



# Applying Aristotelian and Confucian Virtue Ethics to Humane Work in the Business Context

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Received: 5 August 2021 / Accepted: 12 September 2022 / Published online: 27 September 2022  
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## Abstract

What is humane work? What does such work look like in a business context? This paper articulates two ways of thinking about humane work using an Aristotelian and a Confucian virtue ethics approach. This approach reveals the need to think about (1) work's connection not merely with autonomy but with self-refinement and self-perfection, with craft, and with the production of genuinely good goods; (2) possible dangers (e.g., the risk of generating envy) of focusing too much on pay issues in connection with humane work; (3) the relation between humane work and political regimes; and (4) the role played by stakeholders other than managers in the humanizing of work.

**Keywords** Humane work · Aristotle · Confucius · Virtue ethics · Goods and services

The paper has four sections. In Sect. 1, I define “humane work” and present two complementary, but distinctly different, ways of assessing this form of work using an Aristotelian and a Confucian virtue ethics framework. Section 2 considers how these two conceptions may converge or diverge when it comes to judging what qualifies as humanizing work in a business context. Section 3 discusses limitations of using virtue ethics to understand humane work, while Sect. 4 offers a short summary of the practical and theoretical implications of this analysis for the humanization of work and specifies topics for further research.

What is humane work? What does such work look like in a business context? Since work, in general, has many dimensions, so, too, will “humane work” have numerous aspects. Dimensions of work often include, but are not limited to, working conditions, pay levels, pay structure, pay equity, pay transparency, extent of employee autonomy, unionization of work, job security, promotion prospects, leadership's effects on employer-employer relations, effects of specific types of work on the larger economic system and vice versa, and a host of other dimensions too numerous to list. The topic is clearly vast. Since it would not

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be theoretically interesting or practically useful simply to list and make random comments upon these various dimensions, I instead articulate two ways of thinking about humane work using an Aristotelian and a Confucian virtue ethics approach. I then illustrate (with specific examples) how these two frameworks might cash out when it comes to work in the business contest, while closing with a discussion of larger practical and theoretical implications of adopting these virtue ethics approaches. The more specific aim of this paper is to show that applying a virtue ethics approach to humane work highlights key aspects of such work that have been overlooked or under-discussed. In particular, this approach reveals the need to think about (1) work's connection not merely with autonomy but with self-refinement and self-perfection, with craft, and with the production of genuinely good goods; (2) possible dangers (e.g., the risk of engendering envy) of focusing too much on pay issues in connection with humane work; (3) the relation between humane work and political regimes; and (4) the role played by stakeholders other than corporate leaders in the humanizing of work.

The paper makes two original contributions. First, it identifies some aspects of humane work not previously identified using other ethical frameworks. For example, insofar as virtue ethics frameworks are teleological, what counts as humane work cannot be divorced from the goal (*telos*) of a specific corporation—i.e., should employees' work be described as humane if employees are paid a living wage, protected by due diligence measures, encouraged to be creative but are asked by their company to devote their time to producing murderous products or offering inappropriate services? This key connection between corporate ends or *teloi* and humane work has been woefully under-theorized to date. Theorizing this connection turns out to be quite challenging, but this paper offers some thoughts about how to understand this connection within a virtue ethics framework.

