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A Conceptual Analysis of Collective *Phronesis* for Virtuous Leadership

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"A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS OF COLLECTIVE PHRONESIS FOR VIRTUOUS LEADERSHIP"

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Eri Mountbatten-O'Malley (2024)

ABSTRACT

The notion of virtuous leadership has been gaining attention over recent years, no doubt fuelled by developments in a number of disciplines, but also in the context of a growing public apathy and indifference to the corruption and inefficacy of politics. However, some questions have recently been raised about the tendency in the literature towards individualism, and the prospects for a more inclusive and democratic form of governance, whether in public affairs or indeed in business. What is the meaning of virtuous leadership?... whose theories are more persuasive?.. and what influence is this all having on leaders? Indeed, every theory seems to have a place in the marketplace of ideas, with competing assumptions and claims being levied by theorists and philosophers alike on the matters of substance. However, how are we to navigate the morass? How can we settle matters? I suggest that at least partly, it is this apparent chaos and mess, a relativist's haven, that helps to drive apathy and indifference. What is lacking is a comprehensive method by which to analyse all these diverse streams of knowledge in order to make sense of the central purposes and aims of virtuous leadership in action. We lack a way out of the proverbial fly-bottle.

In this paper, I will propose one way to navigate oneself in this minefield. Firstly, using insights from Wittgenstein (2009), Hacker (2007), and Mountbatten-O'Malley (2024), I will focus on proposing a two-pronged approach of conceptual analysis (connective analysis and conceptual elucidation) as a method for illumination and liberation of human understanding. This will be couched in terms of the nature of concepts, language, and community. The upshot will be to bring into focus the normative, public nature of language with implications for how we are to understand problematic concepts.

Importantly, I will then move on to explore some of the key insights from Kristjánsson's (2022) paper on 'collective phronesis'. In that paper, Kristjánsson explores some deeply interesting material on the problematic notion of individualism implicit in much of the literature on virtuous leadership. In particular, I will explore the tensions between *phronesis* and *techne*, between knowledge and action. I will then advance those insights into a discussion on the role of collective agency and emergent wisdom through Nonaka & Konno's (1998) conception of 'Ba'. This will be contextualized with some concrete examples of virtuous leadership through an innovative and participatory method of collective decision-making, the world café method, which aims at exactly this: to help to create transformative 'spaces' for virtuous action and collective wisdom. As I will suggest, meaningful virtuous leadership is *always* predicated on the value of collective decision-making and collective insights.

SOME PRELIMINARIES ON THE NORMATIVE (RULE-BOUND/ SOCIAL) NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE

The nature of philosophy is to engage with ideas, claims, beliefs, attitudes, and to subject them to rigorous scrutiny, both in terms of conceptual sense, as well as justifiability. This is primarily concerned with conceptual analysis, that is, exploring the nature and meaning of words. Even then, there are numerous ways in which we may undertake such an endeavour. For example, we might focus on definitional matters which are characterized by the pursuit of clear definitions that aim to develop analyses hinged upon necessary and sufficient conditions for the use of a word. This is typically the concern of epistemologists. Socrates is the paradigm epistemologist philosopher in this regard asking 'What is…?' type questions. His method into the cardinal virtues is well summarized by Ackah (2003: 125):

1. ***A*** believes ***p***
2. ***p*** is true
3. ***A*** has adequate evidence/reasons for ***p***

Socrates himself famously suggested that he did not seem to have satisfactory answers to his own questions, e.g. "What is courage?" (*Laches*), "What is self-control?" (*Charmides*), and "What is piety?" (*Euthyphro*), which is why he later claims that the one thing he knows is that he knows nothing. (Kraut, 2023). Such epistemological and definitional concerns can be taken to either provide insight into the nature of reality (i.e., having an ontological purpose) or else the nature of meaning (a semantic purpose). Again, my approach is to explore the latter. This is because our conceptions of reality and the problems of philosophy are mitigated through language. But does this mean that we cannot speak about reality? Not at all. As Winch (1990: 15) suggests:

> We cannot say then, ... that the problems of philosophy arise out of language rather than out of the world, because in discussing language philosophically we are in fact discussing what counts as belonging to the world. **Our idea of what belongs to the realm of reality is given for us in the language that we use. The concepts we have settle for us the form of the experience we have of the world** (my emphasis).

Hence, I'd like to suggest that there is no escaping philosophical inquiry into the nature of language, and relatedly, the mind and meaning because it forms the very medium through which we learn about what counts as knowledge. The degree to which there is a direct relationship with an external 'reality' is debatable, contested, and incipient because our understanding is limited (or extended) by the level of sophistication that we have or have not developed in terms of our conceptual frameworks. This should provide some sense of epistemic humility in this sense.

