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Essays on Practical Ethics

From Virtue to Competence: Changing the Principles of Public Service

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Virtue has long been a central principle in the tradition of public service—to what extent is it still relevant today? Focusing on the role of the monitoring officer, a key official in the ethical framework of local government in the United Kingdom, this essay asks which virtues, if any, are still needed for public service and whether these virtues have been displaced by managerial notions of technical competence as the principles of public service delivery. The authors draw an initial distinction between virtue and competence that, upon further investigation, does not appear to be sustainable. Despite being drawn from two different academic perspectives—moral philosophy and management development—the concepts of virtue and competence are, in practice, very similar. This theoretical convergence is reflected in the practical concerns of monitoring officers and their perspective on public service ethics.

Good governance has historically been bound up with ideas of the virtuous ruler—and indeed the virtuous citizen—but the bureaucratization of modern government has emphasized the importance of managerial efficiency over personal virtue. Intuitively, there seems to be a notable distinction between the concepts of virtue and competence. Whereas virtue is bound up in ideas of morality, offering perspectives that shape the way we live, competence embodies notions of learned skills and technical efficiency. More fundamentally, virtue is internal (but not innate), although it has outward consequences: "Virtues are character traits which we need to live humanly flourishingly lives" (Oakley and Cocking 2001, 18).[1] In contradistinction, competence highlights action rather than character, as it is "built around the fundamental principle of demonstrating capability" (Naquin and Holton 2003, 25).

This theoretical delineation has been academically reinforced by the frequent location of virtue and competence within the distinct academic fields of moral philosophy and management development, respectively. Although these two areas are separate, they are by no means mutually exclusive, and one major sphere of confluence is the area of public service management, which seeks to promote managerial efficiency while keeping a constant eye on the public good—that is, it seeks to do well while doing good. Nowhere is this more apparent that in the realm of local government in the United Kingdom, where a new ethical framework, introduced in the Local Government Act of 2000, has attempted to promote personal standards of behavior and integrity through a system of codes, regulations, and compliance.[2] Key questions in local government, then, include the following: To what extent do public officials, both elected and appointed, simply process moral standards? Is this situation compatible with individual conscience and moral choice? Indeed, to what extent are monitoring officers guided by their own personal codes of ethics? Just how virtuous are our public officials? To what extent is ethics perceived as the application of a legalistic code, or is it actually concerned with developing moral judgment in individuals?

Our research specifically explored the extent to which monitoring officers feel supported by their relevant local authority and are integrated within its ethical framework.[3] As part of this research, we attempted to identify the key knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) that allow monitoring officers to successfully carry out their roles and responsibilities. These KSAs seemed to fall into the two broad areas of virtue and competence. Furthermore, initial analysis seemed to indicate that monitoring officers were more predisposed toward virtue as the dominant foundation of their work.

Closer inspection reveals, however, that the two concepts are far more closely interlinked: Competencies embody certain virtues, whereas virtues require competence in order to successfully implement them through virtuous actions. Indeed, this convergence is increasingly reflected in modern literature, although it can actually be traced back several centuries. We are left, then, with two possible approaches. First, the two concepts should be kept distinct; comparing virtue and competence is akin to comparing apples and oranges. Second, and perhaps more challengingly, we can look to a future in which the two are regarded as symbiotic, recognizing that many managerial competencies have innate virtues. This argument has significant implications for those theorists who wish to bring virtue back into the public management fold—it may well be the case that it has never been more strongly contained within it.

This paper, therefore, explores two classic conceptions of virtue developed in political philosophy, describes the new ethical framework for local government in the United Kingdom, and reports our research findings on the role of the monitoring officer.

