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PROMOTING COURAGE AND INTEGRITY
IN BUSINESS SCHOOLS AND THE
CORPORATE WORLD

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Introduction

- I examine the ethical concepts of courage and integrity with a view to establishing the way the academic institutions, with emphasis on the business schools, and the corporations, can promote them and foster a climate of high standards of morality amidst the adversities of profit-seeking and competition in an economically unstable environment. For this purpose, I utilize certain aspects from Plato's and Aristotle's moral philosophy that can be of great assistance in redefining courage and integrity. I also wish to show that these classical thinkers can help us develop a more robust approach to compliance and moral reformation that are fundamental areas of corporate governance.

Defining courage in Plato

In Plato's *Laches*, Socrates' interlocutor is trying to define "*andreia*" (courage):

- As that state of affairs at which a person does not run away but remains at his post and fights against the enemy (190 e);
- The interlocutor's second response is that courage is a sort of endurance of the soul (192 c), which is also challenged by Socrates as to whether he meant a wise and noble endurance (192 d-e).
- Another interlocutor provides the definition that courage is the knowledge of that which inspires fear or confidence in war, or in anything (195 a), which gives Socrates the opportunity to connect it to virtue and consider it as part of virtue (198 a-d), and to refute this definition by indicating that courage is not only the knowledge of hopeful and fearful, but includes nearly every good and evil without reference to time (199 d), thus
- Identifying courage with the whole of virtue and leading the discussion into an "*aporia*" (inconclusive end).

Cont. on Plato

- In the fourth book of Plato's famous dialogue, the *Republic*, Platonic Socrates examines the virtue of **justice** in connection with both the harmony of the state as well as with the harmony of the parts of the soul. In order for reason to prevail over the other two parts, it requires **wisdom** ("*sophia*"), **temperance** ("*sophrosyne*") for keeping harmony among the parts, as well as **courage** ("*andreia*") for implementing what reason dictates in relation to what is fearful (442 b-d).

Cont.

- For Plato, courage is an intellectual and moral endowment, a virtue that highlights the cooperation between the rational part of the soul (*“logistikon”*) with the spirited (*“thymoeides”*) one as well as the controlling effect of the former on both the spirited and the desirative (*“epithymitikon”*) parts. It may not possess the leading position that wisdom holds, but it is the one that ensures harmony among the dictates of reason and what the irrational parts of the soul can achieve. In this sense, courage functions as one facet of integrity as well as a sort of a will to act amidst adversities and hopefulness.

Defining courage in Aristotle

- He distinguishes between the true and the apparent forms of courage and defines it as the mean between cowardice and boldness (*NE*, Γ6, 1115 a 6 – 7). The courageous man possesses that trait of character that enables the moral agent to identify what is truly courageous action and when it should be chosen. He also knows what constitutes true courage and how it should be distinguished from the apparent forms of a courageous action, since he knows the truth of what this value entails.
- The various other kinds of courage, which do not reflect a disposition of courage “*heneka tou kalou*” (Γ4, 1113 a 33 – 34) refer to the apparent and not the real good; they are not goods in an intrinsic sense, and they do not reflect the objective reality of what a courageous disposition stands for.

Cont. on Aristotle

- In that sense, only the Aristotelian “*spoudaios*” man is in a position to judge every moral situation and discover the underlying moral truth (Γ4, 1113 a 29 - 33). And such a man would identify the truly courageous action to do, since s/he also possesses knowledge of the moral truth of courage.

Redefining courage

- I would redefine courage as an advanced state of virtuous disposition that is characterized by a dynamic as well as sincere stance to stand for what one knows to be right and accept it regardless of any negative repercussions this may have for him, since such a person can moderate fear and hope and display them accordingly as the situation arises.

Contemporary Scholarship

- Williams (1981: 49) argues that “*integrity is not a virtue: it is not related to motivation as the virtues are. It’s not a disposition which yields motivation, as generosity or benevolence do*”. He believes that those who hold it as virtue should explain why it is not associated with the characteristic thoughts or motivations. This view grasps integrity as a kind of moral identity, acting in accordance with one’s beliefs.