Nevertheless, a surer foundational basis for discussions over the nature of knowledge (and more specifically, the nature of specific terms) is the practice of philosophical inquiry into the meaning of words. In this case we have a better way forward, that is, better than metaphysical musing, one which explores the conceptual 'grammar' of our terms and their place in the relevant conceptual schema. In other words, we aim to develop a 'perspicuous representation' for the term in question. As Hacker (2013: 438) suggests,

> What is necessary to resolve or dissolve an aporia or to lay bare the logic of illusion is very often an overview of the conceptual landscape in which the problematic concept is located.

Questions such as 'how do we know what we think we know?' may be answered authoritatively using this approach. But there is one more step before we review the concept of virtuous leadership more directly, and that is the exploration of the distinction between knowing-that and knowing how. This will help us understand why what we're doing here is oriented towards a broad understanding

of the concept, as opposed to knowledge per se which suggests something more propositional and limited.

KNOWING-*HOW* VERSUS KNOWING-*THAT*

The distinction between knowing-that and knowing-how was made popular by Ryle (1946) in his presidential address to the Aristotelian Society. He was concerned with the 'prevailing doctrine' of intellectualism, a theory that posits that 'Intelligence is a special faculty, the exercises of which are those specific internal acts which are called acts of thinking, namely, the operations of considering propositions'. Ryle's account seems to, roughly speaking, amount to an undermining of the elitist notions of knowledge at the time, one that reduces practical knowledge to factual or propositional knowledge (hence the intellectualist label).

Following Wittgenstein, it also places knowledge (certainly knowledge about what is important in life) largely outside of the mind, and back within the practical realm of human action and ability.[1] Ryle's distinction between *knowing-how* (e.g., how to perform a practical skill) versus *knowing-that* (e.g., knowledge *about* things, propositional facts and truths) was an attack on the intellectualist dogma that knowledge somehow always needed to be cognitive or mental in nature first, and then applied. For example, Ryle (2009: 8) says: '…[w]hen a person knows how to do things of a certain sort (e.g., make good jokes, conduct battles or behave at funerals), his knowledge is actualized or exercised in what he does.' On the one hand this sounds like he is suggesting that there are two processes at work; one is at a level of factual knowledge, and then secondly, the exercise of *that* knowledge. However, in opposition to such claims, Ryle (1946: 1) suggested that:

> Intelligence is *directly exercised*… in some practical performances as in some theoretical performances …an intelligent performance need incorporate no "shadow act" of contemplating regulative propositions [my emphasis added].

Ryle draws on numerous other examples including the cases of behaviour, etiquette, teaching, legal performance in a court etc. In each case he argues that knowing-how *presupposes* knowing-that. This is to say that for Ryle, the practice or the action comes first as a matter of developing skill. It is only latterly that we have the opportunity to reflect and reason on why we acted in particular ways, why this worked etc. The problem for Ryle is that we can often confuse a devised system of retrospective intellectualized learning about skills (knowing-that) for the learning process and inculcation of the relevant skill itself (knowing-how) which he suggests is the vastly superior, '[e]ducation or training produces not blind habits but intelligent powers' through *practice* not intellectualization. In doing so, he suggests that knowing-how is the exercise, actioning, execution, manifestation, even 'actualization' of a different kind of knowledge and understanding, not of propositions *per se*, but of 'principles', norms and standards of behaviour, or in 'learning how to act'.[2]

But what kinds of expressions might count as 'knowing-*that*'? In the context of self-knowledge, Cassam (2014: 43) offers some examples:

- Knowing that you are generous (knowledge of one's character).
- Knowing that you are not a racist (knowledge of one's values).
- Knowing that you can speak Spanish (knowledge of one's abilities).

[1] cf. *OC* §51: 'In the Beginning Was the Deed'.

[2] In Wittgensteinian terms this might approximate to learning a language-game, that is: '…consisting of language and the activities into which it is woven.' (Cf., *PI* §7).

- Knowing that you are a good administrator (knowledge of one's aptitudes).
- Knowing that you are in love (knowledge of one's emotions).
- Knowing that a change of career would make you happy (knowledge of what makes one happy).