The Historical Virtues of Public Service

Aristotle provides the classic Western exposition of public virtue, inextricably linking the notions of moral and political life.[4] For Aristotle (1947, 1103a, 1–10),[5] virtue is an excellence (*arête*) that can be divided into two types—intellectual and moral—reflecting the twin elements that make man (in the gender-specific sense) specifically human, that is, his reason and ability to make moral judgments through language: "It is a characteristic of man that he alone has any sense of good and evil, of just and unjust" (1988, 1253a, 16–17). Virtue is the means by which we become fully human because it allows us to fulfill our particular human end, the eudemonic good life.[6] Over the years, the term *eudemonia* has been translated in different ways, either as "happiness," "bliss," or even simply as "well-being." The concept relates to Aristotle's teleological belief that something can only be understood and fulfilled once it has reached its natural end. The natural end for an acorn, for example, is to become an oak; for man, it is to achieve eudemonia. The good life can thus be recognized, understood and, most importantly, attained. Aristotle's virtue theory, therefore, necessarily prioritizes the good over the right, a distinction that remains crucial to virtue ethics today (Mangini 2000; Oakley and Cocking 2001).

Aristotle's prioritization of the good allowed him to identify a number of concrete moral virtues—courage, temperance, pride, good temper, friendliness, and truthfulness—that, as excellences of human character, enable man to live the good life. Each of these virtues occupies the middle ground between two extreme positions (echoing Aristotle's doctrine of the golden mean) and can be cultivated in man by habitually practicing virtuous actions. Intellectual virtues—philosophy, science, art, and practical wisdom (*phronesis*)—relate directly to the soul and can be learned through more formal methods of teaching. Practical wisdom is of particular importance because it facilitates political thought and enables man to determine the nature of other virtues: "Political wisdom and practical wisdom are the same state of mind, but their essence is not the same" (1947, 1141b, 25–30). Aristotle further states, "Virtue, then, is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e. the mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it" (1947, 1107a, 1–5).

Not only is virtue necessary for good governance, but it is also political in a broader sense, as it cannot be cultivated or practiced outside of the polis. Man can only achieve eudemonia inside the polis because it is only this particular form of association that facilitates the development of his human self. It is crucial here to remember that Aristotle is referring specifically to male citizens: One of the reasons the polis is so important is that it has the requisite social structure (with subordinate roles for women and, of course, slaves) to allow man the time to practice virtuous actions. It is the self-sufficiency of the polis that allows moral and intellectual development to take place (1988, 1326b, 30). In this sense, all virtues are intimately connected to both public and political life: The polis enables virtues to be cultivated, which, in turn, helps man to achieve his natural good of eudemonia. This is why, as Aristotle argues, "he who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must either be a beast or a god: he is no part of a state" (1988, 1253a, 25–30).

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Unlike Aristotle, however, modern liberal thinking tends to distinguish much more between the public and private spheres, even though clear boundaries between the two are highly complex and difficult to organize. A different approach is to see the distinction between public and private in terms of "manners of acting" (Steinberger 1999). Public acts take on the character of regulations and procedures; private acts are characterized by warmth, intimacy and affection. It is the form of acting rather than the sphere of action that is important. Liberal ideology has prioritized the right over the good, arguing that there is no single "good life" for everybody, and therefore individuals have the right to choose whichever good suits them best. This prioritization has seen the end of teleological assumptions about the natural ends of human beings, and with it a decline in the notion of virtue as a means of achieving the good life.

Machiavelli (1994) offers a second conception of virtue, which again is inextricably linked with political life. Unlike the Aristotelian view, however, Machiavelli's concept has traditionally been seen as the antithesis of the theory of the good: Europe was shocked when Machiavelli proposed that the supposedly virtuous leader should so flagrantly disregard traditional moral values and instead lie, cheat, deceive, and engage in acts of utmost cruelty. Machiavelli's notoriety was gained in no small measure because his concept of *virtù* was equated with traditional ideas of Christian virtue. This reputation is, of course, grossly unfair. Machiavelli, himself a committed republican bureaucrat, always emphasized the need for leaders to act for the public good. His admiration for the scheming and brutal cruelty of Cesare Borgia, including the murder and public bisection of his trusted lieutenant, D'Orco, always overshadowed his disgust with the very similar actions of Agathocles of Sicily (Machiavelli 1994, 24, 28–29). This point is perhaps more readily understood when reading *The Discourses* in addition to *The Prince*, in which, for example, Machiavelli praises the Roman general Valerius, who got the best out of his troops precisely because he treated them with kindness (1994, 200–204). Indeed, the overreliance on Machiavelli's most (in)famous work continues today, and it is particularly prevalent in management literature that seeks to co-opt Machiavelli in giving advice on business leadership and strategy (Macaulay and Lawton 2003).