Cont.

- In a different line of thought, Scherkoske (2012) suggests that integrity is an epistemic virtue: it neither disposes agents to particular motivations or characteristic thoughts: *“In the same way that epistemic virtues, such as accuracy, or open-mindedness, do not specify any particular content, integrity does not supply a characteristic thought either”*. This view grasps integrity as the moral capacity of standing for something.

Cont.

- In another study, Cox, La Caze and Levine (1999) argue that integrity is a virtue but it functions as a rather complex term. In their view, one would find it difficult to call it as moral virtue as courage would be, since it can have heterogeneous applications: a person may exhibit integrity by deciding to resign from his job in the event of a conflict of values with his employer, or somebody else may choose to stay as a way of exhibiting moral disagreement; in fact, resigning for him would be lack of integrity.

Contemporary scholarship on Aristotle

- Solomon (1992) refers to it as one of the cardinal virtues in the Stagirite's ethics, attributing to it the sense of moral consistency and coherence of the individual. It is a sort of internal consistency. In a way, he means that, for Aristotle, a person acts in integrity if he remains true to oneself in action, which is closer to the identity sense of integrity.
- Colby (2002: 134), argues that "*full moral development requires development of both moral understanding and moral integrity*". He emphasizes the significance of developing through experience that kind of moral habit that will lead to a certain moral behavior, a point that I shall comment on later on.
- In the domain of organization studies, Schneider et al. (2005), examine how individual virtue can develop in organizations, taking the position that it is a form of integrity if people develop a socially responsible behavior, since it is embedded in everyday decisions and actions.

Aristotle on Virtue

- For Aristotle, “*arete*” as an “*hexis*” is both a “*dynamis*” (capacity) and an “*energeia*” (activity); through habituation this activity is directed towards the perfection of the relevant capacity (B1, 1103 a 26 – b 22). In this way, the Stagirite presents “*arete*” not only as an acquired knowledge of what is good,, but even more so as a disposition of the soul and an activity of what is best in us.
- A virtuous character is always appreciated in society, as opposed to a wicked person who is not respected or in any way acknowledged. This implies an internal aspect of the Aristotelean conception of virtue, which relates it to the modern notion of value.

My interpretation

- I would take the position that the **ethical concept of integrity is not a moral virtue in the strict Aristotelian sense but it does possess the characteristics of an advanced moral quality**. It is not a virtue, strictly speaking, since it's not a "*mesotes*" (middle point) between two excessive ways an emotion can be displayed, as well as it does not act on its own in accordance with reason in identifying the right thing to do.
- As I shall argue further down, **it should be connected to "*phronesis*" (practical wisdom)** in order to fully manifest itself as a form of moral "wholeness" or "intergratedness".
- It is, however, a disposition that **it includes an ever evolving moral stance and behavior, a dynamic synthesis of an agent's moral and intellectual endowment characterized by the motivation to act well in view of the ultimate end**. It is what sustains a person's moral value and attributes to him a sort of moral identity.

Cont. on my interpretation

- I would not consider integrity as a cardinal Aristotelian virtue in the way that Solomon means it. He is right though to refer to it as a sort of moral consistency or coherence. It presupposes a moral understanding and moral behavior of an advanced quality exactly because it integrates all virtues in the way they are manifested in action.
- At the same time, I would not consider integrity, in Aristotle's ethical framework, as being basically the evolution of moral habit developed through experience, as indicated by Colby. He does appreciate the combination of moral understanding and moral integrity but he sees the latter as the outcome of habituation only.

Cont.

- Integrity is a disposition that develops through the agent's habituation into acting in a morally consistent way, so experience does count, but it also presupposes a strong liaison between the intellectual and the moral virtues.
- For this reason, I would not consider integrity as only an epistemic virtue on the assumption that it does not carry any justification or characteristic thought. Insofar as **integrity is a dynamic synthesis of moral virtues and the capacity of choosing well as provided by practical wisdom, it does involve a moral motivation, some sort of internal or intrinsic agency sharpened by reason to act well.**
- This attributes to it a form of **moral purpose which would be compatible with the teleological aspect** of Aristotle's ethics.