The kind of self-knowledge outlined above certainly seems useful for personal and professional development. It's harder to go about one's life if one is deluded about one's abilities, beliefs or characteristics in a fundamental sense because you will (normally) face a life of even greater challenges then you would otherwise face. Facts seem important in pragmatic ways, not purely intellectual ones. Some argue, however, that all knowledge is reducible to knowing-*that* (including knowing-how).[3] This is only partially true because experience shows us that we grow in knowledge about ourselves and the world through time (at least in principle). The central question is whether self-knowledge is even possible outside of a knowing-*how* ability. It is one thing to know that an arrow is an arrow, *prima face* as a fact (a linguistic fact as opposed to a metaphysical fact), but seeing as what is to count as an arrow is primarily to know what *kind* of thing an arrow is, we can see how it could be argued that knowing-how could be reducible to a knowing-*that* kind in one sense; there doesn't seem to be one without the other. In the case of the arrow, however, the concept is meaningless outside of knowing-*how* ability – namely, to think about the role that the term 'arrow' plays in the language-game of competitive archery. This includes knowledge of what to do with it, where to place it on the bow string, how to use it and how to use it well. To try and reduce that skill-based knowledge to propositional forms (e.g., the arrow rises and falls, will pierce flesh etc.) is simply misleading.

Typically, knowing-how might suggest a practice of some sort, which seems to imply the application of both mental knowledge and practical *skills*, though not necessarily the discreet mental knowledge supposed by some intellectualists. Broadly construed such skills might include,

- Language skills (learning facts, grammatical rules and idioms)
- Reflective skills (ability to reflect and gain knowledge about yourself, strengths, weaknesses, values and goals)
- Career skills (knowledge)
- Interpersonal skills (surface relations/ people management)
- Interview skills (interpersonal skills)
- Relationships with others (deeper relations, emotion regulation)
- Health insights (physical and mental well-being)
- Practical skills (tricks on a bike/ art/ magic/ climbing trees/ fishing/ play-fighting/ card tricks/ DIY/ making rope swings/ fires/ bows and arrows), and
- Practical wisdom (good judgement in everyday matters)

[3] cf. Stanley & Williamson (2001).

Wittgenstein draws a related distinction between technique (learning fixed rules in systems of knowledge) and judgement (knowledge gained through experience and intuition). In the context of knowing the feelings of others, Wittgenstein states:

> Can one learn this knowledge? Yes; some can learn it. Not, however, by taking a course of study in it, but through 'experience'…Can someone else be a man's teacher in this? Certainly. From time to time he gives him the right tip. —– This is what 'learning' and 'teaching' are like here. —– What one acquires here is not a technique; one learns correct judgements. There are also rules, but they do not form a system, and only experienced people can apply them rightly. Unlike calculating rules. (*PPF* §355)

A telling remark is that 'these do not form a system'. Here Wittgenstein is alerting us to the impulse towards generalizing about that kind of knowledge too tightly. There is only so far that a rule, a proposition, or a fact can take us, the real benefit lies in the ability of a person to perform good judgements of how these 'facts' fit in to a given system of concern appropriate to answering the question at hand in a given situation. Similarly, as Ryle suggests in the context of practical wisdom, 'Aristotle was talking about how people learn to behave wisely, not how they are drilled into acting mechanically' (Ryle, 2009: 15). This distinction has huge implications, for pedagogical practice among other areas. Crucially of interest for us here, is how we *learn* to develop as a person. It might seem sensible to suggest that it is not through the learning by rote of the principles of life, or in repeating mantras, or in forcing certain behaviours that we learn how to live a good life.

Ryle's critique does throw a criticism at disciplinarian approaches to teaching which he equates with teaching a seal. For example, he contrasts a 'recruit' (i.e., a student, initiate) with an animal: 'Unlike the seal he [the recruit] becomes a judge of his own performance - he learns what mistakes are and how to avoid or correct them [parenthesis added]'. This seems to be the very mark of intelligence (or perhaps 'insight') for Ryle. This helps to support arguments that suggest that agency and autonomy are crucial in the context of meaningful learning and development. I may have the potential as a human being to develop musical talent, and indeed the ability to master it, but I may choose to do nothing with it for an ability (once learned) need not be strengthened and may be subject to neglect. If someone struggles with motivation, they may even choose not to apply their vocational abilities to work, for example. Winch (2006: 74) too agrees with Ryle in this important sense:

> …autonomy requires one to be able to engage in a form of practical reasoning concerning one's own ends in life. The outcome of the exercise of autonomy should be a course of action based on *one's own motivation* (my emphasis).

Although the concept of knowing-that is useful in fundamental ways, knowing-how seems to require of us greater intelligence and insight. And as Hacker (2013: 3) suggests, the 'former is not in general reducible to the latter'. The duality of knowing-how is perhaps akin to learning a language. Whereas knowledge of verbs and cases is important for general mastery, it is the *practice* of speaking a language (learning all the idioms and body language that helps to communicate effectively), that is more important.[4] This indicates a broad range of knowing abilities for sure. On this view, know-how

