Shared Virtue: The Convergence of Valued Human Strengths Across Culture and History

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Positive psychology needs an agreed-upon way of classifying positive traits as a backbone for research, diagnosis, and intervention. As a 1st step toward classification, the authors examined philosophical and religious traditions in China (Confucianism and Taoism), South Asia (Buddhism and Hinduism), and the West (Athenian philosophy, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) for the answers each provided to questions of moral behavior and the good life. The authors found that 6 core virtues recurred in these writings: courage, justice, humanity, temperance, wisdom, and transcendence. This convergence suggests a nonarbitrary foundation for the classification of human strengths and virtues.

Keywords: virtues, character strengths, positive traits, culture, positive psychology

In recent years, strides have been made in understanding, treating, and preventing psychological disorders. Critical to this progress are two widely accepted classification manuals—the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM–IV;* 4th ed., 1994) and the World Health Organization's (1990) *International Classification of Diseases (ICD)*. Consensual classifications are important because they provide a common vocabulary for basic researchers and clinicians, allowing communication across professional groups as well as with the general public.

The *DSM–IV* and *ICD* describe much of what is wrong with people, but what about those things that are right? Psychology has long ignored human excellence, in part because we lack a crucial starting point: an empirically informed, consensual classification of human virtues. Nothing comparable to the *DSM–IV* or *ICD* exists for human strengths. When psychologists talk about mental health, wellness, or well-being, they mean little more than the absence of disease, distress, and disorder, as if falling short of diagnostic criteria should be the goal for which we all strive (cf. Jahoda, 1958).

We can either curse the darkness or light a candle. Our goal in this article is to extend what the *DSM–IV* and *ICD* have begun by proposing a foundation for the study of what is right about people, specifically the strengths of character that contribute to fulfillment and thereby enable the good life (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). We follow the example of the *DSM–IV* and *ICD* by proposing a classification scheme. The crucial difference is that our domain is not psychological illness but rather psychological strength.

The task of proposing an exhaustive list of virtues is so easy that it has been done hundreds of times. Moral philosophers, theologians, legislators, educators, and parents all have ideas about what character means, and few have resisted the temptation to articulate a definitive list of the virtues that constitute the well-lived

life. The most frequent objection to previous classification schemes is that they fall short of being universal and are in fact idiosyncratic, culturally bound, and laden with tacit values. In short, goes the typical argument, there are no universals when it comes to virtue.

But perhaps there are some *ubiquitous* virtues and values that can be identified by looking for them at the appropriate level of abstraction. Perhaps some virtues exist that are so widely recognized that an anthropological veto ("The tribe I study does not have that one!") would be more interesting than damning. Accordingly, we undertook a historical survey with dual and complementary purposes. The first was a literature search and review of early and influential attempts to list virtues crucial to human thriving. The second aim was empirical: Would the virtue catalogs of early thinkers converge? Would certain virtues, regardless of tradition or culture, be widely valued?

Procedure

We limited the search to ancient traditions recognized for their enduring impact on human civilization. In his survey of world philosophies, Smart (1999) nominated China, South Asia, and the West as the most broadly influential traditions of thought in human history. We followed Smart's lead and focused specifically on Confucianism and Taoism in China, Buddhism and Hinduism in South Asia, and Athenian philosophy, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in the West. We restricted our examinations to written texts from these traditions. With reluctance, we excluded other intellectually fertile cultures that lacked readily available texts.

Within the traditions included, we looked for expository discussions consensually recognized as the earliest, the most influential, or preferably both. We searched for those authors who deliberately developed a catalog, particularly one with a clear beginning and ending in the form of explicitly numbered virtues (e.g., the Ten Commandments, the Holy Eightfold Path).

If there were more than one possible entrant, we chose the one that reflected the most crucial aspects of the tradition under study. Thus, for example, we did not include Pantanjali's (1979) ideas on virtue as outlined in *The Yoga-Sutra*. Although this text is the basic one of the sixth orthodox school (yoga) of Hindu philosophy, the virtues outlined in *The Bhagavad Gita* (Thadani, 1990) are both more inclusive and more well known. Occasionally, no single text emerged as most representative, in which case we included more than one text per tradition.