Perhaps more importantly, it reflects a misunderstanding of the word *virtù* itself. Unlike Aristotle, Machiavelli did not put forward a number of specific virtues that represent excellences of human character. Instead, virtù denotes more general skills and excellences pertaining to leadership, including military prowess, diplomatic sensitivity, an understanding of one's subjects' character, and so on. As Wootton shows, Machiavelli is not so much virtuous as a *virtuoso* (Machiavelli 1994, xxix). Machiavelli's virtù, therefore, is not a moral concept in the tradition of Aristotle, although it is still very much connected with right or proper action. Machiavelli's conflation of virtue and skill arguably fits more comfortably with notions of managerial (or leadership) competence than with the moral character traits of virtue theory. Virtù is easily demonstrable and has clearly understood results, whether in terms of successful battles, the acquisition of land, or simply good diplomacy. Machiavelli's definition prepares the groundwork for the tension between the concepts of virtue and competence.

Virtue and Management

Unlike governance and politics, the area of management has long been considered bereft of virtue and virtuous behavior. Perhaps the most important—and almost certainly the most influential—exponent of this position is Alasdair MacIntyre, whose concept of *virtue ethics* depicts the character of the bureaucratic manager as distinctively lacking in virtue. MacIntyre argues that regardless of whether he or she is operating in a private or a public organization, the bureaucratic manager relies on a system of knowledge that promotes efficiency and effectiveness—looks at controlling means rather than ends—and therefore leaves no room for moral debate. For MacIntyre, managers are "seen by themselves, and by those who see them with the same eyes as their own, as uncontested figures, who purport to restrict themselves to the realms in which rational agreement is possible—that is, of course, from their point of view to the realm of fact, the realm of means, the realm of measurable effectiveness" (1985, 30).

There can be no such managerial knowledge, however, because it is erroneously based on that of the social sciences, which foolishly seeks to find an equivalent of the natural sciences: "[T]he salient fact about those sciences is the absence of the discovery of any law-like generalisations whatsoever" (1985, 88). MacIntyre accordingly portrays managers not as omniscient and all powerful but as impotent, affecting their organizations *despite* rather than *because* of their managerial expertise. Thus, claims about managerial knowledge are doomed to fail because they are part of the wider problem of modernity, which actively seeks to substitute emotivism for sound moral judgment. MacIntyre uses the term *emotivism* to denote the liberal worldview, which broadly holds that all moral perspectives are equally admissible, and therefore moral debate is not about what is right or wrong but is restricted to persuading people that one point of view is preferable. For MacIntyre, the problem is a result of the Enlightenment project, which abandoned the concept of the teleological good life and instead promoted the right of individuals to discover their own *telos.*

MacIntyre's perspective on the managerial character has been criticized on a number of different fronts. Most commonly, it is argued that MacIntyre is simply wrong—that his discussion rests on a caricature of the bureaucratic manager rather than genuine character traits (Nash 1995). Other commentators have noted that the concept of the amoral manager completely ignores the many examples of corporate social responsibility that underpin morally decent organizations: "[M]any real life managers and management theorists do not so readily divorce rationality from morality" (Randels 1995, 205). Finally, it has been suggested that MacIntyre's characterization of the manager actually asks a number of different moral questions simultaneously—descriptive, normative, and analytical—inevitably creating a lack of clarity (Goodpaster 1995). More importantly, several commentators now have suggested that public management provides an interface for these two traditions in which virtue can once again play an important role.