[4] This is also relevant to current debates about the educational challenges and issues raised by the emergence of Chat GPT. However, whilst AI can mimic ordinary language, it cannot replicate contextual insight. As Professor Korkontzelos (2023) recently conceded in his inaugural lecture, no matter the potential of AI, at best, we are a 'long way off' from it being able to interpret and communicate cultural and other nuances in the kinds of contextual communications that indicate true human-like intelligence [quoted remark paraphrased]. This suggests that there is potential for a re-focusing of educational practice, away from simple regurgitation of 'facts' (knowing-that forms), and towards a re-evaluation of the importance of criticality and insight (knowing-

seems on one hand to be a *background* knowledge or range of assumptions about how to go about with knowledge (e.g., awareness of concepts and schemes and how to operate within them). A form of learning how to learn. On another, it is a kind of *practical* knowledge (or skill) which might typically include activities such as riding a bike, handwriting, drawing, or playing a musical instrument etc. I'd like to suggest that *both* uses are forms of practical judgement. This seems to be a position that intellectualists like Stanley & Williamson (2017) may also, recently, be willing to concede.[5] Nonetheless, Hacker (2013: 153) articulates at least three central uses of *know-how*, and these will be relevant here:

> What is possessed when one has achieved mastery of an art or craft is practical knowledge or know-how. We may distinguish, in Aristotelian spirit, between the know-how of making (mastery of a craft) the successful exercise of which produces an artefact that is good of its kind, the know-how of educating (of cultivating analytic powers, teaching intellectual and practical skills, inculcating virtues), and the know-how of doing (e.g. mastery of the art of medicine, the arts of politics or of war, the performing arts). All involve acquisition of information and principles to a greater or lesser degree. But neither information nor maxims suffice for mastery of a craft or art.

Hacker's 'know-how' schema seems to suggest 1) mastery of a craft, 2) mastery of analytic powers, and 3) mastery at work. Self-knowledge and understanding, then, seem to be evidence of maturation in a given domain of knowledge, what seems to differ is a matter of degree in the level of maturity, skill, and ability. Hence, whether or not someone masters a particular skill-set will rely hugely on the degree to which we (as a culture) *value* such skills.[6] Ryle (1946) and Cassam (2014) both articulate their own distinctive version of conceptions of knowing-how, and both are targeted to avoid rationalist or intellectualist excess in their conceptions of knowledge. Hacker (2013) builds on these insights to help form a richer schema for know-how.

AN ANALYSIS OF VIRTUOUS LEADERSHIP USING A TWO-PRONGED METHOD

So far I have problematized the nature of knowledge and suggested that a more fruitful way to address conceptual problems is through conceptual work or conceptual analysis. This entails at once a background picture for how knowledge works, but crucially entails a particular set of skills in knowing how to manage knowledge effectively in context. But what does this approach look like in practice? Although there is a wide degree if variance in terms of practice and key concepts, I take 'conceptual analysis' to entail two key methodological components.[7] These are:

I. ***Connective analysis***,[8] which considers the *relationships* between the concept in question and related terms in the network. This requires an intermediate ordering or arrangement

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how). Also see remarks in Chapter 1 (section 5) on the contrast and distinction between 'following' a rule and 'according with' a rule.

[5] 'Knowledge depends on skill. A scientist knows that one theory is better than another, through her skill at assessing such theories. A wine-taster knows that the wine in front of him is a Bordeaux, through his skill at wine-tasting. An outfielder knows where the fly-ball will land, through his skill at fielding.' (Stanley & Williamson, 2017: 713)

[6] In an era where scientism is one of the underlying forces of modern culture, and where knowing-that kinds of knowledge is privileged in the school-system (and even in the academy), it is not hard to see why the humanities are being undermined, (e.g., through loss of funding or reduced access to humanities degree programs).

[7] Cf. Mountbatten-O'Malley (2024). For a fuller explanation of this method, also see Hacker (2013: Appendix).

[8] Originally coined by Strawson (1992) to highlight the complex interconnectedness of concepts in their relationships with one another. Hacker also uses this term extensively to suggest the possibility of a conceptual 'map' (cf. Hacker, 2007: 438 & 448).

that should not be seen dogmatically. Any such ordering is merely *one way* of organising the conceptual landscape within a range of logical possibilities. It is then, at least partially, about making arrangements in order to provide a clearer *way of seeing* a given problem. Connections may be in the linguistic mode (looking at words) or else in the conceptual mode (looking at conceptual relations).

II. ***Conceptual elucidation***,[9] which explores the direct *logical consequences* of the use of a given term. This amounts to an exploration of the rules for use for given word and might typically include the use of elucidatory cases to help contextualize general remarks. It might also include objects of comparison as a temporary 'yardstick' (cf. *PI* §131-2) with which to compare and contrast features of our concepts in specific contexts. The result should be clarification on occasion-sensitive truths, and hence, confidence in assertability.