If we could not find a deliberate or concise exposition on virtue within a tradition, we opted to study its best-known text, as well as respected secondary sources, and to extrapolate. For instance, nowhere in the *Analects* (1992) did Confucius reel off a discrete list of crucial virtues; rather, he referred to virtues throughout. But the text is so unanimously associated with the Confucian tradition that we focused our inquiries there.

Texts and their virtue catalogs were gathered in more or less chronological order. Nominated virtues were sometimes vaguely defined, in which case secondary sources and expert colleagues were consulted to determine the meaning of each entry within its cultural context. Analysis involved condensing each list by locating thematically similar virtues and classifying them under an obviously emerging *core virtue*. By that term, we mean an abstract ideal encompassing a number of other, more specific virtues that reliably converge to the recognizable higher order category. For instance, the core virtue justice is an abstract term representative of the ideals of more specific virtues captured by injunctions, laws, and procedural rules for fairness (Bok, 1995). To say that particular virtues, *within a tradition*, converged into a core virtue is not to argue that all of their features line up perfectly; rather, they exhibited a coherent resemblance to one another, sharing more features than not (Yearley, 1990). Individual virtues that could not, without pushing and squeezing, be classified within a core virtue category were considered distinct.

Furthermore, to say that certain virtues, *across traditions*, converged into a core virtue likewise does not mean that we found a one-to-one mapping of a virtue across cultures. Certainly, an abstraction such as justice means slightly different things—and is valued for somewhat different reasons—from one culture to another. Again, what we sought was coherent resemblance, that the higher order meaning behind a particular core virtue lined up better with its cross-cultural counterparts than with any other core virtue (e.g., examples of Confucian justice have more to do with those of Platonic justice than with those of Platonic wisdom). What we identified were instances in which the similarities across cultures outweighed the differences, and, again, when the core virtue of a particular tradition did not have an obvious cross-cultural counterpart, it was considered as separate in the final analysis.

Convergence Across History and Culture

Our literature review revealed a surprising amount of similarity across cultures and strongly indicates a historical and cross-cultural convergence of six core virtues: courage, justice, humanity, temperance, wisdom, and transcen-

dence (see Table 1); we remind readers that our goal was to discern broad family resemblances across traditions, not to argue for exact semantic and cultural equivalences. Let us turn to how each of these six core virtues is evident in the different traditions we surveyed.

Confucian Virtues

The teachings of Confucius (551–479 BCE) are the most influential in the history of Chinese thought and civilization. His moral and political philosophy, with its prescriptive focus on education and leadership, had become the official religion of China by the second century BCE and became compulsory study for 2,000 years beyond that (Smart, 1999).

His teachings were recorded mainly in the form of aphorisms, most reliably collected in the *Analects* (Confucius, 1992). His comments on virtue are scattered across the *Analects*, not presented as a formal catalog. There is, however, agreement among scholars that there are four or five central virtues espoused in the tenets of Confucianism: *jen* (translated variously as humanity, human heartedness, or benevolence), *yi* (duty, justice, or equity), *li* (etiquette or observance of the rites of ceremonious behavior), *zhi* (wisdom or perspicacity), and, possibly, *xin* (truthfulness, sincerity, or good faith; Cleary, 1992; Do-Dinh, 1969; Haberman, 1998a).

Humanity is the virtue most exalted by Confucius. Throughout the *Analects,* this core sentiment permeates all others. For instance, the Confucian ideal of duty (*yi*) is not one prescribing humble acquiescence of the many to the undeserving and powerful few; rather, it denotes the mutual respect persons should have in relation to one another, beginning with the familial relationship and extending outward to the state (Huang, 1997).

The Confucian precept of good etiquette (*li*) is also best understood as a directive to treat others sensitively; Confucius (1992, p. 127) wrote, "to master oneself and return to courtesy is humaneness" (12:1). Thus, the cultivation of courtesy and deference in one's everyday behavior is the equivalent of the cultivation of humanity, because manners and deference are concerned more with consideration for another's feelings than they are with strict adherence to rules and empty ceremonial custom. Confucian wisdom (*zhi*) is best understood as the functional application of an informed intellect to humanity, justice, and etiquette, whereas truthfulness (*xin*) is that which is exemplified by fidelity to the ideals of the four preceding virtues (Cleary, 1992).