The theoretical basis of integrity

- I would consider the Aristotelian conception of integrity to be wholeheartedly connected to the idea of practical wisdom.
- In essence, practical wisdom ensures the existence of integrity as either moral self-affirmation, manifestation of moral purpose and moral coherence, since it is exactly the capacity that helps the moral agent to identify the good of the situation, the “*eschaton*” (the moral end).
- In the Aristotelian sense, a man of integrity would foremost exhibit a coherent pattern of moral behavior in terms of combining the moral with the intellectual prowess as reflected by means of practical wisdom.

On Aristotle's Practical Wisdom

- Practical wisdom as a virtue which does not only discern the right choice to make, the truth of the situation, but also prescribes what is the right thing to do, that is, it has an evaluative and a normative character (Z10, 1143 a 8 – 9, Z2, 1139 a 21 – 26); it is itself a value. Through this capacity, Aristotle dissociates ethics from any abstract codification of rules and norms and calls the moral agent to exercise his true self, thus exhibit integrity. (Cf. Koutras, 1987: 70-73).

The Platonic conception of integrity

- The Platonic conception of integrity would be closely connected to what historical Socrates referred to as the unity of virtues, along with the Platonic position that virtue is knowledge culminating in the knowledge of the Form of the Good. For both Socrates and Plato, one cannot be courageous if he is not also truthful or fair, that is exhibit a consistent moral behavior. For Socrates, a person achieves his self-actualization if he acts in accordance with his beliefs, or even better, with what he truly knows to be right.

Cont.

- In the *Republic*, through justice, that is distribution of labour and an attribution of merit in a fair way for each class, or for each part of the soul, there's a sense of integrity as moral intergratedness or wholeness. The philosopher-ruler is by definition a man of integrity, since he is supposed to have reached that level of moral understanding that serves as the unconditional truth, thus the beginning of any other inquiry or action.
- This distinguishes him from the Aristotelian practically wise man who is a person of integrity given that his advanced moral and intellectual capacities are to prove this very integrity in action. Through the choices he makes, the Aristotelian practically wise man, comes to affirm his integrity in an ongoing dynamic process; it is not taken for granted as in Plato's philosopher-ruler.

How to promote courage

- One way is the case of an employee who would exhibit moral courage if he exhibits loyalty to the employer to the extent that this does not come into conflict with his integrity of character, and if needed, he would risk his position for defending it.
- Moreover, it would be courageous if a corporate executive refused to bribe a governmental representative who is demanding a contract sweetener in order to exhibit favouritism in an open contest that the CEO's company is involved. Such a person would choose to use transparency and fairness in all aspects of corporate governance.
- Or, to use another example, it would be a manifestation of the Aristotelian moral courage if a political leader, say a minister, offers his resignation because he is forced by the governing party to support a new health scheme which is unfair for the underprivileged classes, knowing that this would most probably cost him his political career.

Cont.

- I would also refer to the virtue of truthfulness (*NE*, B7, 1108 a 19 – 23; Δ 7, 1127 a 13 – b 32), which is the opposite of falsehood and any form of pretense. In particular, Aristotle states that a truthful person would not exhibit any arrogance, he would not pretend to creditable qualities that he does not possess and in general he would be sincere in both his actions and words, and admit the truth about his own qualifications without either exaggeration or understatement (Δ 7, 1127 a 20 – 26). For this reason, such a person would be praiseworthy whereas those who lie and deceive other people would be blameworthy (1127 a 28 – 32).
- It is also interesting that the philosopher identifies the significance of such a person not necessarily in business relations, nor in matters of honesty and dishonesty, which he connects to the virtue of justice, but of cases where a man is truthful both in words and conduct when no considerations of honesty come in, from a habituated sincerity of character.

Cont.

- This aspect can best connect it to the idea of integrity in the sense that it is a manifestation of a person's moral prowess, a sincere display of integrity of character.