It may be worth clarifying firstly that the term 'virtuous leadership' has a technical meaning. Seeing as numerous authors and presenters at this conference will already be exploring the literature explicitly, my focus will be on an analysis of the conceptual terrain for virtue and leadership exploring implications for any ordinary meaning of the term (as opposed to developing a tight theoretical exposition).

THE ROLE OF 'REASONING' IN VIRTUE

The concept of virtue has a rich heritage and history. For the purposes of this section, we need only identify that broadly speaking, what we mean by virtue. Typically, for a virtue to count as a virtue we need to assume the human two-way power of agency (Cf. Mountbatten-O'Malley, 2024). Virtues and vices only make sense if human beings have capacities to develop *reasons* for their actions. In other words, neither animals nor automata can be virtuous (although they may still make simple decisions; in the former sense due to instinct, in the latter sense, due to algorithmic programming by human beings). Virtuosity is an attribution that only human beings may logically be attributed with. In this regard, Hacker (2007: 107) draws attention to a distinction between one and two-way powers, that is, between *agential* and *procedural* powers.[10] For example, he contrasts 'one-way volitional powers' (typical for most simple animals and all biological or chemical processes) with 'two-way volitional powers' (the powers virtually unique to human beings or perhaps some intelligent animals). These are, 'powers to do things that we can do or refrain from doing at will'.

Of course, within Western thought we tend to associate virtue with flourishing (*eudaimonia*). Socrates, Plato and Aristotle all correlated this aspect of virtue in particular. For example, Socrates related his conception of flourishing directly to 'virtue and knowledge' (cf. Crisp xxx: viii). This is no small part of the reason why he was willing to die for his values for otherwise he may well lose his whole life's purpose (i.e., *eudaimonia*). Although Aristotle was motivated towards similar conclusions his focus (due to his reliance on his *Function* argument) was to focus on 'reasons' for action. Even today, Hacker (2013: 1) suggests: 'our deeds are explained teleologically by reference to our goals and purposes, and by the reasons and motives for which we act'. Hence what matters most in this sense is that reasoning (as opposed to mere knowledge) is itself a virtuous activity. This suggests that

[9] The term, 'elucidation' is often used by Hacker to help to outline Wittgenstein's elucidatory aims of philosophy (cf. Hacker, 2007: 11-17). In *PI* §90, Wittgenstein compares 'light' with 'purpose', and in doing so suggests that in problematic cases, the sense and meaning of an utterance are together understood best when compared and contrasted with vivid pictures of 'hidden' non-sense.

[10] Also see Reid (2010) for an earlier exposition of the concept of 'two-way powers'.

Aristotle was more applied in some important respects with regards to practical knowledge (*phronesis*) than was Socrates.

SOME USES OF THE CONCEPT OF 'LEADERSHIP'

Similarly, the notion of leadership has both technical as well as ordinary meanings. In an ordinary sense, below are some typical uses of the concept of leadership:

- "Her leadership during the crisis should be praised."
- "What most people want to see is determined, decisive action and firm leadership."
- "And the tragedy for me... is that there is not strong enough leadership in the countries."
- "He has leadership qualities and gives a lot of energy to other players."
- "The board under her leadership increased disciplinary action against officers."
- "The struggling organization lacks clear leadership."
- "Weak leadership hurts the entire company."
- "His overreach is also a reminder of the flaws in the strongman model of leadership."
- "They leave a school where the leadership is not good."
- "There is a dearth of leadership in the present Labour leadership election."

These uses suggest the kinds of qualities (good or bad) of a leader or leadership culture. What is implied here is the capacity to make good decisions, which entails having access to knowledge and applying it well. What is also implied is of course the kinds of traits that supports virtuous leadership practices, such as understanding, self-awareness, confidence, persuasiveness, and the ability to convey a compelling vision. Conversely, what is also implied is the assessment of opposites (vices vs virtues), such as narcissism, callousness, greed, selfishness, ignorance, or manipulation – all o which are associated with vicious leadership.

We have other examples:

- "No one wanted to take on the leadership role."
- "Would he like to see new blood in the party leadership?"
- "The vacuum in leadership is another concern."
- "He's got a huge leadership role to play in English cricket."

These suggest characterizations or assessments about positions, roles, or reputations where there is an expectation of responsibility tied to the role.