Confucius did not explicitly mention temperance, but its importance to the humane life is strongly implied. The importance placed on rites presumably involves a respect for propriety and self-control as much as for humanity. In both his personal affairs and the *Analects*, Confucius advocated modesty and self-control. In the *Analects,* he commended as virtuous those who lived simply (6:10), refrained from self-aggrandizing boasts (6:14) or extravagance (3:4), and placed hard work before reward (6:22).

Another core virtue not explicitly named was transcendence. The Chinese did not believe in a divine lawgiver, and Confucius's philosophical

Table 1
Core Virtues

Virtue	Description
Courage	Emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal; examples include bravery, perseverance, and authenticity (honesty)
Justice	Civic strengths that underlie healthy community life; examples include fairness, leadership, and citizenship or teamwork
Humanity	Interpersonal strengths that involve "tending and befriending" others (Taylor et al., 2000); examples include love and kindness
Temperance	Strengths that protect against excess; examples include forgiveness, humility, prudence, and self-control
Wisdom	Cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge; examples include creativity, curiosity, judgment, and perspective (providing counsel to others)
Transcendence	Strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and thereby provide meaning; examples include gratitude, hope, and spirituality

focus was clearly on the secular and rational aspects of human functioning, not the cosmic or spiritual (5:13 and 11:12). This is not to say that Confucius completely ignored the transcendent or that he relegated it to insignificance (Hall & Ames, 1987). For instance, excellence in moral conduct was afforded the status of the transcendent: Confucius invoked heaven when discussing the origin of virtue (7:23) and urged reverence for sages whose perfect virtue was modeled after the divine (6:17 and 16:8; see also Haberman, 1998a).

Taoist Virtues

The creator of Taoism, Lao Tzu (approximately 570 BCE–?), is thought to be a contemporary of Confucius, although there is some debate as to whether he was one sage or many and whether the primary work attributed to him, the *Tao Te Ching* (Lao Tzu, 1963), came much later than he may have lived (Graham, 1998; Kohn, 1998; Lynn, 1999). The central tenet is one of transcendence: The *Tao*, or Way, that governs the heavens and earth is indescribable, unknowable, and even unnamable (Lao Tzu, 1963, chap. 1). It is also untranslatable: The Way (its Chinese character depicts a head in motion) refers simultaneously to direction, movement, method, and thought, and no single word can depict the profundity of its total meaning. Moreover, it is the creator of all things, including virtue (*Te*), but does not act: The Way is spontaneous and without effort (Cheng, 2000; Wong, 1997).

The text of the *Tao Te Ching* is often cryptic, and attempts, particularly Western ones, to interpret its verses can never be definitive (Clarke, 2000; LaFargue, 1998). Like Confucius, Lao Tzu attempted to use his philosophy to reform rulers and improve society, but the emphasis was not on virtue as social interaction (Cheng, 2000). Rather, what Lao Tzu believed in most was the virtue of "naturalness" or "spontaneity" (*tzu-jan*), or that quality of being without effort. Scholars tend to agree that naturalness is the cardinal virtue of Taoism, with nonaction (*wu-wei*) as the essential method to realize naturalness in social life (Cheng, 2000). The point is that Lao Tzu esteemed other virtues, but only if they arise from the higher one of spontaneity. Later in the *Tao Te Ching* he explicitly cited as important the virtues of humanity, justice, and propriety, but only after (or in the presence of) this higher one (chap. 38).

Likewise, wisdom is espoused in both rulers and commoners, but only if that knowledge is the true sort of the Way, not the superficial sort used for cunning: According to Lao Tzu (1963), a sage ruler is "a man of subtlety [but] with deep insight" (chap. 15); he does not "insist on his own views, thus he has a clear view," nor does he "justify himself, thus he sees the truth" (chap. 22; see also chaps. 3, 19, 33, and 49). And temperance, in terms of both humility and restraint from pursuing the false gods of material wealth and privilege, is advocated again and again: "He who becomes arrogant with wealth and power . . . sows the seeds of his own misfortune" (chap. 9); "he who boasts of his own achievements harms his credibility . . . he who is arrogant experiences no growth in wisdom" (chap. 24); "he who knows glory, but keeps to humility . . . is sufficient in the eternal virtue" (chap. 28).

