



## Character and Leadership: Situating Servant Leadership in a Proposed Virtues Framework

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Leadership scholars and practitioners have emphasized the important connection between ethics and leadership over the years. This connection is emphasized even more within the field of servant leadership. While the servant leadership models proposed over the past two decades have advanced our understanding of servant leadership and its application, there is an increasingly obvious need for a common vocabulary and framework for engaging the ethical dimensions of leadership that can be used to facilitate further research into the antecedents and philosophical foundations of servant leadership. In this paper, the authors (a) provide an overview of virtues and servant leadership, (b) propose a model of character and virtues that frames ethical discussion and answers a void in the servant leadership literature, and (c) demonstrate how this model relates to several prominent servant leadership models.

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**T**he contemporary study of servant leadership may be traced to the groundbreaking work of Greenleaf (1977). Over the last decade, study of servant leadership has expanded into areas such as alternative models (Cerff & Winston, 2006; Laub, 1999; Patterson, 2003; Poon, 2006; Rennaker, 2005; Spears, 1998; Winston, 2003; Wong & Page, 2003), leader characteristics (Patterson, 2003; Pepper, 2003; Spears, 1998; Whetstone, 2005), follower interaction (Patterson, 2003; Whittington, 2004; Winston, 2003), worldviews (Boyum, 2006; Dyck & Schroeder, 2005; Koehn, 1998; Wallace, 2006; Warren, 2002), organizational cultures (Laub, 2003; Rennaker, 2005; Whetstone, 2005), comparisons with other leadership models (Matteson & Irving, 2005; Patterson, 2003; Whittington, 2004), and contextual applications (Brookshire, 2001). More recently, explorations of the philosophical foundations of servant leadership have emerged with accompanying efforts to present a consistent model of its ethical components. Lawson (2007) stated that we can best understand leadership in light of its moral activities. Boyum (2006) noted that one of the limitations of servant leadership is that it lacks a philosophical foundation, and that therefore empirical theory building and empirical research are hindered. Patterson (2003),

Parolini (2004), Wallace (2006), Winston (2003), Whetstone (2005), and Covey (2005) have presented research that contributes to our understanding of the connections between ethical leader characteristics and servant leadership. Reinforcing this connection, Liden, Wayne, Zhao, and Henderson (2008) identified “behaving ethically” as one of seven scales in their multidimensional model of servant leadership. Even so, there is variation among many of the authors noted above. What is still lacking in the literature on servant leadership is a common vocabulary and framework for engaging the ethical dimensions of leadership that can be used to facilitate further research into the antecedents and philosophical foundations of servant leadership. We propose that an approach using virtues provides this common vocabulary and framework.

### Overview of Virtues

In order to discuss virtues and their relationship to servant leadership, there must first be an understanding of what virtues are and how they relate to similar concepts such as character, values, and personal attributes.

Early work in identifying and defining virtues was done by Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Confucius, and Buddha, among others (Ciulla, 2001). History contains a long list of those who have developed theories and practical frameworks. Peterson and Seligman (2004) noted that every major religion has some articulation of virtues. Kinnier, Kernes, and Dautheribes (2000) developed a list of common universal values from a variety of religious and non-religious sources dating back more than 2000 years. Seligman (2002) described an exercise in which his team of researchers pored through 200 virtues lists covering 3000 years of history.

MacIntyre (1981) stated that it was Aristotle, drawing on Plato, who gave us one of the first coherent articulations of character and virtue, considering the “end,” or *telos*, of man. He spoke of virtues as character traits that are the means of bringing man from what he happens to be to what he could be if he realized his essential nature. Aristotle also defined “happiness,” or *eudaimonia*, as a well-lived life and believed that right action flows from right character. In the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas (McDermott, 1993) and Moses Maimonides (Weiss, 1991) added to Aristotle’s thinking by including divine and eternal elements. The underlying assumption among them and the reason why virtues are important, according to MacIntyre, is that man possesses “an essential nature and an essential purpose or function” (p. 58). McKinnon (1999) supported this idea, arguing it would be inconsistent to recognize that animals possess specific natures but then to say humans do not.

While there are many sources from which to draw when studying virtues, Western history has yielded several schools of ethical thought as noted in Table 1, and not all of them consider character, nor do they all define or consider virtues in the classical sense. During the Enlightenment, Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke, DesCartes, Pascal, and others brought rationalism and science to ethics, separating ethics from its theistic foundations in the belief that individual reason and experience are the ultimate guides to moral norms (Israel, 2002). Descartes, for example, rejected all prior assumptions of objective or universal truth in favor of the individual’s perception of truth, which he believed could be discerned from one’s reasoning abilities (Hooker, 1996). However, this introduction of rationalism eventually shifted consideration from character and the end (*telos*) or purpose of man to a more categorical, rules-based approach, leading the discussion of ethics to focus on the abstract identification of universal rules and principles (MacIntyre, 1981).

Out of this new direction of thought emerged deontological, or duty, ethics, which focus on moral acts rather than moral agents and duties somewhat independent of their consequences. Using a normative approach, proponents of deontological ethics such as Immanuel Kant used reason and logic to discern societal norms and thereby prescribe categorical principles and rules by which moral decisions could be made. These rules in the deontological framework, because they are seen as universal, are often linked to a concept of virtue (Crisp, 1998). However, they make the character of the individual secondary to the fulfillment of moral obligations. One potential issue with the deontological approach is that abstract rules can be carried to practical extremes. For example, Clark and Rakestraw (1994) presented a dilemma in which someone following the rule “do not lie” would have felt morally bound to tell a Nazi soldier where innocent Jews were hiding.