Second, the paper specifies with greater rigor what qualifies as humanizing work within a virtue ethics framework, an approach that has largely been neglected when it comes to this topic. Much of the analysis of humane work done to date appeals to a respect for persons/Kantian/human rights approach—e.g., humane work entails that companies not be able to fire workers without due process or that companies fully embrace some form of workplace democracy (e.g., Werhane and Radin 1996). In other cases, the notion of “humane work” is invoked but never defined, defined overly narrowly, or defined implausibly. Glavas (2012) tells us that humane work equals work that fosters employee well-being and that promotes sustainability. However, the meaning of well-being is not fleshed out in any semi-rigorous fashion. Jacobson (1995) seems to equate humane work with the challenging of male norms and eliminating any and all discrimination against women. However, this approach to work reform would be consistent with continuing to pay all employees a paltry—but equal—non-living wage, a practice that does not seem especially humane. Blum (1987) argues that some women see semiprofessional jobs (nursing, teaching, etc.) as especially humane because such work is nurturing. She does not explain, though, whether a job in finance could not also be humane or be rethought to become more nurturing. Are men by definition doing inhumane work? Does nurturing work always have to involve someone else? Might not self-nurturing work also be humanizing? Other scholars have equated humane work with work involving greater cooperation between management and labor and with work organized on more Marxist lines (Allen and Rishikoff 1985). But, again, management and labor cooperated extensively in Nazi factories, and the products they produced were often murderous. For Renesch (2006), humanizing work occurs when employees perform their work with passion and enthusiasm. However, it takes little imagination to come up with counterex-

amples to this claim. For instance, a painter who is making and selling counterfeit paintings may love to come to the studio each day. However, many would question whether work aimed at defrauding buyers contributes to customer well-being. So how humanizing is this painter's work? I see this paper as a first step toward defining more precisely and plausibly what qualifies as normatively sound humane work, applying Confucian and Aristotelian conceptions of self-refinement and virtuous flourishing.

The paper has four sections. In Sect. 1, I examine “humane work” and offer two complementary, but distinctly different, ways of assessing this form of work using an Aristotelian and a Confucian virtue ethics framework. Section 2 examines how these two conceptions of may converge or diverge when it comes to judging what qualifies as humanizing work in a business context. Section 3 discusses limitations of using virtue ethics to understand humane work, while Sect. 4 offers a short summary of the practical and theoretical implications of this analysis for the humanization of work and specifies topics for further research.

## Section One: What is Humane Work?

From a virtue ethics perspective, work is humane if and only if it promotes human flourishing. Such flourishing is understood as objectively good acting, speaking, and thinking that human beings find deeply satisfying at both an individual and collective level. This satisfaction derives from the actualizing and perfection of distinctively human capabilities. To be deemed humane, then, work must advance the communal, as well as individual, good. But that sweeping claim still does not tell us much. There are at least two ways of thinking about human flourishing from a virtue ethics approach—a more essentialist and a more dynamic, developmental approach. In some cases, these two ways offer contrasting judgments when it comes to assessing how humane some aspect of work truly is.

### Aristotelian Essentialist Approach

Let me begin with what I describe as Aristotle's more essentialist virtue ethics approach. For Aristotle, a happy or eudaemonistic life is one lived in accordance with human virtue (Aristotle 1934). Such a life is distinctively human. Indeed, Aristotle famously argues in Bk 1, ch. 7 that each of us has a function or work (in Greek, *ergon*) (Aristotle 1934, 1097b22–1098a20). That function belongs to us as organic beings who differ from plants and animals. Our distinctive function is that of using and perfecting our perceptual and reasoning abilities through acting, judging, and thinking.

Ethically sound reasoning—reasoning of the sort that leads to thriving, excellent lives—operates within the economic realm but also takes us beyond it. The economic and familial realm is one of necessity (Arendt 1958). Running a household (*oikos*) requires that we have sufficient material resources and wealth to meet our basic needs. In his *Politics*, Aristotle carves out a space for economic life that is not a matter of wealth-getting but is rather driven by the need to meet universal biological needs for food, shelter, etc. (Aristotle 1984, 1252a1–1252b27). Put differently, Aristotle is not a fan of wealth-getting in and of itself. His analysis is consistently teleological, and he argues in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that, strictly speaking, wealth-getting has no end because wealth is merely a means to an end (Aristotle

1934, 1096a6-11). As such, it has no limiting *telos* or end that would tell an agent when “enough is enough.”