Buddhist Virtues

Buddhism is a philosophical–religious tradition of great variety and far reach; its tenets and practices today extend from its birthplace in South Asia to China, Tibet, Korea, Japan, Thailand, Indonesia, and beyond. The origins of all teachings, however, are traced to the Buddha (563?–483? BCE), or "Enlightened One," who lived at the same time as Confucius and six centuries before Jesus. Canonical texts describe his renunciation of his traditional and comfortable life to search for the end to the chronic suffering of life, death, and rebirth (*samsāra*). After years of travel, asceticism, and yogic meditation, the Buddha came upon the path to enlightenment, to *nirvana*: the ultimate destiny of existence, the state of bliss brought on by an effacement of the self and its desires (Bhatt, 2001). The Buddha believed that anyone, with the right sort of practice, could reach nirvana, and he spent the rest of his life teaching people the way to it (Dutt, 1983).

If there is a fundamental virtue catalog in classical Buddhism, it is the Holy Eightfold Path, a subset of the more inclusive doctrine of the Four Noble Truths (*ārya satyāni*), which the Buddha preached at his very first sermon. The Four Noble Truths are that (1) life is suffering; (2) the cause of this suffering is the "birth sin" of craving or desire; (3) suffering ceases only

upon nirvana, the extinction of desire; and (4) nirvana may be achieved only by following the Holy Path (or Middle Way), an eight-pronged strategy to counteract the innate tendency toward desire. In turn, the Holy Eightfold Path invokes the notion of perfection or right in one's (1) understanding, (2) thinking, (3) speech, (4) action, (5) livelihood, (6) effort, (7) mindfulness, and (8) concentration (Fowler, 1999; see also Carter & Palihawadana, 2000).

A later Buddhist virtue catalog is suggested by what is known as the Five Virtues or Precepts (*pañca-sīla*). These are ritually chanted abstentions from (1) harming living things, (2) taking what is not given (theft or fraud), (3) misconduct concerning sense pleasures, (4) false speech (lying), and (5) unmindful states due to alcoholic drinks or drugs (Harvey, 1990). One can see notions of humanity and justice in the first, second, and fourth precepts and strong directives toward temperance or self-restraint in the third and fifth precepts.

Finally, there are the four Universal Virtues (*apramāna*; also known as "immeasurables") of Buddhism: benevolence (*maitrī*), compassion (*karunā*), joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upeksā*; see Nagao, 2000). These virtues are also mentioned in various canonical texts, concern the practical (as opposed to theoretical) aspects of Buddhism, and clearly advocate humanity.

Buddhism, with its emphasis on nonduality and enlightenment, is a forthrightly transcendent tradition. It is also—as a result of its fundamental tenet of the impermanence of all things, including the self—likely to frustrate Western hermeneutic endeavors. Armstrong (2001) warned against interpreting the action section of the Eightfold Path as some sort of collection of moral directives; to do so would be to blur Buddhist teaching (i.e., that voluntary adherence to these precepts helps remove hindrances to clarity and enlightenment) with Western notions of obeisance to a higher power. It is also important to note that Buddhist virtues are not metaphysically stable entities (because there are no stable entities in Buddhism) as they are in many traditions; rather, they are thought or behavior tendencies designed to end craving.

Hindu Virtues

The collection of sacred texts known as the *Upanishads* deals with spiritual and metaphys-ical aspects of Hinduism; the earliest of these texts appear to date to the sixth or seventh century BCE, marking their existence slightly before the rise of Buddhism. The oldest, the *Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad,* elucidated some of the central theological tenets of early and modern-day Hinduism: the unifying principle of *brahman,* the sacred absolute power and the creator of the universe; the related notion of the interconnectedness of all things, as all ultimately extends back to *brahman*; and the cycle of rebirth, which comes from the blending of the self and *brahman* (Haberman, 1998b; Leaman, 1999). Hinduism and Buddhism diverge in the notion of the self: In the former tradition, the self is eternal, universal, and indistinguishable from *brahman*; in the latter, there is no permanent self and no ultimate creator (Harvey, 1990).