Jeremy Bentham, J. S. Mill, and their contemporaries later drew upon deontological and teleological concepts in the development of utilitarianism (Crisp, 1998). They redefined happiness as the maximization of pleasure and the absence of pain, focusing on outcomes or consequences of actions rather than the character or duties of the individual. Utilitarianism subsequently emerged as a dominant ethical framework that focuses moral decision-making on what brings the most good to the greatest number. McKinnon (1999) observed that one of the key limitations of utilitarianism is that it places the individual decision maker as the arbiter of the good, when individuals generally do not possess the traits required to make consistently correct calculations regarding the greatest happiness in outcomes and consequences.

Table 1  
*Characteristics of ethical approaches*

	<b>Virtue Ethics</b>	<b>Duty Ethics</b>	<b>Utilitarian Ethics</b>
Key operational question	Who ought I to be?	What ought I to do?	What brings the greatest happiness to the greatest number?
Definition of Happiness	Fulfilling one’s purpose or function	Adherence to moral absolutes	Maximization of pleasure, absence of pain
Focus	Character of the individual	Rules and resulting obligations of the individual	Outcomes and consequences

*Note.* Each of these “schools” of ethics has variations. For example, Crisp (1998) noted that utilitarianism can be divided into rule utilitarianism, motive utilitarianism, and act utilitarianism.

We see more recently in the works of MacIntyre (1981), Bennett (1996), Hursthouse (1998), and Foot (2003), for example, a resurgence in virtue ethics as a competing framework for ethical behavior and decision making in modern times. One reason for this is likely the inability of other ethical models to satisfactorily address contemporary issues. For example, McKinnon (1999) discussed more specifically the key distinctions between virtue ethics and its competitors, duty ethics and utilitarianism, noting that these other schools of thought cannot properly explain

the importance of integrity or discernment because those traits are not necessarily tied to determinate actions.

One challenge for virtue ethics, however, is that despite all that has been written about virtues over time, no single dominant view or construct currently exists. Differences of opinion are readily apparent regarding the definition and nature of virtues. With regard to definition, there is little consensus regarding what actually constitutes a virtue. Ciulla (2001) argued that virtues are good habits that come from the daily practices of a society or organization. Garrett (2005) defined virtues as admirable character traits—generally desirable dispositions which contribute to social harmony, enable us to act in accordance with reason, enable us to feel appropriately and have the right intention, and are orientations towards a mean, rather than extremes. Note that these definitions, useful as they are in framing desirable leadership traits, lack the philosophical underpinnings that would lend themselves to the consistent interpretation of such phrasings as “good habits,” “admirable character traits,” and “desirable dispositions.”

Offering a contrast to the perspectives common in leadership studies, Peterson and Seligman (2004) defined virtues within the field of positive psychology as core characteristics valued by moral philosophers and religious thinkers. While this definition includes (by reference) a moral component, it offers us little in terms of practical application. From yet another perspective, Whetstone (2005) stated that virtues are essential moral attributes of individuals. Similarly, Clark and Rakestraw (1994) defined virtues as “specific dispositions, skills, or qualities of excellence that together make up a person’s character, and that influence his or her way of life” (p. 276). It is important to note in this discussion that the focus is on personal attributes and character traits as opposed to observed behaviors, corresponding with Winston’s (2006) assertion that character focuses on the necessity of being good as opposed to simply doing good. This aligns our discussion with the school of virtue ethics as opposed to duty ethics or utilitarianism.

It is also generally recognized that there is little agreement as to the nature of virtues. Brookshire (2001) suggested that the virtues enumerated by Aristotle, the New Testament writers, Ben Franklin, and others were simply contextual representations of virtues at specific points in history. McKinnon (1999) agreed, stating that different cultural or social arrangements can influence what counts as good character. Winston (2006) described the seemingly contextual nature of virtues, comparing the virtues articulated by Aristotle with those of traditional Christianity and Patterson’s (2003) servant leadership model. Whetstone (2005) generally agreed, going so far as to state that all virtues are contextual by nature, not only historically but situationally as well, meaning that what is considered virtuous in one situation might not be so in another.

Offering an opposing view, MacIntyre (1981), drawing on Aristotle, asserted that if man has an essential nature that is shared by all individuals, there are then virtues that apply to all individuals as well. He contended that the contextual appearance of virtues is due to the subtraction of this essential nature from the discussion of ethics. Peterson and Seligman (2004) confirmed that while all cultures emphasize sets of character traits they deem important, there is a strong convergence across religions, cultures, and time with regard to certain core virtues. Covey (2005) made a similar assertion regarding the concepts of honesty, respect, and the innate sense of right and wrong that are shared across cultures. Jacobs (2001) noted a consistency in the acquisition of the vices across cultures throughout history.

Given their ability to demonstrate the consistent appearance of specific virtue concepts throughout history and explain contextual appearance, we concur with the arguments of

MacIntyre (1981) and Peterson and Seligman (2004). In contrast to Whetstone's (2005) assertion, the contextual appearance of some virtues, both historically and culturally, is better explained by the fact that certain virtues are emphasized more in some situations or cultures than others. In another example, Pava (2005) considered a model that recognizes only three virtues in a leadership context—restraint, modesty, and tenacity—and omits other identified virtues—courage, optimism, and strength—because the latter are generally required only in heroic circumstances.