How to promote integrity

- My interpretation of integrity as a dynamic dispositional quality that engages virtues in action by means of practical wisdom, I believe, would be best exhibited in terms of the way corporate governance is exercised, that is, the way an organization conducts its affairs with all the corporate constituents, both external and internal. And given that an organization would achieve its best function by promoting virtuous conduct – above all – towards its internal constituents, integrity should be manifested with employment decisions.

Cont.

- Such organizational decisions inflict pain, so they should be followed by some aetiology and above all a moral justification. It would not be practically wise for an organization to make choices that promote malfunction, lack of trust and create the context for moral distress or demotivation. Such a conduct may also lead into cases of internal, or even worse, external whistle-blowing, which can cause serious repercussions.

Other ways of promoting integrity

- In fact, another way of exhibiting integrity through practical wisdom is the way an organization establishes and exercises the whistle-blowing policy. The main point is not how to apply a codified set of moral statements that function as moral imperatives but how a moral agent, especially in a leading organizational position, exhibits virtuous conduct by implementing the rules and envisioning the corporate future.

Cont.

- Another example of how integrity can be promoted in the corporate world is by restoring the loss of trust. Relevant to this would be Aristotle's idea of *pistis*' discussed in the first book of his *Rhetoric*.
- If we extend this analysis and apply it to the corporate world, we see that what matters is not how persuasive towards its corporate constituents an organization is but how it can build up conviction as a reflection of integrity. Such corporate leaders should also be in a position to examine the human character and its various virtues (or vices) as well as to perceive its emotive aspect and the causes of these emotions (1356 a 19 – 24).
- The connection between conviction and trust places the idea of '*ethos*' (character) in the centre of corporate attention and teaches us ways of implementing integrity.

Integrity in business schools

- To ensure consistency between moral language and virtuous conduct, one needs to develop integrity in the way I've been arguing. To that extent, business schools should engage in philosophy in order to develop critical thinking, moral awareness and alternative ways of moral action. For this reason, teaching business ethics should be fundamental but students should be more actively involved in the learning process. They need to engage in decision-making in relation with a certain moral problem, be given actual moral dilemmas from their relevant fields, such as finance, marketing, management, or strategy, and develop the relevant intellectual and moral capacities to discern the good and act accordingly. **Some stronger coordination between the business ethics domain and the isolated fields of study should then take place, since all areas of business have ethical relevance. People can be trained to develop organizational virtue and integrity before joining the corporate world.** Roca examines the significance of teaching practical wisdom in business schools (Roca, 2008).

Punishment as Moral Reformation

- I would like to draw reference to Plato's *Laws*, a late dialogue, in order to propose a reformative as opposed to a punitive aspect of justice in both restoring integrity and promoting its endorsement in a person's private and professional life.
- So, in the case of an employee who has been exhibiting absenteeism or diminished performance one should search for the reasons and, in the event of serious family problems, try to rectify the situation by balancing a compassionate approach with the practical requirements of business. If there's a case of sexual harassment or other form of misconduct organizational integrity would mean that every case is handled separately with a practically wise approach (not simply the implementation of a code of ethics).

Cont.

- In the domain of education, if students exhibit academic dishonesty through cheating on exams or plagiarizing in essay writing, application of the code system on academic integrity would not be adequate; they might do it again. The main purpose should be to make the agent understand the wrongness of the deed and gradually develop a sense of integrity in a fuller sense, the one we've been arguing about. People need to integrate these ideas through a training process and an active engagement in producing an original work. **They should understand why what they did was wrong and experience the joy of academic creativity.**

Conclusion

- In conclusion, both Plato's and Aristotle's ethical frameworks can provide us with indispensable tools in redefining courage and integrity and examining ways of promoting them in the corporate world and the academia. Following a closer exploration of Aristotle's account, we can understand integrity as this dynamic dispositional quality that reflects the agent's capacity to coordinate well his moral and intellectual virtues with practical wisdom as the key function. By means of such an approach leaders can better perform corporate governance and achieve their organizational "*telos*".