The emphasis in Hinduism is on personal virtues, such as self-denial and renunciation; these virtues promote self-improvement in the current life and a potential of salvation or attainment of a higher caste in the next. Hence, one catalog of Hindu virtues, as narrated in the sacred text of *The Bhagavad Gita* (Thadani, 1990), is intertwined with notions of caste. This text describes a stratified society consisting of the Brahmins (educated aristocrats), Kshatriyas (soldiers), Vaisyas (agricultural and lower trade laborers), and Sudras (menial laborers). Each of the four castes is distinguished by the characteristic virtues exhibited by its members. The spirituality of the Brahmin shows itself in penance, self-control, forbearance, purity, rectitude, knowledge, experience, and faith; the qualities ascribed to the soldier caste include those of valor, skill, glory, fortitude, and charity (generosity); and the lower castes are assigned the virtues of dutiful performance of labor: Little is expected in the way of spiritual and intellectual achievement for these people in their current lives (Thadani, 1990).

Hinduism, with its emphasis on personal improvement, echoes Buddhism but contrasts sharply with the Confucian (and later Athenian) belief in virtue as citizenship. And though their meanings have some cultural specificity, the core virtues are present thematically within the Hindu tradition. Consider wisdom: Although the Hindu (and Buddhist) ideal of attainment of transcendental knowledge of the self does not directly compare with the Confucian notion of

the importance of wisdom gained through education and experience, the theme of coming to a higher knowledge is central to all traditions. Transcendence, as invoked by the concept of *brahman*, is diffused throughout *The Bhagavad Gita*, and examples of justice (rectitude), courage (valor), temperance (self-restraint), and humanity (charity) all make their appearance as virtues attributed to specific castes. Note also that the concept of justice is interwoven with the Hindu belief that actions in one life help to determine caste status in the next. That the text ascribes different virtues for different castes does not argue for nonubiquity within the culture; it is difficult to imagine that Hindu culture advocates bravery for soldiers and cowardice for everyone else.

Athenian Virtues

The first major virtue catalog of the West was articulated by Plato (427–347 BCE) in the *Republic,* his magnum opus on the ideal human society. Here Plato, using Socrates as his mouthpiece, proposed wisdom (*sophia*), courage (*andreia*), self-restraint (*sôphrosune*), and justice (*dikaisunê*) as the four core virtues of the ideal city (1968, IV, 427e). He argued that these qualities compose a class-based hierarchy of civic virtues that has its anchor in the makeup of the individual soul (IV, 441c). That is, the desirable division of civic virtues—wisdom belongs to the ruling class, courage to the soldier class—is mirrored in an individual's healthily functioning psychology. The soul has its divisions, and to each belongs a virtue: Wisdom is exercised by reason, courage is exercised by the "spirited" part, and self-restraint is imposed on the appetite. In both the civic and individual cases, justice (moral action) will occur when each division properly carries out its assigned task (IV, 443d–e; see Johansen, 1991/1998). This Platonic vision of virtue is comparable to the Hindu notion already outlined: Virtues are categorized along professional and class lines.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics,* Plato's student Aristotle (384–322 BCE) continued the argument that virtuous behavior is a social practice exercised by a citizen of an ideal city (2000, V.I, 1129a). For Aristotle, virtue was an acquired skill learned through trial and error. Related to this is his characterization of virtue known as the doctrine of the mean: One encounters a situation and, relying on reason, experience, and context, selects a course of action from between two extremes of disposition, those of deficiency or excess. The mean between these two extremes *is* virtue (1107a). Generosity, for instance, is the mean between wastefulness and stinginess (1120a); courageousness is the mean between cowardliness and rashness (1116a).

Aristotle's list of the virtues included the original Platonic four (courage, justice, temperance, and wisdom), but to these he added others such as generosity, wit, friendliness, truthfulness, magnificence, and greatness of soul (Aristotle, 2000, IV). The latter two might sound strange to the modern reader: Magnificence has to do with spending lavishly, though in a tasteful way, on honorable items such as sacrifices or warships (IV.II); greatness of soul refers to thinking oneself worthy of great things, particularly honor (IV.III).