Drawing these various perspectives, we propose a practical definition of virtue as: A set of related personal attributes or dispositions that (a) is universal and not contextual (MacIntyre, 1981; Peterson & Seligman, 2004), (b) has moral implications that extend beyond the individual (Ciulla, 2001), (c) has recognition that possessing it without excess is considered good and lacking it is considered harmful (Koehn, 1998), and (d) can be attained through practice (Strang, 2005).

The first proposition that virtues are universal and not contextual is consistent with the extensive research of Peterson and Seligman (2004), MacIntyre's (1981) historical perspectives, Covey's (2005) discussion regarding conscience, Lewis's (1944) observations on the agreement across cultures throughout history on what is good and what is evil, Geisler and Turek's (1998) transcultural examples of common moral law, and Garofalo, Geuras, Lynch, and Lynch (2001) and Jacobs' (2001) assertions that many aspects of moral corruption are also universally recognized.

Second, we propose that virtues have moral implications beyond the individual. For instance, Koehn (2001) described how a lack of individual trustworthiness affects one's relationships with others. Ciulla (2001), Englebrecht, Van Aswegen, and Theron (2005), and Locke (2006) have all described how corruption in organizational leaders impacts stakeholders within and beyond the boundaries of the organization. Dyck and Schroeder (2005) also discussed the impact of organizational corruption on economic systems.

Third, we propose that possessing virtues is good and lacking them is harmful. Possession of virtues is good by definition. Corruption, or lack of virtue, is considered harmful, as noted by Garofalo et al. (2001), Strang (2005), and Koehn (1998).

Our fourth proposition is that virtues can be acquired through practice. As asserted by Strang (2005), the acquisition of virtue is like the acquisition of any habit. One must first perform acts consistent with virtue, and after the habit has formed (or during the process) one comes to realize that these virtuous acts are valuable in themselves; then, one can decide to pursue the acts because one loves acting virtuously. The more virtuous one becomes, the easier it becomes to resist corruption (Strang).

Likewise, Jacobs (2001) addressed the acquisition of vices through practice, noting that a good deal of vicious behavior is not really a lapse in the pursuit of virtue, but instead a success in the pursuit of wrong values. Hursthouse (as cited in Darwall, 2003) underscored the necessity of practice in the acquisition of virtues, noting that there are no "moral whiz-kids" in the way there are mathematical whiz-kids.

Our definition considers virtues to be categorical or thematic concepts rather than singular concepts. One advantage of this approach is that moral concepts that have eluded definition can be treated with clarity. Audi and Murphy's (2004) exploration of integrity serves as an example, wherein they demonstrated that virtually every attempt to define integrity as a singular concept has failed. However, if integrity is instead treated as a *category* of attributes, it enables us to include within it many commonly associated singular attributes, such as honesty,

authenticity, trustworthiness, faithfulness, and transparency. Additionally, when using this approach, virtues can more easily be distinguished from other concepts such as values, abilities, and personality traits.

The distinction between virtues and values can be recognized based on context. For instance, courage is widely considered a good character trait, leading to its recognition as a virtue. In contrast, independence is considered a good character trait in the United States, but not in Japan. Generally speaking, we propose that values tend to define cultures or characteristics of roles within an organization or social construct, while virtues transcend cultures and other socially-embedded constructs. Lennick and Kiel (2008) affirmed the universality of virtues, and compare them to values at cultural, corporate, and individual levels. They argued that virtues supersede values in a sort of moral hierarchy. This is consistent with the previously noted observations of MacIntyre (1981) and Peterson and Seligman (2004).

The distinction between virtues and abilities can be recognized based on attainment and moral implications. For example, a disposition of gratitude can be acquired through practice and attention to one's attitudes. Once attained, it may cause one's life and relationships to flourish; without it, relationships often suffer and die. In contrast to gratitude, there are many people who have no ability when it comes to woodworking, for example, and they are morally no worse off because of it.

One additional characteristic of virtues is that they do not function independently, but interdependently. Consider the virtue of courage without the virtues of discernment and temperance, or diligence without integrity. MacIntyre (1981) noted,

For Plato, the presence of one virtue requires the presence of all. This strong thesis concerning the unity of the virtues is reiterated by both Aristotle and Aquinas. The presupposition which all three share is that there exists a cosmic order which dictates the place of each virtue in a total harmonious scheme of human life. Truth in the moral sphere consists in the conformity of moral judgment to the order of this scheme. (p. 142)

The interdependency of virtues is useful when considering the virtues that are generally called upon by various leadership models.

### **Overview of Servant Leadership**

Servant leadership has received more attention in recent years, even in the media and popular press. From Stone Phillips' (2004) Dateline interview with Larry Spears of the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership to Gregen's (2006) article in U. S. News & World Report, it is becoming evident that a model of leadership that once was peripheral in discussions of organizational life is receiving greater attention and respect. In his article creatively titled *Bad News for Bullies*, Gregen noted that "Increasingly, the best leaders are those who don't order but persuade; don't dictate but draw out; don't squeeze but grow the people around them" (p. 54). He added that rather than holding onto power, these servant leaders, "push power out of the front office, down into the organization, and become a leader of leaders," understanding "that the people in an organization are its No. 1 asset" (p. 54).