But what about 'virtuous' leadership? Let's have a look at what we mean by 'virtue'. Here we have more complexity:

- "What a virtuous person!" (good character trait)
- "She could have established her own innocence and virtue easily enough." (good character trait)
- "Her flaws were as large as her virtues." (good character trait)
- "Humility is considered his greatest virtue." (good character trait)
- "It is a human virtue to take comfort from small things." (good character trait)
- "But ask him now if honesty is a virtue and he says absolutely." (good character trait)
- "We all felt ashamed in the face of such virtue." (good character trait)

- “Patience is a virtue” (good character trait)
- “Virtue is not confined to those who follow a faith.” (good character trait)
- “They made a virtue out of a crisis.” (benefit)
- “Staying positive' is usually presented as one of cricket's cardinal virtues.” (benefits)
- “There was no virtue in returning the way we had come.” (sense/ reason)
- “Its other great virtue, of course, is its hard-wearing quality.” (quality or benefit)
- “Lowering public spending is both a necessity and a virtue and that will require imaginative change.” (good decision)
- “There's no virtue in suffering in silence.” (benefit)
- “The article stuck in my mind by virtue of one detail.” (because of)
- “Mr Obelecha has British residency by virtue of his marriage.” (because of)

Hence, we have a range of uses, not all related to what we might typically associate virtue with in these contexts (e.g. relating to benefits/ reasons)… but importantly, what we mean by ‘virtuous leadership’ is something like ‘leaders of *good* character.’ Of course, famously, what counts as ‘good’ is largely a matter of context and culture.[11] So in one context the ability to make effective decisions that pulls people in might be praised (i.e. in a time-sensitive crisis) - whilst in other contexts more inclusive, empathetic, or deliberative leadership methods are what is expected. But in all cases, virtuous leadership is based on an assessment of *character*. The kind of character that is benevolent and yet effective in the context of the particular needs in a given moment. This is important because during crises leaders often defend the need for authoritarian styles of leadership and although there will always be defenders of this approach, I suggest it’s hard to argue that there is anything at all virtuous about authoritarian styles of leadership, no matter the context.

THE COVID RESPONSE – AN EXEMPLAR OF VICIOUS LEADERSHIP

The recent COVID crisis is a case in point with authoritarianism being defended and spreading across the world, pushing our Western-Liberal democratic values to breaking point. In the UK, the intentional manipulation of *perception* of risk to life (using behavioural science methods) was driving public fear has led to widespread support for some of the most momentous peace time restrictions on liberty during peacetime. In fact, populations were crying out for more restrictions and the Government was criticised for not doing enough. Although the Government must rightly do everything it can to protect the public, it must do so in ways that are proportionate to the risk. It must strike the right balance between respect for civil liberties and the legitimate aims for the protection of public health.

Yet, Government justifications for the introduction of a wave of emergency powers seemed to have been predicated on misleading mortality statistics based on highly misleading PCR tests, poor use of modelling, and terrible changes to how deaths were counted on death certificates, contributing to what I termed in an online blog for UKAJI (Mountbatten-O’Malley, 2020) as a ‘perfect sensationalist

[11] As Hacker (2007: 133) suggests: ‘What is deemed a necessity today may have been unnecessary in the past, or a luxury rather than a necessity, or altogether unimaginable. Neither absolute nor minimal needs are simply statistical notions, but rather partly normative ones, the former being dependent upon the axiological conception of health, the latter upon the conception of the requirements of a tolerable human life.’

storm of error'. As I suggested, this cannot be the basis for Government policy if we are to safeguard a healthy democracy. This recent crisis exemplified the patent risks we have in terms of assessing virtuous leadership. We might ask, which, if any, leadership virtues were evident during the crisis? I can't think of any. Almost every decision was a bad one. Decisions were made either sluggishly, or rashly, or else based on poor data and evidence, and with a blatant disregard for both the virtues of truth (epistemic insouciance, a la Cassam, 2019) and our fundamental liberal values.

The results of poor leadership are almost always evidence in practice too. As we have seen since, the damage of Government interventions likely caused many more deaths than lives they saved (cf. Jenkins et al, 2021, Miles et al, 2021) and it seems that we would have been better off not doing either anything at all, or at least following the Swedish model which was based on 'guidance' and voluntary isolation etc.[12] There was not just a character gap during this period, but there was gap in ethics, a gap in meaningful consultation with a wide variety of experts, and a dearth in concern for the ordinary people affected by Government policies. Decisions were largely based on instrumental ends, which invariably lead to widespread policy harms and dehumanization of particular groups affected (often, as in this case, it is the socially or economically disadvantaged that bear the brunt of poor decision-making, cf. Broadbent et al, 2020). Indeed, thousands needlessly lost their lives, and they died in the context of the entirely predictable consequences of poor epistemic practices and vicious leadership styles.

But I do not wish to focus here on the problems of vicious leadership during COVID per se as this will take us off track a little. There is more to be said about what *virtuous* leadership might look like, and as suggested initially, virtuous practices are always based on collective insights, collective wisdom, and collective intelligence. Hence it is to Nonaka's notion of 'Ba' in the context of 'collective intelligence' that I now turn.