In neither Plato nor Aristotle's account is transcendence named as a virtue. But, as was the case with Confucius, the notion of transcendence as a crucial good suffuses their works. In the *Republic,* Plato described how the ideal city would be governed; philosophers, whose inner constitution of virtue is such that they are above selfish interests, should rule. But he admitted that this state is yet to be realized on Earth, and mortal man must look to the heavens to find its model (IX, 592a–b). Aristotle invoked the transcendent when he discussed the relationship between virtue and happiness (*eudaimonia*). For Aristotle (2000, p. 194), happiness was "activity in accordance with virtue" (X.VII, 1177a). He told us in the last book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that, of all of the virtues, wisdom is the most perfect, and the exercise of it—contemplation—constitutes perfect happiness. "If intellect, then, is something divine compared with the human being, the life in accordance with it will also be divine compared with human life" (Aristotle, 2000, X.VII, 1177b, p. 194).

Likewise, humanity (kindness, love) was never specifically named as a virtue in either Athenian account. However, notions of shared humanity, of the importance of friendship, of generosity and charitable acts, of giving others pleasure and not pain, are scattered across both works.

Christian Virtues

The Seven Heavenly Virtues, the classic Christian enumeration of human strengths, are described in Aquinas's (1224–1274) *Summa Theologiae* (1273/1989). Because the work is celebrated as a successful interpretation of Aristotelian (pagan) philosophy in terms of Christian theology, we describe this text before Jewish ones.

In his virtue catalog, Aquinas deleted all of Aristotle's additions to Plato. He constructed his list by retaining the cardinal virtues of temperance, courage, justice, and wisdom and then adding the three theological virtues proposed by St. Paul: faith, hope, and charity (or love). Aquinas argued for a hierarchical organization of the virtues: Of the cardinal virtues, wisdom is the most important, but the transcendent virtues of faith and hope are more important than that, and of all the seven, charity (love) reigns supreme. Note that within the Seven Heavenly Virtues, Aquinas enumerated what we believe are the six core virtues: He presented the four cardinal virtues by name, invoked transcendence with the virtues of faith and hope, and invoked humanity with the virtue of charity.

Jewish Virtues

Within the Hebrew Bible, there are two sections particularly concerned with the virtues esteemed by Jewish culture: the account of the Ten Commandments received by Moses in Exodus and two books of Proverbs that provide specific instruction on the consequences of virtues and vices. The Ten Commandments is a list of "thou shalts" and "thou shalt nots" from which conclusions may be drawn about the virtues advocated in this tradition. The Commandments forbid polytheism, idolatry, taking God's name in vain, murder, adultery, theft, lying, and covetousness while commanding that the Sabbath be kept holy and parents honored (Exodus 20:1–17, Revised Standard Version). Justice is implied in prohibitions against murder, theft, and lying; temperance in those against adultery and covetousness; and transcendence generally within the divine origin of the commands.

Sage instructions to Jewish youth on moral and religious behavior are the main concerns of Proverbs. The opening lines of the first book of Proverbs are a call to edification and are quite clear in distinguishing those virtues that Judaism esteems, for example, wisdom, justice, and prudence. Books II and IV of Proverbs are attributed to Solomon and deal specifically with virtuous behavior (as well as admonitions against vice). Many of the maxims are still well known (e.g., "A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls"). The verses of Proverbs are plentiful, and many virtues are advocated. They include integrity (courage); righteousness, just leadership, and trustworthiness (justice); love, graciousness, and kindness (humanity); diligence, prudence, humility, and restraint (temperance); hope and fear–love of God (transcendence); and understanding, knowledge, and respect for instruction (wisdom).

Islamic Virtues

Islam's core beliefs and practices took form during and shortly after the life of Muhammad (570–632 CE). Revelations communicated to him by the angel Gabriel, recorded in 114 chapters of scripture known as the *Koran* ("recitation"), founded Muhammad's claim to being the successor of Jesus and the last of the prophets. The revelations also established the foundation for his further teaching, which quickly developed into the organized Islamic faith (Leaman, 2002).

Although differing from Judaism and Christianity in crucial ways, Islam nonetheless was influenced by and includes some of the values of these other religions (Mahdi, 2001). The ideas presented in the Koran are thought to have germinated the tendency toward philosophic thought; in turn, the main influence on the development of Islamic philosophy is thought to be the Greeks, though with some Indian strains (Dunlop, 1971).