Not only is servant leadership receiving more attention in the media and popular press, but many key organizations are implementing servant leadership in practice. Among others, companies such as Starbucks, Southwest Airlines, Vanguard Investment Group, The Men's Wearhouse, Synovus Financial Corporation, and TD Industries are taking seriously principles related to servant leadership. Phillips (2004) noted that as many as 20% of Fortune magazine's

top 100 companies to work for have sought out guidance from the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership.

While interest in servant leadership is growing, the practice of servant leadership is not a new concept. In fact, it is not uncommon for students of servant leadership to trace its ancient roots to the model and teaching of Jesus Christ (e.g., Bekker, 2006; Gyertson, 2006; Irving, 2005b; Irving & McIntosh, 2009; McIntosh & Irving, 2010). From Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet (John 13) to his challenging the disciples when they were focused on vying for positions of status (Matthew 20:25-27), Jesus called his followers to a different way. On this point Blanchard (2002) noted that in Jesus' teaching, he talked about a "form of leadership very different from the model familiar to the disciples; a leader who is primarily a servant. He did not offer them a Plan B. Servant-leadership was to be their mode of operation. And so it should be for all leaders" (p. xi).

Beyond mentoring his disciples in service and showing them the way by modeling such acts as washing their feet, Jesus provided the ultimate example of service and self-sacrifice in his death on the cross. As Stone Phillips (2004) pointed out in his interview with Larry Spears, "Being willing to give his life on the cross... in service of others," was "the ultimate example of this [service]" in the life of Jesus. With this ultimate act of service in view, early church leaders emphasized the importance of following this model. For instance, in Philippians 2:5 the church is called to: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus" (English Standard Version). What specifically was this attitude or mind that they were to have? The passage goes on to describe Jesus Christ as the one,

...who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:6-8)

The attitude of humility and service that characterized Jesus Christ in life and death is the attitude that is to characterize his followers as well. This ancient call is making its way into the present as contemporary leaders seek to engage in the practice of servant leadership in their organizations.

While the practice of servant leadership has both present and ancient examples, the contemporary study of servant leadership traces its roots primarily to Greenleaf (1977), who captured the essence of servant leadership for a modern audience through his writing and work with AT&T. Posing the question "Who is the servant-leader?" in his book, Greenleaf answered by stating, "The servant-leader *is* servant first. . . . It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is *leader* first" (p. 27).

This "servant first" emphasis is a hallmark of servant leadership studies and has captured the attention of leadership scholars and practitioners alike. Built upon this understanding, Laub's (1999) definition of servant leadership emphasized the understanding and practice of leadership that places the good of those led over the self-interest of the leader. Emphasizing the means by which servant leaders accomplish this, Whetstone (2005) noted that servant leaders are characterized by persuasion and example rather than command and control.

From Greenleaf's early work in the 1970s, servant leadership theories began to emerge in the 1990s and early 2000s. The following table from Irving and McIntosh (2007, p. 788) provides an overview of several of these key models.

Table 2

*Servant Leadership Theories*

Graham (1991)	Buchen (1998)	Spears (1998)	Farling et al. (1999)	Laub (1999)	Russell (2001)	Patterson (2003b)
Inspirational	Self-identity	Listening	Vision	Valuing people	Vision	Love
Moral	Capacity for reciprocity	Empathy	Influence	Developing people	Credibility	Humility
	Relationship building	Healing	Credibility	Building community	Trust	Altruism
	Preoccupation with the future	Awareness	Trust	Displaying authenticity	Service	Vision
		Persuasion	Service	Providing leadership	Modeling	Trust
		Conceptualization		Sharing leadership	Pioneering	Empowerment
		Foresight			Appreciating others	Service
		Stewardship			Empowerment	
	Commitment					
	Community building					

Based upon these models, the field of servant leadership studies has been gradually shifting from theory and conceptualization to empirical testing. These empirical studies include: Barbuto and Wheeler (2006), Bekker (2005, 2006), Dannhauser (2006), Dennis (2004), Dennis and Winston (2003), Dingman and Stone (2006), Drury (2004), Hebert (2004), Helland (2003), Irving (2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2008), Irving and Longbotham (2006, 2007a, 2007b), Koshal (2005), Laub (1999, 2003, 2005), Ledbetter (2003), Liden et al. (2008), McIntosh and Irving (2010), Parolini (2005), Rennaker and Novak (2006), Sendjaya (2003), Sendjaya, Sarros, and Santora (2008), Washington, Sutton, and Field (2006), and Winston (2004).

**Connections between virtues and Servant Leadership**

Having considered virtues and servant leadership separately, what are the connections between them? There is general agreement as to the connection between morality and leadership. For example, Covey (2005) proposed that moral authority is what makes formal authority work; Ciulla (2001) stated that leadership is morality and immorality magnified; and Engelbrecht et al. (2005) asserted that integrity lies at the heart of leadership.