The demands made on officials across the public services have increased in scope and scale in recent years. Unlike the classic model of bureaucracy, officials are no longer located within a particular hierarchy and do not merely carry out duties determined by those above them, particularly policy makers. The extent to which they ever did is, of course, a moot point (see Lipsky 1980 for an account of street-level bureaucracy). Public officials engage with a range of different stakeholders both within and outside their own organizations. Partnership building, coalition forming, and network managing are the new imperatives in the drive to provide a seamless public service. At the same time, officials are expected not just to deliver public services economically and efficiently but also to be creative, enterprising, and innovative. As public officials come into contact with different sets of values—notably, those of private sector organizations—fears are expressed that the public service ethos will be undermined (Doig and Wilson 1995). However, the extent to which there is a generalized public service ethos and the nature of its ethical character are open to question (Lawton 1998). Nonetheless, it is argued that traditional public service virtues, identified as integrity and probity, and principles, identified as accountability, are being undermined by more recent requirements of entrepreneurialism and risk taking.

However, one development in the changing management of public services that has implications for virtue is the increase in regulatory regimes under which public services operate. Our public service institutions and our professions are subject to more and more audit and compliance. However, whatever the views of successive governments concerning the self-regulation of public sector professionals, it is still the case that the professions are held in high esteem by the general public. Members of the professions are deemed to be virtuous by the fact of membership, yet the competence of individual professionals may be challenged and subject to scrutiny.

Most recently, Bowman et al. (2004) have sought to reintegrate virtue and technical competence as key elements of successful public management. They suggest that successful public management rests on a "skills triangle" comprising technical competence, leadership, and ethical competencies. Ethical competencies include moral reasoning, values management, and prudent decision making (Bowman et al. 2004, 21). Specifically, Bowman et al. distinguish an "ethics triangle" (72) that highlights three distinctive approaches to ethical decision making: consequentialism (i.e., decisions based on expected results), duty ethics (i.e., decisions based on the application of rules), and virtue ethics (i.e., decisions based on proper moral character). Each approach has its own strengths and weaknesses, which means that all three of these decision-making processes are equally important: "[L]ike a good map, [the ethics triangle] offers choices, not formulas. Just as a map outlines a journey, the triangle provides help in making the inevitable compromises" (Bowman et al. 2004, 75). For Bowman et al., virtue ethics has several hurdles to overcome, not least that virtue is not a universal concept and that it differs according to time, place, gender, age, and other factors. In addition, virtue ethics provides no theory of action and lacks integrity: "[O]ne may be good but not know how to do good" (Bowman et al. 2004, 70–71). Bowman et al. recognize the limitations of virtue ethics and therefore see it as one complementary element (alongside technical competence) of public management.

Conversely, some commentators have sought to return virtue to the realm of public management through the creation of a new public virtue ethics. Cooper (1987), for example, expands on MacIntyre's concept of practice and internal goods to posit a model of *administrative practice*. Cooper identifies three realms of practice—public interest, process and procedures, and loyalty to colleagues—and lists their attendant internal goods. He then establishes the relevant virtues that "must be consistent with agreed upon internal goods of the practice of public administration" (323). The problem here is that, as with any theory of the good, there will always be the potential to criticize particular choices as somewhat arbitrary. For example, Cooper suggests that "beneficence for citizenry" is one of the internal goods of administrative practice and that one of its necessary virtues is benevolence. It could be argued, however, that such a virtue is entirely unnecessary for an administrator, who has to implement certain procedures and standards and therefore does not need to be personally benevolent. The problem for Cooper is that facing all teleological theories: Can we agree on what can be regarded as virtues or even internal goods? If these ends cannot be identified in advance, they can never successfully be attained.

