employees performance (Laker et al., 2020), and which are responsible for higher degrees of technostress even in workaholic employees (Spagnoli et al., 2020).

Firms can also adapt some of their personal development strategies to promote the virtue of integrity. For example, many companies offer employees the opportunity of coaching services with professional coaches. These sessions are usually offered to employees and they are confidential in nature. However, the company can suggest reflecting on personal values and on one's moral character, thus encouraging the beginning of a path of deeper self-understanding for receptive employees, stimulating the unity of life typical of a person who lives with integrity. The practice of coaching is based on anthropological premises that make it an effective tool for

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human flourishing (Bergamino, 2017), in the sense described by the neo-Aristotelian tradition of the virtues.

In this reinforced wave of support for employees who are working in the new digital and remote work environment, companies are now usually offering subscriptions to mental health apps, which encourage taking time for meditation or for a walk with specific reflection or relaxing music. This clearly relates to the development of the virtue of mercy, as companies encourage employees to meet their own needs for time and mental space. Subscription to certain categories of books or to series of podcasts go as well in this direction. Companies are also trying to make their employees focus on the needs of people outside the corporation, suggesting the sponsorship of specific charities and encouraging the employees to donate, promising to double the donations of their employees.

As previously mentioned, all these corporate efforts can help a person to find the time and the attitude to cultivate the virtues of moderation, integrity, and mercy; however, the cultivation of virtues ultimately comes from an inner desire for integral growth, and this desire cannot be substituted for or forced upon someone. At the same time, a firm's willingness to trust their employees and let them develop virtuous habits, instead of enforcing surveillance mechanisms, can potentially redefine the social norms around work, rewarding those who are able to excel in their personal and professional life because of their capability to make the most of their work flexibility.

6 | CONCLUSION

This article considers the phenomenon of working from home, greatly accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions in different countries all over the world, and its impact on both business and society, as an opportunity to cultivate some specific virtues. While there is some academic literature on the virtues in different digital contexts, there are no contributions, yet, on how the digital and remote working from home environment can be the place for human beings to flourish. Conscious of the many challenges that the working from home environment and lifestyle entail, this article looks at both the virtues and the vices that are potentially generated by this setting.

The virtues of moderation, integrity, and mercy were explored as possible positive fruit of working from home, together with other connected virtues; on the other hand, intemperance, compartmentalization, and selfishness are likely to emerge if the agent is not resisting the many temptations of the home environment and is indulging in light of the lack of social and professional control.

It is very important to notice that these three virtues are not the only ones that remote workers can acquire: This article focuses specifically on moderation, integrity, and mercy, because the specific circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift to remote working and exacerbated the change, especially during the phases of lockdown, imposing new circumstances and conditions that created the opportunities for these specific virtues to flourish. It would be extremely important to keep researching regarding other virtues that remote workers can specifically develop, now that working from home has become a more widespread practice and—for some workers—it lost the extraordinary condition due to the pandemic and has become ordinary life.

Looking at the possible development of this research, it would be interesting to explore the mechanisms that organizations can enable so that their employees tend to develop their virtues

instead of their vices. The working from home phenomenon seems to have arrived to stay (Clancy, 2020; Laker et al., 2020), as many companies are finding benefits in this new way of organizing their employees' work. For this reason, the theoretical considerations exposed in this paper will need to be accompanied by a practical and applied reflection regarding concrete tools to make remote working virtuous behavior an ordinary reality. Empirical studies would be highly beneficial to measure the impact of the development of the virtues on employees' productivity in the remote working environment, especially if compared with methods based on surveillance.

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ENDNOTES

[1] One of the concerns expressed in the *Future of Jobs Report* (World Economic Forum, 2020), is that displaced workers (who were employed in sectors like retail or hospitality, heavily affected by the pandemic) now face "significant job uncertainty" and "a short-term or permanent need to shift roles" (p. 16). While in the higher spectrum of wages, remote workers are more likely to be affected by mental health issues than by financial precariousness.

[2] We acknowledge that these three virtues can be developed outside the workplace, and that those who do not work can perfectly acquire them. However, the article wants to show how the working from home environment opens new opportunities for the development of these virtues.

[3] It is worth noting that it is not only those working from home that face the presence of "untimely pleasures," but for those working from the office these are likely to take other forms (e.g., unnecessarily extending a coffee break, or taking a longer path to go from one place to another).

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