As noted previously, contemporary leadership theory has emphasized the moral dimension of servant leadership from the days of Greenleaf’s work. More recently, this dimension has received increasingly open discussion. Patterson (2003) clearly established that servant leadership is a virtuous theory, describing it as encompassing seven virtuous constructs, which work in processional pattern. The virtues Patterson described are *agapáo* love, humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment, and service. Wong and Page (2003) identified integrity, humility, and servanthood as relevant components of the servant leader’s character. Matteson



and Irving (2005, 2006) found a correlation between servant leadership and self-sacrificial leadership in the virtue of altruism. In evaluating team effectiveness and servant leadership themes, Irving and Longbotham (2007b) identified the virtues of providing accountability, valuing and appreciating, and engaging in honest self-evaluation among leadership themes. Cerff and Winston (2006) argued for the inclusion of hope as a virtue in the servant leadership model. Lawson (2007) demonstrated the connections between servant leadership and virtue ethics, and additionally connected virtue ethics to the virtuous constructs contained in Patterson's (2003) servant leadership model. Covey (2006) also connected servant leadership with the virtues of humility, integrity, love, courage, patience, self-control, gratitude, and respect. As noted by Spears (2002), the concepts of character and virtue are inseparably tied to servant-leadership.

Making the case for a philosophical foundation for servant leadership more directly, Wallace (2006) explored the connections between servant leadership and various worldviews and philosophical approaches. He argued that absent some form of metaphysical grounding, any ethic as a basis for action is simply another expression of relativism; aside from utilitarian outcomes, there would be no compelling reason to choose one form of leadership over another. In discussing character as a component of the Judeo-Christian worldview, he enumerated essential character traits from a Christian perspective, including wisdom, teachableness, lovingkindness, joyfulness, peace making, humility, meekness, longsuffering, gentleness, patience, self-control, courage, self-sacrifice, trustworthiness, truthfulness, empathy, and foresight.

While Wallace's (2006) case for a philosophical foundation for servant leadership is significant, there is considerable variety between what is recognized as virtuous and the differentiation among other authors in their definitions of individual virtues. Furthermore, while there is significant value in the work that has already been done in servant leadership studies, the literature points to the need for a common vocabulary and a consistent approach to distinguishing virtues from other essential leadership traits. With this in mind, we propose a model for character and virtues as a response to this need in the literature.

### **A Model of Character and Virtues**

Figure 1 shows a hierarchical construct that consolidates virtue constructs from many sources into eight categories or themes. Each category contains a set of example attributes that clarify the scope of the category, but do not fully represent its definition. This model is drawn primarily from a Judeo-Christian worldview through the study of character and virtues in the Old and New Testaments. This approach is consistent with the work of Wallace (2006), who extensively explored the appropriateness of the Judeo-Christian worldview as a complementary ethical basis for servant-leadership theory, concluding it provides the best fit when compared to other major world religions. This is supported by Colson (1999), Buchholz and Mandel (2000), and Slingerland (2001), who noted that for most of Western history virtues have been developed on theistic foundations, as well as by Habermas (2008), who asserted that the identity of Western culture is rooted in Judeo-Christian values. Additionally, it reconciles in many respects with virtue constructs from other world religions and writings in the field of virtue ethics. As an extension of this work, we present comparisons with several servant-leadership models.

In comparison with research done in the field of psychology, and with positive psychology in particular, there are many similarities but also some notable differences. For instance, comparison with Peterson and Seligman's (2004) character strengths model yields

similarity in terms of hierarchical structure, but a mixture of similarities and differences in terms of the contents of the hierarchy. The reason for this is twofold and highly instructive. The first reason is that the rules used for selection of virtues differ considerably between the two models. Our criteria consist of four components—(a) universal and not contextual, (b) moral implications that extend beyond the individual, (c) recognition that possessing it without excess is considered good and lacking it is considered harmful, and (d) attainment through practice—that are focused on personal attributes; Peterson and Seligman’s criteria consist of ten components that include behavioral criteria, resulting in what they call “character strengths” in addition to virtues. The second reason is the contrast in accounting for the origins of virtue. Our work is based upon a Judeo-Christian worldview, while theirs is based upon a biological origin process (p. 13).