A SKETCH OF NONAKA'S CONCEPTION OF 'BA' & EMERGENCE

The context for Nonaka & Konno's (1998) paper on the Japanese concept of 'Ba' (originally highlighted by Nishida, 1970, 1990) is primarily corporate management. The concept denotes something like 'place' or rather, 'a shared space for emerging relationships'. It underlines a certain sensitivity to the context of knowledge (or knowledge 'creation' as Nonaka & Konno puts it) and it recognises the importance of relationships and the social construction of knowledge. Nonaka & Konno articulate the notion of this shared space as a 'self-transcendent' process where the self is recognised for its limits and collective knowledge is valued. For example, he develops a theoretical framework for how knowledge is created in these social environments where explicit and tacit knowledge is seen in dynamic and symbiotic terms, each aspect of knowledge complimenting the other to help form a new kind of knowledge that is enriched by this process and is 'owned' by no one in particular, but is rather co-created by the whole. This new kind of knowledge is made possible, then, not merely by the bringing people together, but by doing so in ways that are underpinned by shared values, norms, and purposes. In other words, it is an intentional practice of being together (in the experiential and phenomenal sense) and sharing together (in the epistemological sense). Therefore, the notion of 'Ba' is a means by which not only is the whole human being recognised (psychological, emotional, intellectual, physical etc.) but also the whole group is given an elevated

[12] E.g., in a major study by the hugely respected Johns Hopkins University suggested that '[o]ur study fails to demonstrate significant positive effects of mandated behavioral changes (lockdowns)' (Herby et al, 2022), yet we know that the collateral damage to both lives and the economy was staggering and unprecedented.

status whereby the whole is seen to be more, much more, than the sum of its parts. In this sense, the 'self is freed' to become more than it might otherwise be; it becomes a greater self.

What is most interesting for me, is that the process (which Nonaka & Konno label as 'externalization') is premised not only on shared values, but also on shared practices and techniques. For example, some of the techniques mentioned include use of a) figurative or metaphorical language b) visual thinking, c) and, importantly, dialogue. Indeed, Nonaka & Konno suggest that it is 'through dialogue' that an 'individual's mental models and skills are converted into common terms and concepts'. I believe that this is truly profound because what Nonaka & Konno is suggesting here is that dialogue assists with developing a common language where deep communication is made possible. The ethical implication for leaders is made clearer by Nonaka & Konno later in his paper when he suggests that it is the role of leaders to 'embrace and foster the dynamism of knowledge creation'. He goes further to imply that this is in fact a duty to nurture spaces of 'emergence'. This is very interesting in the context of some of the points raised already in the context of the normativity (rule-bound nature) of knowledge, the benefits of know-how (which he associates with practical skills as I have mentioned as well) and the role of reasoning for virtuous leadership. Importantly, however, it is powerful in the context of Nonaka & Konno raising the importance of recognition of the existential situatedness of the members of a particular 'Ba' community, i.e., a recognition of their values, beliefs, emotions, and their inherent dignity, their humanity.

CREATIVE CONNECTIONS – 'BA' AND 'WORLD CAFÉ'

I've been a world café practitioner and host since around 2013. World café is an innovative and creative method of dialogue facilitation using artistic means to achieve a kind of 'collective' knowledge and insight. Essentially it entails having small group discussions on tables that are laid out with paper tablecloths and pens. There are a number of principles that support the world café methodology (seven in all) which, according to Brown & Issacs (2005) include:

1. **Setting the context**: ensuing that purpose of the event is clear and everyone knows why they are there.
2. **Creating a hospital space**: for example, one that feels inviting, informal, and inclusive. Typically this is achieved by using flowers, plants, soft background music, and informal layouts.
3. **Exploring questions that matter**: crafting compelling questions that address meaningful concerns for the group, usually in consultation with a small cohort of the participants.
4. **Encouraging everyone's contribution**: making explicit the inclusive nature of the event and making allowances for introverts, the disabled or impaired, and encouraging an environment of horizontal power in the room.
5. **Cross pollinate and connect diverse perspectives**: this is a crucial element. In short, attendees move between tables in rounds and so there is a sense of dynamism in the room as different groups connect with each other on shared questions.
6. **Listen together for patterns and insights**: through practicing shared listening and paying attention to themes, patterns and insights - as these emerge - attendees begin to gain a sense for deeper connections to the larger whole.
7. **Share collective discoveries**: Conversations held at one table reflect a pattern of wholeness that connects with the conversations at the other tables. This last phase is often called the "harvest" because it involves the host making this pattern of wholeness more explicit and visible to everyone in a large group conversation. It involves drawing out the 'collective intelligence' of everyone in the room.