Other management literature has stressed that competence is inherent to character, which, is also one of the conceptual underpinnings of virtue. Ellström (1997) argues that a distinction needs to be made between competence and simple qualification, paralleling the similarity between competence and virtue. Whereas qualification refers to simple job requirements, competence can be defined in terms of a number of factors: intellectual skills, attitudes, values, motivations, personality traits, and social skills. His definition of competence as "the potential capacity of an individual (or a collective) to successfully . . . handle certain situations or complete a certain task or job" (267) could certainly pass for a definition of virtue, especially with the insertion of the word *moral* in front of *situations*.

Using Ellström's competence/qualification distinction as a starting point, Virtanen (2000) constructs a series of five public management competencies, the last of which is ethical competence. Ethical competence is essential to complement the competition and self-interest that have been introduced by the promotion of the free market in

New Public Management. For Virtanen, New Public Management has changed the landscape of the welfare state to such an extent that a public manager's ethical commitments are now orientated toward utility rather than egalitarianism or redistributive justice. Ethical competence is necessary, therefore, to establish a framework for right action in this new form of administration: "[W]ithout ethical competence, public managers do not use their political, professional, or task competence in right ways" (Virtanen 2000, 336).

In a similar manner, our research suggests that the boundary between competence and virtue, as perceived by monitoring officers in the United Kingdom, is indeed indistinct and that the two concepts are much more closely intertwined than they may appear.

The Ethical Framework of U.K. Local Government

The Local Government and Housing Act of 1989 imposed a statutory requirement on each local authority to establish the post of monitoring officer, whose principal role was to ensure that local policy decisions were legal. The 1989 act offered a fairly broad definition of the monitoring officer's role, and as a result, the development of the post was somewhat ad hoc. Each authority had a monitoring officer who effectively dealt with things in his or her own way, and many of the actual day-to-day activities of the monitoring officers differed among authorities. In addition, and most importantly, the monitoring officer's role has never been an entirely separate post but an add-on to the duties of a currently serving officer (usually, but not always, the chief legal officer within the authority). Consequently, the amount of time that a monitoring officer could dedicate to his or her new role also differed significantly among authorities.

This situation changed with the introduction of a new "ethical framework" for local government, set out in the Local Government Act of 2000. The ethical framework consisted of a number of key factors: First, the 2000 Act required all local authorities to establish a Standards Committee if they did not already have one; second, each authority was legally required to adopt a code of conduct, which could include provisions for local circumstances; and third, the 2000 Act required each authority to extend the role of the monitoring officer, whose job expanded to include enforcing the code of conduct, setting up and maintaining registers of member's interests, and assuming a strong advisory role, especially to the Standards Committees. Our research clearly shows that the monitoring officers considered their advisory role the most important and time-consuming duty that they perform.

In addition, the Local Government Act of 2000 created a new national body to oversee the ethical conduct of local authorities, the Standards Board for England, which has the power to investigate complaints of misconduct by members (and co-opted members) of their authority's code of conduct. Investigations are the responsibility of the ethical standards officer who acts independently of the Standards Board. An ethical standards officer may, if necessary, refer a matter to an adjudication panel, which has the authority to impose sanctions, including disqualification from office for up to five years for members who have breached an authority's code of conduct. The ethical standards officer may also refer an allegation back to an authority's Standards Committee for a local determination. The monitoring officer thus has a potentially extensive liaison role in addition to the other duties of the post.

Our initial research consisted of a series of semistructured interviews with monitoring officers, from which a list of the post's numerous roles and responsibilities emerged (see table 1). From this list, it can be seen that the role of the monitoring officer involves a number of activities that require both managerial competence and personal virtue.

In 2004 the boundaries became even more blurred as new regulations, introduced under Section 66 of the Local Government Act 2000, came into force, granting monitoring officers greater investigative powers. The new regulations have not only increased the workload for monitoring officers but also triggered potentially difficult ethical problems. For example, monitoring officers now face an increasing chance that conflicts of interest will emerge during investigations in which they may already have proffered advice to a public official.

Monitoring officers, therefore, have a pivotal role in the ethical framework of local authorities: They promote the ethical conduct of the authority through their advisory role while enforcing particular standards through registers and codes of conduct. Consequently, for the monitoring officer, the concepts of virtue and competence are in tension.