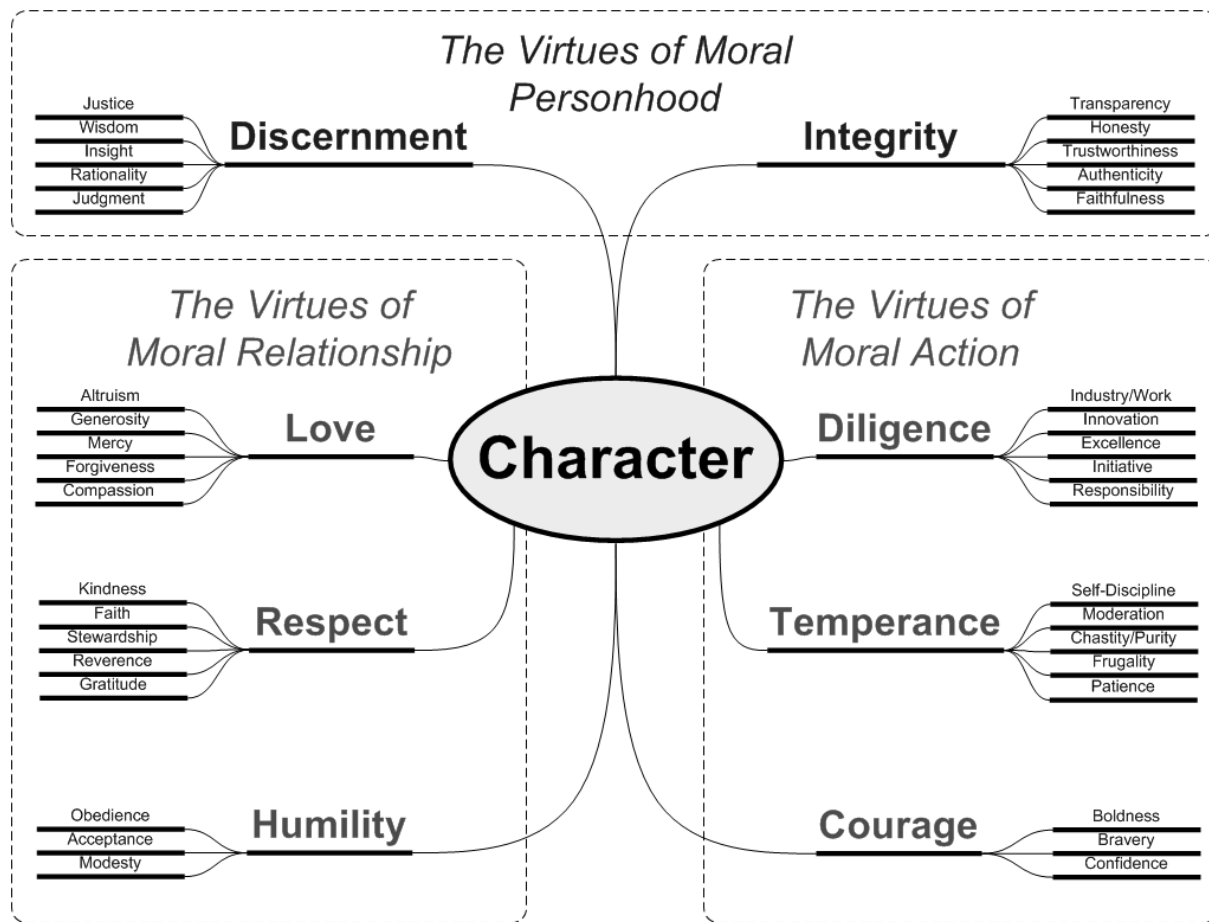


Figure 1: Character/Virtue Model

### Definitions of the Virtues

As previously stated, we propose that virtues are categorical rather than singular concepts. This idea originated in an attempt to reconcile lists of virtues from a variety of sources into a single comprehensive set. The attempt proved quite unwieldy, leading to the construction of categories as shown in Figure 1. Definitions were then developed for each of the categories by using related terms from the original languages in the Old Testament (Hebrew) and the New Testament (Greek) consistent with the comparative work done by Wallace (2006). These

definitions were then compared back to the source lists to determine whether or not there was general agreement between the sources and the definitions. While there will likely be ongoing discussion regarding these definitions and the approach used to derive them, we are hopeful they can serve as the foundation for a common vocabulary in the context of servant leadership and for advancing research into its ontological foundations. Following are definitions for each of the virtue categories:

- **Integrity** – Personal attributes related to the consistent alignment of motives, words, actions, and reality over time. Examples of attributes in this category include transparency, honesty, trustworthiness, authenticity, and faithfulness.
- **Discernment** – Personal attributes related to accurate moral perception and distinction. Examples of attributes in this category include justice, wisdom, insight, rationality, and judgment.
- **Love** – Personal attributes related to unselfish concern for the needs, best interests, and wellbeing of others. Examples of attributes in this category include altruism, generosity, mercy, forgiveness, and compassion.
- **Respect** – Personal attributes related to correctly estimating the value of everything external to one's self. Examples of attributes in this category include kindness, faith, stewardship, reverence, and gratitude.
- **Humility** – Personal attributes related to correctly ascertaining one's place in life and one's value in relation to others. Examples of attributes in this category include obedience, acceptance, and modesty.
- **Diligence** – Personal attributes related to the active pursuit of value, timeliness, and excellence in outcomes. Examples of attributes in this category include industry, work, innovation, excellence, initiative, and responsibility.
- **Temperance** – Personal attributes related to restraint in one's appetites, desires, attitudes, thoughts, words, and actions. Examples of attributes in this category include self-discipline, moderation, chastity, frugality, and patience.
- **Courage** – Personal attributes related to confidently advancing or defending what is true or right in the face of opposition or uncertainty. Examples of attributes in this category include boldness, bravery, and confidence.

### Comparisons to Other Virtue Constructs

Development of a model that represents the virtues enables one to compare various models. Table 3 presents comparisons of several models, revealing model-specific concentrations in some virtues and gaps in others. For instance, Benjamin Franklin's 13 virtues are largely centered on facets of temperance, but courage is absent from his list. A weakness in Locke's model is that independence is counted as a virtue, but independence is better defined as a value among Western cultures, especially the United States.

Table 3  
*Virtue/Character Trait Comparisons*

Virtue Category	Plato/ Aquinas (Drefcinski, 1998)	Franklin (1868)	Lewis (1952)	Maitland (1997)	Peterson & Seligman (2004)	Locke (2006)
<b>Integrity</b>		Sincerity		Trustworthiness	Courage	Honesty Integrity
<b>Discernment</b>	Justice Wisdom	Justice	Justice Prudence	Fairness Justice	Justice, Wisdom	Rationality Justice
<b>Love</b>			Charity Forgiveness	Sympathy	Humanity	
<b>Respect</b>		Silence	Faith Hope		Transcendence	
<b>Humility</b>		Humility	Humility		Temperance	Earned Pride
<b>Diligence</b>		Industry		Industry Inventiveness	Courage	Productivity
<b>Temperance</b>	Moderation	Chastity Frugality Moderation Order Resolution Temperance Tranquility	Temperance Chastity	Self-Control	Temperance	
<b>Courage</b>	Fortitude		Fortitude		Courage	
Additional Attributes		Cleanliness				Independence

### The Concept of Virtue and Vice

Patterson (2003) described servant leadership virtues as constructs that are components of the servant leader’s character, stating that these constructs have a moderating effect on the leader’s behavior. This corresponds with Aristotle’s assertion that a virtue is an ideal situated between extremes. Following these concepts, Figure 2 shows each virtue as a midpoint between deficiency and excess.