This ‘collective intelligence’ is fundamental to the core purpose of the method. As Brown & Issacs (2005: xii) have said:

> …[collective intelligence is] the wisdom we possess as a group that is unavailable to us as individuals. This wisdom emerges as we get more and more connected with each other, as we move from conversation to conversation, carrying the ideas from one conversation to another, looking for patterns, suddenly surprised by an insight we all share. There’s a good scientific explanation for this, because this is how all life works. As separate ideas or entities become connected to each other, life surprises us with emergence—the sudden appearance of new capacity and intelligence.

In short, the group is seen in terms of a system of people thinking together, voluntarily and in deep connection and relationship with each other:

> The World Café process is not simply an interesting vehicle for the random emergence of collective intelligence. Rather, it embodies a simple but intentional architecture of engagement—creating the conditions for the arrival of serendipitous discoveries, new patterns of meaning, and the “voice in the center of the room”—especially in groups that are larger than most traditional dialogue circles. (ibid, 117).

Now there are many examples I can give in terms of how world café has been used worldwide and by various kinds of groups to achieve this ‘collective intelligence’. For example, as an action research method (World Café Community Foundation, 2024 & Kitzie et al, 2020), as well as a form of deliberative democracy (Narada Obywatelska, 2019). I too have used the method in these ways, both as a research methodology to help establish community issues facing vulnerable groups supported by mental health service providers during the age of austerity (Mountbatten-O’Malley, 2013), as well more recently through my social enterprise (FlourishCafé, 2023a) helping to inform a 17 county sustainability strategy in the North of England (FlourishCafé, 2023b) as well as culture strategies for both mid-Wales (FlourishCafé, 2023c) and the South West of England (FlourishCafé, 2023d).

But what I wanted to briefly focus on what I consider to be the transformative power of the method to engage and facilitate community leadership. In February I hosted an event in Twerton (a socially disadvantaged area of Bath). In attendance was a small group of local residents, numbering about 15 and the space was tiny; we could barely move between tables. Despite the small space, it was immediately clear to me as I began to introduce the method and approach for the day, that we had a lively group. They were engaging with each other well, listing into one another, sharing histories and hopes. By the end of the session we had some people in tears as the powerful emotion of hope was unleashed. Attendees developed a vision for their community, one that was filled with local pride, local action, local connection. One of the great ideas that came out from the event was a carnival for Twerton. At the time we only had a carnival for Bath City, so it seemed rather far-fetched. However, little did we know that one of the attendees was a local councillor who had a place at the table for the planning of the year’s city carnival. As a result of this event, Twert Lush (2023) happened. This was a local carnival with a line up of speakers, musical performers, creative family activities etc. What happened is that the hopes and dreams of the local community came to life as a direct result of this tiny little FlourishCafé event.

For me, what this event helped to showcase is that local leaders can listen and can act to create meaningful change for local communities. That local communities can also act in their own right as agents of change, and that this transformative process can be facilitated through creative methodologies, dialogue, and a space of ‘collective intelligence’ and knowledge emergence.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

In summary, I have endeavoured to highlight that although knowledge is socially constructed, it is normative, that is, it is rule-bound conceptually. The understanding of our terms is therefore a skill that we develop as we mature as competent users of the English language. Further still, that in order to gain insight into conceptual and philosophical problems, we need a little more know-how that the average person might have. This is a skill that we can nurture through philosophical inquiry, engagement, and dialogue where our ability to reason is of prime importance.

Applying some of the techniques to notions of leadership and virtuous leadership in particular, I have aimed to highlight why virtuous leadership is founded on deliberative and ethical processes, even in a crisis (especially in a crisis). Traits such as moral courage and vision matter here immensely. As suggested, during the COVID crisis, we had a dearth of moral courage or vision and instead we saw knee-jerk responses to public pressure that was fed by deeply unethical and problematic behavioural science techniques that were designed to terrify the public. Further still, the environment of moral panic contributed to an environment where a litany of poor decisions was made by out leaders. Rather than founding policies on ethical foundations and solid science, we were all swept up in a kind of social madness where the most vulnerable were harmed immensely, including the elderly, the poor, and minority groups. What this helps us to appreciate is the value of virtuous leadership, not merely from a philosophical perspective, but from a practical one. If our leaders are not informed by sound ethics and virtues then people suffer, needlessly.

Yet, there is hope for us as a society even though we are in a shockingly bad milieu and loss of faith in politics, science, and our central public institutions. As I suggested, through my exploration of Nonaka & Konno's conception of 'Ba' as contextualized through the world café method and my work with FlourishCafé, there is a way for leaders to develop virtuous practices that respects both the inherent dignity of every person, as well as contributes to an environment and transformative space of emergence. The challenge for us today is whether we can persuade political leaders to let go of the old ways of doing things and be open to the real and genuine possibility of emergent 'collective intelligence'.

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