Islamic philosophy is distinguished by the central inclusion and importance of God (Leaman, 2002). Mahdi (2001) wrote that the "single attitude" that has historically characterized the Islamic community is "gratitude for the revelation and divine law" (p. 17), and so not surprisingly the transcendent plays a central and powerful role in most of the early philosophical texts, with the exception of the following.

Alfarabi (870–950 CE) is distinguished as the "first outstanding logician and metaphysician of Islam" (Fakhry, 1983, p. 107). He is also

known for his numerous interpretative works of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy, and his most concise virtue catalog, presented in *Fusul al-Madani* (*Aphorisms of the Statesman*; Alfarabi, 1961), is highly reminiscent of theirs. Alfarabi's discussion of virtue, though rare in its relative omission of the divine, is included here because he is generally regarded as the founder of Islamic philosophy.

Fusul al-Madani is composed of 96 aphorisms dealing broadly with the health of the soul. Specifically, Alfarabi (1961) described the government that best nourishes the individual soul in its quest for perfection. Again, this was a forthrightly political work: Alfarabi did not specifically invoke the prophet and mentioned revelation and philosophy only rarely; rather, his focus was on the city-state, and he constantly mentioned and described the activities of the ideal citizen and ruler (Butterworth, 2001).

Much of Alfarabi's (1961) catalog is familiar: Justice in the city-state is of central concern, and virtue is the middle way between two extremes, echoing Aristotle's doctrine of the mean (Aphorisms 61–67). Alfarabi also borrowed from the Athenians when he presented the notion of the divided soul: The soul is split into the Rational and the Appetitive, and the exercise of each part constitutes the corresponding Rational and Moral virtues (Aphorisms 8 and 9).

It appears that the virtues of the former category are the personal virtues of contemplation, whereas those in the second are the social virtues are invoked in dealings with others. Those included in the Rational category are "wisdom, intellect, cleverness, quick-wittedness, and excellent understanding"; those of the Ethical category are "moderation, courage, liberality (generosity), and justice" (Aphorism 8). Hence we see a repetition of the Platonic virtues, with a core humanity virtue (generosity) added and afforded equal standing. Despite his specific omission of the Prophet, transcendence is present in Alfarabi's (1961) account, given his contention that religion and philosophy can be harmonized and that the exercise of virtue is in itself a spiritual act (e.g., Aphorisms 68, 81, 86, 87, and 94).

Conclusion

The impetus for this project was our attempt to create a consensual classification of human strengths while avoiding the criticism that any specific list we proposed would be culturally or historically idiosyncratic (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The primary lesson we learned from our historical exercise is that there is convergence across time, place, and intellectual tradition about certain core virtues. As one tradition bled into another, as one catalog infused and then gave way to the next, particular core virtues recurred with a sort of pleasant tenacity. Whereas others appeared on some lists and then were lost, certain virtues, either explicitly or thematically, had real staying power.

Putting aside the distinctions between virtues and values, these general traits agree with related efforts within philosophy and psychology to identify "universal" values (see Bok, 1995; Schwartz, 1994). They coincide as well with contemporary lists of traits that predispose individuals to the (psychological) good life, whether termed positive mental health, psychological well-being, psychosocial virtues, self-actualization, psychosocial maturity, or authentic happiness (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). They also agree with traits deemed most desirable in a romantic partner (Buss, 1989) or a friend (National Opinion Research Center, 2001), with individual differences identified as conducive to excellence in the contemporary workplace (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001), and with virtues celebrated in more recent centuries by Western philosophers (Comte-Sponville, 1995/2001).

Caveats are in order. First, it makes good sense to ask whether the six core virtues are equally ubiquitous. Probably not (see Table 2). Justice and humanity showed up the most reliably in that they made every tradition's list; they tended to be named explicitly, and we suspect, given their crucial importance to the survival of even the smallest society, that they are truly universal (Bok, 1995; de Waal, 2000; Ridley, 1996). Temperance and wisdom finished a close second: At least in our survey of the cultures with long literary traditions, they appeared reliably and usually explicitly. Transcendence seems the next most ubiquitous, finishing fifth only because it is the most implicit of the core six: Transcendence was not always nominated explicitly, but the notion that there is a higher meaning or purpose to life, be it religiously underpinned or not, infuses each tradition to the extent that even in some decidedly nonreligious