Although Aristotle does not talk about corporations per se, his virtue ethics approach can be extended into the corporate world insofar as employees within businesses are called upon to act in ways that are temperate, just, friendly, etc. When they act in these ways, they perfect their distinctively human abilities (Hartman 2013). Moreover, I see no in principle reason why corporations cannot be construed as part of what Aristotle characterizes as an economic sphere firmly embedded within and accountable to a larger political realm. He is aware, for example, of activities such as ship-building (Aristotle 1934, 1094a9), which involve teams of people working together to produce a valuable product on which the political community depends. These sorts of large collective activities, while not government-chartered in the way modern corporations are, have ends beyond profit-maximization. Aristotle explicitly argues that the political community’s architectonic or inclusive end of defending itself against external aggression and of maintaining its economy is what ultimately gives a productive and laborious activity like ship-building its meaning and its end (Aristotle 1934, 2094a10-16)—i.e., to build ships appropriate for effective defense, for trading, etc. In effect, Aristotle locates the economic production of necessary goods and services (production which generates wealth but does not do so as its primary goal) within a larger political framework.

Broadie (1987, 46) makes a related point in her detailed argument about craft’s deep connection with practical wisdom as a whole, an argument that ties economic production and good or humanizing work to the political life of free citizens:

In short, the specific crafts ...operate within limits set by what Aristotle calls “*phronesis*”: wisdom about the whole of practical life. It is true that Aristotle sometimes follows Plato in a schematic division of labor: the carpenter is one entity, and the who dictates the when, where and how much of the carpenter’s activity is another—the “*politikos*,” whose concern is for the good in all of its aspects. But that is for the purpose of analysis only. The actual carpenter has to be something of a *politikos*: not necessarily a “statesman” in some high sense, but a social being. His excellence in his particular trade depends in part on this, for who would employ a carpenter who understood nothing but carpentry? More to the point, such notion is hardly intelligible.

Virtuous or humane living in its many aspects, while manifest in economic production, belongs quintessentially to the political life, a life concerned with what is *kalos k’agathos* or beautiful, good, and genuinely honorable. We might say that Aristotle praises and promotes distinctive human life (*bios*) not mere animal life (*zōē*). To anticipate a bit: Aristotle would deny that a living wage would suffice to make us happy. Living wage legislation in and of itself focuses on mere life, the basic requirements for economic life. It does not suffice to make us good citizens willing or able to perform noble actions.

The political life requires that our actions display a kind of nobility manifested on the battlefield (virtue of courage), in individual or collective philanthropic activities such as underwriting tragic festivals, Olympic competitions (virtue of magnificence), and so on. Acting nobly entails, in turn, doing the right thing, in the right way, at the right time, with respect to the right people, on the basis of the right motives (Aristotle 1934, 1106b20-30). Fitting our actions to the moment demands that we hit the mean, avoiding excess and deficiency (Aristotle. 1934, 1106b1-1-1107a10). For example, we cannot act justly if we individually or collectively entirely ignore the rules—that would be to take a deficient position—but we

also ought not to hew mindlessly and rigidly to rules. The latter stance is excessive insofar as no rule or law ever covers every case. Acting justly means paying attention to what equity requires as well as to what the rules say.

Through paying attention and making an effort to avoid extremes, we can perfect our deliberative abilities. We can find a mean when dealing with passions such as anger and fear and when interacting and speaking with others. The more we choose well, the more we habituate ourselves to acting and choosing well (Aristotle 1934, 1106a14-25). Although we are not born with habits, we can be said have a human nature in several respects. First, we are able to feel shame, a precondition for acting nobly (Aristotle 1934, 1128b10-35). Second, we have the ability to activate our reasoning and then to perfect it (Aristotle 1934, Bk. VI) in the form of various intellectual virtues, including practical wisdom and craft. Third, we are so constituted by nature as to able to acquire habits and—with practice—to discern what might be termed the structure and nature of the virtues esteemed and the vices excoriated in our community. These habits then become our second nature or essence (Aristotle 1934, 1103a14-1103b35).