The Virtuous Monitoring Officer?

The question of virtue and competence arose in our research when we asked monitoring officers which

Table 1 Roles and Responsibilities of the Monitoring Officer

- Advising individual elected members
- Advising the local authority's Standards Committee
- Advising the chief executive
- Advising other chief officers
- Dealing with parish councils (where appropriate)
- Advising the elected council of the authority
- Training elected members
- Advising the political leader of the council
- Maintaining the register of elected members' interests
- Investigating allegations and complaints about elected members' conduct
- Commenting on ethical standards officers' reports
- Reporting to the council under section 5 of the Local Government and Housing Act of 1989

KSAs they considered crucial in successfully carrying out their roles and responsibilities. Our initial research consisted of a number of semistructured telephone interviews with monitoring officers from a range of local authorities (district councils, borough councils, county councils, police authorities, national park authorities), from which we compiled the following list of KSAs: ethical awareness, legal expertise, political sensitivity, investigative skills, interpersonal skills, time management skills, self-motivation, leadership skills, local authority experience, administrative skills, problem-solving skills, perseverance, personal resilience, training abilities, verbal communication skills, fearlessness, written communication skills.

Next, we sent a questionnaire to every monitoring officer in England.[7] We included the list of KSAs and asked the monitoring officers to rate the items in terms of (1) the importance of each item to the successful implementation of his or her duties and (2) the extent to which each of the KSAs represented a personal strength or weakness of the monitoring officer in question. In both cases, a seven-point scale was used. For question 1, the scale ranged from 1, "not at all important," to 7, "very important," whereas question 2 ranged from 1, "very weak," to 7, "very strong." The results of these two questions appear in table 2.

Intuitively, it seemed that some of the KSAs related to our initial view of virtues as character traits that allow us to develop our human selves: Personal resilience and perseverance, for example, seem to embody such virtues as determination and tenacity; fearlessness requires courage; political sensitivity needs both intelligence and empathy. Other KSAs appeared to be more competence based, in that they are clearly measurable (such as the qualifications needed for legal expertise), demonstrable (problem-solving skills and training skills), and gained through a process of learning, whether formal (written communication skills) or informal (verbal communication skills, local authority experience). Additionally, we noted that virtues are personal characteristics, whereas competencies are organizationally and role specific. As such, we categorized the monitoring officers' KSAs into the categories of virtue and competence (see table 3).

Table 2 Monitoring Officer KSAs

Rank	General Importance	Rank	Personal Strengths
1	Ethical awareness	1	Local authority experience
2	Verbal communication skills	2	Ethical awareness
3	Interpersonal skills	3	Written communication skills
4	Written communication skills	4	Political sensitivity
5	Political sensitivity	5	Legal expertise
6	Personal resilience	6	Verbal communication skills
7	Problem-solving skills	7	Self-motivation
8	Fearlessness	8	Perseverance
9	Perseverance	9	Interpersonal skills
10	Local authority experience	10	Personal resilience
11	Legal expertise	11	Problem-solving skills
12	Investigative skills	12	Leadership skills
13	Self-motivation	13	Fearlessness
14	Leadership skills	14	Administrative skills
15	Training abilities	15	Investigative skills
16	Time management skills	16	Training abilities
17	Administrative skills	17	Time management skills

We were somewhat surprised by the way several important KSAs were generally perceived. In particular, we were surprised that such competencies as legal expertise and local government experience did not warrant a higher ranking, especially in light of the backgrounds of most of the monitoring officers: 75 percent of respondents confirmed that they had legal qualifications, and 71 percent said they had been working at their current local authority for more than five years (figures that were reflected in terms of personal strengths). Another interesting feature of both lists is that in each case, six of the top 10 KSAs are virtues rather than competencies (although these are not the same virtues in each list), which may suggest that monitoring officers place a greater value on the concept of virtue.