Table 2
Convergence of Virtues

Tradition	Courage	Justice	Humanity	Temperance	Wisdom	Transcendence
Confucianism		E	E	T	E	T
Taoism		E	E	E	E	T
Buddhism		E	E	E	T	E
Hinduism	E	E	E	E	E	E
Athenian philosophy	E	E	E	E	E	T
Christianity	E	E	E	E	E	E
Judaism	E	E	E	E	E	E
Islam	E	E	E	E	E	E

Note. E = explicitly named; T = thematically implied.

lists (such as Confucianism or Athenian philosophy) the notion of virtue serving heaven or the gods seems taken for granted. Finally, courage is quite explicitly nominated (usually as physical valor) on most lists but is missing on others, notably those from the Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist traditions. We doubt that this means bravery is not valued in these traditions, and more modern definitions of courage that extend its meaning beyond the battlefield to fortitude in other domains can readily be detected in their classic literatures (e.g., Yearley, 1990).

Second, we find variability across cultures in terms of what is most esteemed. Each tradition nominated some number of virtues as proper or necessary for the well-lived life, but no two lists were identical and, not surprisingly, many virtues we encountered fell by the wayside because they failed the test of ubiquity, even by expanded and fuzzy criteria. Among culture-bound (nonubiquitous) virtues, a number are familiar to those of us in the here-and-now, for example wit and glory. Other culture-bound virtues seem exotic from our vantage, for example magnificence and naturalness. These examples of nonubiquitous virtues are of course important and deserve serious attention by psychologists, but they were not the main concern of this endeavor. We hope that as our classification project develops, we can turn to these less ubiquitous, culture-bound virtues.

Third, all of the traditions we surveyed come from large, literate, and long-lived societies with cities, money, law, and division of labor. None of these cultures existed in total isolation from the others. Although we are quite interested in the matter, we do not pretend to know whether the six core virtues we have identified characterize small or short-lived or nonliterate or hunter-gatherer societies. However, contemporary field research conducted by Biswas-Diener and Diener (2003) has confirmed the core virtues identified here among the Maasai (in western Kenya) and the Inughuit (in northern Greenland).

To summarize, our survey of influential religious and philosophical traditions revealed six broad virtue classes to be ubiquitous. This conclusion has important implications for our attempt to classify positive traits. Most significant, we have a nonarbitrary basis for focusing on certain classes of virtues rather than others. Much of the ongoing societal discourse on "character" is tilted in one direction or another by less than universal political and personal values. Although our classification is decidedly about such values, it is descriptive of what is ubiquitous rather than prescriptive or idiosyncratic.

We have used these core virtues to organize a longer list of more specific character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). We opted for this strategy for several reasons, including the aforementioned complexity of the general virtues. In each case, we can think of several ways to achieve the general virtue, and our eventual measurement goal led us to focus on these more specific routes (what we term "strengths") to the core virtues. Thus, the virtue of "humanity" is achieved by the strengths of kindness on the one hand versus love on the other. The virtue of temperance similarly has several routes: humility, prudence, and self-control. The practical implication of this classification is that it suggests which character strengths are similar and which are not.

Fourth, the ubiquity of these core virtues suggests the possibility of universality and a deep

theory about moral excellence phrased in evolutionary terms (Wright, 1994). One possibility is that these virtues are purely cultural: acquired characteristics required by long-lived, moneyed, literate, citified societies with massive divisions of labor. Another possibility is that the core virtues are purely biological and define the "moral animal." And a third possibility, the one to which we lean, is that they are evolutionarily predisposed. These particular styles of behaving may have emerged and been sustained because each allows a crucial survival problem to be solved.

Philosophers often refer to virtues as corrective, meaning that they counteract some difficulty inherent in the human condition, some temptation that needs to be resisted, or some motivation that needs to be rechanneled into something good (Yearley, 1990, p. 16). We would not need to posit the virtue of courage if people were not (sometimes) swayed from doing the right thing by fear or the virtue of temperance if people were not (sometimes) reckless. Without the biologically predisposed mechanisms that allowed our ancestors to generate, recognize, and celebrate corrective virtues, their social groups would have died out quickly. The ubiquitous virtues, we believe, are what allow the human animal to struggle against and to triumph over what is darkest within us.

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