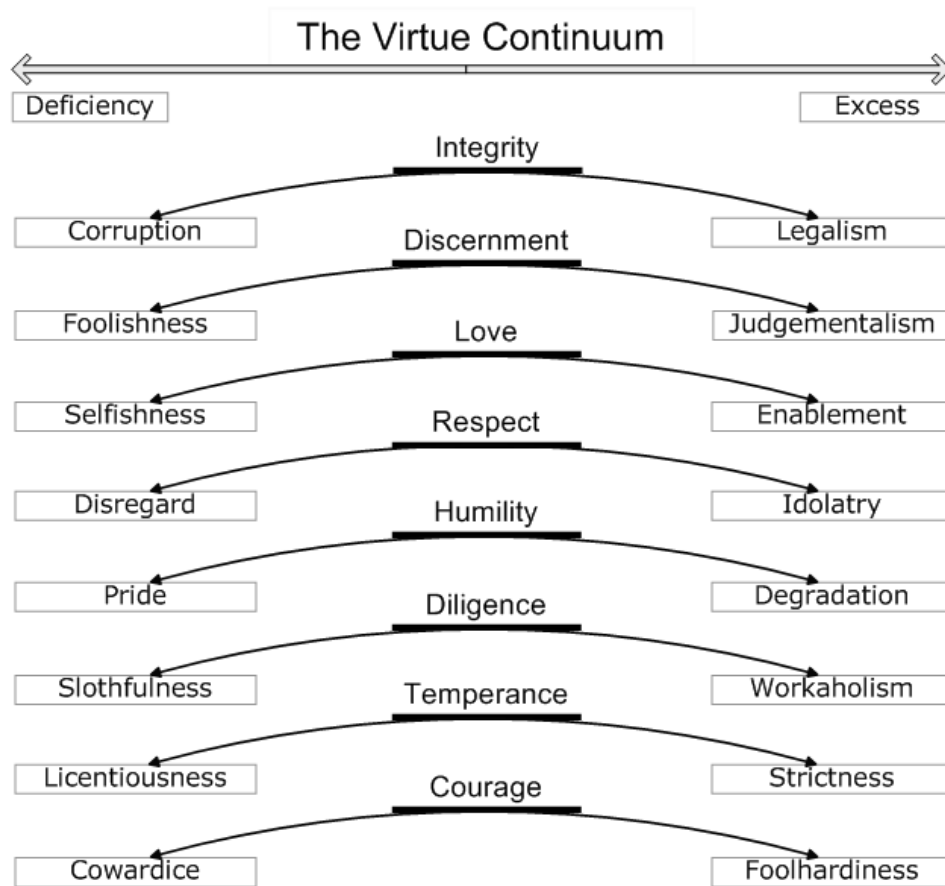


Figure 2: The Virtue Continuum

### Overlap with Current Servant-Leadership Models

A number of models for servant-leadership have been advanced in the literature. Without exception, they consider the moral requirements of servant leaders. Perhaps one reason for the attention to moral and ethical considerations is that servant-leadership demands more in the way of virtuous behaviors than any other style of leadership. Under command-and-control styles of leadership, the minimal virtues required for success are Integrity and Discernment. By contrast, servant-leadership requires demonstration of all, or nearly all, virtues. Patterson's (2003) discussion of servant leadership provided an example where a number of servant leader behaviors are mentioned. Table 4 lists those behaviors and corresponding virtues.

Table 4

*Patterson’s Servant Leadership Behaviors and Corresponding Virtues*

<b>Patterson’s Servant Leader Behaviors</b>	<b>Corresponding Virtues</b>
Love unconditionally	Love
Genuinely appreciate followers	Respect
Inspire courage	Courage
Esteem and honor people	Respect
Demonstrate humility	Humility
Show more care for people than the organization’s bottom line	Love, Respect
Demonstrate calm determination	Temperance, Diligence
Able to see the handwriting on the wall	Discernment

Winston’s (2003) extension of Patterson’s servant leadership model demonstrates how virtues can be cultivated within an organization through follower reciprocation. This ultimately leads to what Lawler (2004) has referred to as a virtuous spiral organization.

Covey (2006) also connected servant-leadership with a number of virtues as shown in Table 5, emphasizing the need for moral authority as a necessary feature of servant-leadership.

Table 5

*Covey’s Servant Leadership Behaviors and Corresponding Virtues*

<b>Covey’s Servant Leader Characteristics</b>	<b>Corresponding Virtues</b>
Love	Love
Gratitude	Respect
Courage	Courage
Respect	Respect
Humility	Humility
Patience	Temperance
Self-Control	Temperance
Integrity	Integrity

Spears (2002) summarized Greenleaf’s articulation of servant-leader qualities into ten distinct characteristics, which can be approximately linked to virtue categories as shown in Table 6. Interestingly, themes of Love and Respect are prominent in Spears’ review, demonstrating the relational nature of servant-leadership. This is in contrast with the command-and-control nature of transactional leadership styles which arguably require neither of these virtues.