The central problem with this hypothesis is that each of the KSAs can be individually unpacked to show that there is not necessarily any major distinction between a given monitoring officer's categories of virtue and competence. Ethical awareness, for example, was subject to several interpretations during the initial interview stages. One respondent suggested that ethical awareness could not be simply an awareness of right and wrong in the sense of personal morality because a monitoring officer needs to set aside personal morals when rendering judgments and giving advice. This respondent stressed that morals are not the same as legal judgment. Another respondent

Table 3 Monitoring Officers' KSAs, Categorized According to Virtue and Competence

Virtue	Competence
Ethical awareness	Investigative skills
Self-motivation	Administrative skills
Personal resilience	Legal expertise
Fearlessness	Problem-solving skills
Interpersonal skills	Training abilities
Leadership skills	Time-management skills
Perseverance	Local authority experience
Political sensitivity	Written communication skills
Verbal communication skills	

argued that ethical awareness is related to transparency, accountability, and the rights or wrongs of local authority systems and practices, which ties in with the monitoring officer's needs to have an intimate knowledge of the legislative and statutory duties that compose the ethical framework of local government. Clearly, this embraces the twin competencies of legal expertise and local authority experience.

Political sensitivity, which some respondents saw as inextricably linked to ethical awareness, was also interpreted in at least two distinct ways: first, in a wider sense of understanding "how people work," which, from the virtue perspective entails good judgment, empathy, and other character traits, and second, in terms of political sensitivity, which again introduces the competence of local authority experience. Similarly, personal resilience was subject to a number of interpretations. Some respondents regarded it as resistance to stress in general, whereas others saw it as the necessity of giving accurate advice and not softening one's view when under pressure to change a decision (which had personally occurred in the case of one participant). Again, this may invoke some of the competence KSAs, such as written and verbal communication skills, so that a monitoring officer may explain a certain judgment.

It is equally apparent that many of the supposed KSA competencies can be seen as embodying particular virtues. Investigative and problem-solving skills require intellectual virtues; local authority experience itself is inextricably linked to practical wisdom. The boundaries become blurred even further when we begin to look at motivations: Does legal expertise, for example, arise from an initial moral commitment on the part of the monitoring officer to study law? It is entirely plausible that people initially choose to accept the post of monitoring officer because they desire to influence ethical behavior and believe they possess the requisite skills to carry out the job. Consequently, even the act of becoming a monitoring officer may reflect a deliberate choice to match certain skills to ethical situations.

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Thus, the boundaries between the personal and the public are blurred. As we argued earlier, the distinction is not just about identifying clear boundaries between two separate spheres but addressing different forms of acting and engaging with others. Public officials, both elected and appointed, have difficulty circumscribing conduct that might be deemed appropriate in their private lives and should not be subject to public scrutiny. The difference between the personal and organizational realms is nuanced for those working in and for organizations committed to serving the public interest.

Virtue and Competence Reconsidered

In the classic expositions stated earlier, virtue can be seen as reflecting notions of competence either explicitly (as in Machiavelli) or implicitly (as in Aristotle). In all cases, virtues—which, it may be noted, have not significantly changed in nature—can be identified as particular qualities, and as such, they may be demonstrated and measured. The *degree* of virtuous behavior is crucial to theories that prioritize the good over the right. Most crucial of all, however, is that virtue must have a fundamentally practical application: Without any public demonstration, virtues are effectively meaningless. Thus, like competencies, they exist equally in the realm of action as in the realm of human character. An approach such as Cooper's, for example, which identifies the relevant virtues associated with administrative practice, can easily be read in terms of management competence. Indeed, the specific virtues that Cooper identifies are not far removed from the management competencies compiled by Vilkinas et al., who list 55 specific elements (Virtanen 2000, 335), or from our own list of KSAs.

It may be tempting to think that the advent of New Public Management has shifted the ethos of public managers entirely toward managerialism, efficiency, and competence, and the example of local government potentially reinforces this view. The practice of virtue, of seeking to do well while doing good, seems to have been mislaid. Ethical conduct under the new local government framework seems to be promoted through compliance: The enforcement of standards is leading to the bureaucratization of individual conscience. The expanse of regulations seems to have sublimated the need for virtuous conduct. Under the new framework, for example, codes of conduct are increasingly trying to legislate against disrespectful behavior, as well as other vague actions, which means that doing good (behaving respectfully toward others) is now simply a matter of doing right (following the regulations). Advances in management development—notably, the rise of managerial competencies—have reinforced these changes. More generally, the apparent dominance of second-order goods, such as meeting targets, over first-order goods, such as serving the public interest, appears to be established.

Our findings suggest that these arguments are both exaggerated and somewhat misguided. Competence has not *replaced* virtue as a foundation of public service management because virtue is an integral feature of managerial competencies. Competence as an *excellence* of management inevitably has the notion of virtue at its heart. Similarly, to be in any sense meaningful (i.e., demonstrable), virtues must have some quality of competence in order to be put into practice. In this sense, commentators such as Virtanen, who shows that there is still room for ethics within public management while accepting the dominance of New Public Management, do not go far enough. All competence, in one sense, is ethical competence. Virtue and competence are equally valid routes to the successful implementation of a new ethical culture within local government because they ultimately address the same issues: excellences that fit people to certain practices. Despite attempts to bureaucratize ethics through codes of conduct and formal rules of compliance, our monitoring officers still exercise individual judgment, drawing on their practical wisdom. Their actions cannot be simply described as exercising legal competence.

Our findings, then, differ from MacIntyre's view of management, suggesting not only that there is room for virtue in public management but that it is one of its essential characteristics. Therefore, we suggest that work such as Bowman et al. (2004) does not go far enough in suggesting that virtue is one element of managers' key skills. We contend that such questions as "What should I do?" and "What kind of person am I?" are not separate questions but come together in public service organizations to allow for individual flourishing. Our research suggests that the approach of Cooper and others is far more profitable—that it is not necessary to reunite virtue and public management but to recognize that seemingly new approaches have these age-old moral concerns at their heart.

Notes

1. In their discussion of virtue ethics, Oakley and Cocking concede that other ethical theories also focus on the primacy of character (for example, Kantianism and consequentialism), although they distinguish virtue ethics from these theories by a number of other criteria (Oakley and Cocking 2001, 9–19).
2. The term *ethical framework* is not popular with everybody, but the expression was used repeatedly by respondents in our research. The term is also used in the implementation notes of the Local Government Act. Note 102, for example, states, "Part III of the Act establishes a new ethical framework for local government. This includes the introduction of statutory codes of conduct, with a requirement for every council to adopt a code covering the behavior of elected members and of officers, and the creation of a standards committee for each authority." Therefore, we use *ethical framework* to refer to the key pillars of the Local Government Act: standards committees, register of interests, codes of conduct, and the Standards Board for England.
3. This research was funded by the Standards Board for England, which the authors acknowledge for its support of the project. We stress, however, that any opinions put forth within this article are purely our own. Research was completed with colleagues from the University of Warwick and the University of Liverpool.
4. The classic Eastern view is expressed by Confucius, who, like Aristotle, identified a specific range of virtues—humility, honesty, loyalty, and obedience—that are vital to the successful governance of public life. Confucius believed that such virtues could be cultivated and promoted an elaborate system of rituals that public servants should follow to help facilitate their moral development. Rojeski suggests that the Confucian tradition has proved particularly influential in U.S. public administration: "In the recent history of public administration leadership we have succeeded in creating Mandarins in the Confucian mold" (2000, 5).
5. All references to Aristotle are given in terms of standard line numbers.
6. There is a debate as to whether eudemonia is a single concept or one that can be applied to a number of distinct human ends; see Everson's introduction to *The Politics* (Aristotle 1988).
7. Questionnaires were mailed to 475 English monitoring officers whose names and addresses were obtained from the Standards Board; of those, 244 questionnaires were returned, a response rate of 51.4 percent.

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