Laub (2003) discussed the development of the Organizational Leadership Assessment (OLA) instrument, which measures key characteristics of servant-leadership. The six characteristics identified by Laub are shown in Table 7, aligned with corresponding virtues by the comparison of definitions.

Table 6

*Spears' Servant Leadership Characteristics and Corresponding Virtues*

<b>Spears' Servant Leader Characteristics</b>	<b>Corresponding Virtues</b>
Listening	Love/Respect/Temperance
Empathy	Respect
Healing	Love
Awareness	Humility/Respect
Persuasion	Respect
Conceptualization	Discernment
Foresight	Discernment
Stewardship	Respect
Commitment to the growth of people	Love
Building Community	Love

Table 7

*Laub's Servant Leadership Activities and Corresponding Virtues*

<b>Laub's Servant Leader Activities</b>	<b>Corresponding Virtues</b>
Valuing people	Love/Respect
Developing people	Integrity/Respect
Building community	Love
Displaying authenticity	Integrity/Humility
Providing leadership	Courage/Discernment
Sharing leadership	Humility

Several other examples exist. One important observation from the examples presented is that careful attention must be given to the definitions of attributes. In many cases, individual servant-leader attributes span multiple virtues. Laub's (1999) model of servant-leader activities (Table 7) serves as an excellent example. It should be noted that this phenomenon does not imply any defect in servant-leader attributes that have been presented over time, but that servant-leader characteristics and behaviors can be complex in nature.

### **Basis for Ontology-Driven Approach for Servant Leadership**

Boyum (2006) stated that there is a void in the literature regarding the connections between philosophical underpinnings and leadership approaches. This appears generally to be the case. A review of a variety of servant-leadership models does indeed provide little evidence of deliberate links to any one predominant philosophical approach. This is not to say that such connections have not been made. For instance, Winston and Patterson (2006) found a base for servant leadership in the seven Beatitudes of Matthew 5. Wallace (2006), in examining characteristics of the world's five major religions, carefully made the case from a worldview perspective that the Judeo-Christian worldview most closely aligns with the various attributes of servant-leadership. These examples demonstrate that while ontological connections are being made in the literature, there exists no unifying standard.

Other works, while stating no allegiance to any particular philosophical approach, beg to be drawn into a common moral semantic. Matteson and Irving (2006) touched on the ontological dimensions of servant-leadership in the characteristics of love, authenticity, and humility. Spears

(2002) articulated a set of servant-leader characteristics that connect well with a variety of moral constructs. Covey (2006) identified a list of servant-leader traits that exude a Judeo-Christian ethic without stating an explicit connection.

The lack of a common vocabulary and framework makes it difficult to engage the ethical dimensions of leadership with consistency and hinders the progress of meaningful research. The character/virtue model proposed in this work, with its foundations in the Judeo-Christian worldview and its affirmation in a wide variety of other virtue constructs, provides the philosophical underpinnings and unifying semantics needed to resolve these issues.

### **Challenges to the Character/Virtue Model**

The character/virtue construct we propose is not without its own challenges. The first is that identifying virtues is a somewhat subjective task. Dozens of virtue models have been proposed over the last two millennia, and none has emerged as a standard. We have considered a number of them and present this model as a work in progress, knowing that there will be ongoing discussion and improvement.

The second challenge is that there is a lack of agreement on the definitions of various virtues. The definitions proposed in our model may well serve as a foundation for further research. However, we recognize that definitions will always be a challenge because of the nature of language. For instance, Patterson (2003) defined humility in leadership as the ability to grasp the idea of not knowing, understanding, or having all the answers. Peterson and Seligman (2004) defined it as letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves; not seeking the spotlight; and not regarding oneself as more special than one is. Parolini (2004) described it as a display of character that supports leaders in overcoming egotistical tendencies of thought, feeling, and action. We define it as a set of personal attributes related to correctly ascertaining one's place in life and one's value in relation to others. While there are similarities in these definitions, there are also differences. There may never be complete agreement on which definition best represents a given virtue. However, we believe this is at least partially addressed by treating virtues as categorical, rather than singular, concepts.

In considering the effects of language on the challenge of defining virtues, we also recognize that extending our model into other languages may require as much effort as that required for the initial version in English.

### **Further Research Recommendations**

There are a number of areas in which further work will be beneficial. Further validation of the model's categories and definitions against other constructs will provide confidence in the validity of the model overall.

Additionally, work is required to better understand how various proposed leadership models relate to this construct. We believe this model will help better explain the differences between servant-leadership and other leadership styles, as well as provide the ability to clarify the distinctions and emphases among various proposed servant-leadership models.

Finally, development and validation of testing instruments to measure virtues and vices will provide empirical means to understand the antecedents to servant-leadership and to evaluate a servant-leader's areas of moral strength.



### Summary

Due to the increasing emphasis placed on the relationship between leadership and ethics, particularly in the study and practice of servant leadership, in this paper the authors have sought to address the need for a common vocabulary and framework for engaging the ethical dimensions of leadership. Based on an overview of virtues and servant leadership, the authors have provided a model of character and virtues that frames the ethical discussion and attempts to fill a void in the literature. It is the hope of the authors that this proposed virtues framework will advance the study of character and the ontological dimensions of leadership, and that it will provide a working model with common terminology for those interested in engaging ethics and leadership both at the level of study and practice.

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