Aristotle's approach to humane work is thus *essentialist* insofar as we are humanized through becoming virtuous in a manner eminently suited to our nature in the sense just specified. The approach is essentialist in another sense as well. Aristotle treats each of the virtues as having a kind of essence. For example, courage, strictly speaking, is manifest on the battlefield when warriors, who love life, choose to die for a truly noble cause. Unlike his teacher Plato (1967), who thinks that courage can be displayed in other contexts, Aristotle accepts the concept of courage most common among Athenian citizens. That said, Aristotle's approach does have flexible elements, which enable his virtue ethics approach to be extended by analogy to other contexts. Precisely because Aristotle's dialectical method is one of saving the appearances—i.e., teasing out the implicit logic of concepts of happiness and virtue already held by the majority of people or by the best and wisest individuals (Hamlyn 1990)—the domain of particular virtues will change as these concepts communally evolve to deal with new situations. In addition, the mean at which the virtuous person aims can never be specified in advance since it requires prudence to judge what lies in the middle with respect to specific situations, persons, times, etc. Aristotle explicitly insists upon such context-sensitive judgment in his treatment of justice. As I noted above, Aristotelian justice includes not only legal justice embodied in written laws but also equity understood as rendering people that which they are owed in particular cases where applying the law would result in them not receiving their due (Aristotle 1934, 1137a32-1138a5).

### Confucian Dynamic Developmental Approach

I turn now to a second conception of human flourishing—the non-essentialist view offered by Confucius (Confucius 1998). To understand his approach, it is useful to grasp a few basics of Chinese metaphysics. The ancient Chinese—and Confucius, in particular—did not understand nature as a system of fixed essences or beings. Instead, they viewed nature as an unfolding series of events and changes. The ancient Chinese even thought of the elements themselves as agents of change or movements (Wendell 2009, 37). This natural dynamism is never random or unintelligible. Seasons, for example, unfold cyclically. It is this sort of dynamic cyclicity to which we should become attuned:

Scientific thought began, in China as elsewhere, with attempts to comprehend how it is that although individual things are constantly changing, always coming to be and perishing, nature as a coherent order not only endures but remains conformable to itself. In the West the earliest such attempts identified the unchanging reality with some basic stuff out of which all things around us, despite their apparent diversity, are formed. In China the earlier and in the long run the most influential scientific explanations were in terms of time. They made sense of the momentary event by fitting it into the cyclical rhythms of natural process (Sivin 1977, 110).

This claim by Nathan Silvan accords with Confucius' belief that circumstances have their own propensities, which crucially affect what can be accomplished by human beings (Confucius 1998, 14.36). Self-refinement requires being sensitive to these propensities (Confucius 1998, 20.3). Heaven "speaks" through the four seasons and through the movement and plurality of things that come to be. I will say more shortly about what harmony looks like within a dynamic Confucian ethic. But already it should be clear that harmony with the world, nature, or human community cannot mean realizing or fulfilling a preordained essence or potential laid up in heaven or even within a community at some particular time and place.

This stress on the continual flow of life appears in Confucius' ethical work *Analects* at various points. The "master was standing on the riverbank, and observed, 'Isn't life's passing just like this, never ceasing day or night!'" (Confucius 1998, 20.3). One might usefully contrast this statement with the ancient Greek thinker Heraclitus's remark that we can never step in the same river twice. Heraclitus implicitly still invokes the notion of an essentialized river—i.e., the "same river." Confucius, by contrast, stresses the relentless flow itself. Unlike Heraclitus, he does not contrast his view with a static, unchanging cosmos. He makes no tacit claim that there is, was, or even ever could be, a statically unchanging river. He can only gesture at a "this."

Confucian ethics similarly makes no appeal to an objective world or structure of unchanging beings or natures (rational or otherwise). Nor does it invoke a transcendent God who has a divine plan and who has endowed us with a fixed nature (Liao 2017; Hall and Ames 1987, 158–159). In fact, Confucius explicitly declines to discuss the ways of heaven, spirits, or strange happenings (Confucius 1998, 5.13; 7.21). Instead, his teachings, according to his students, fall under four categories that are preeminently practical, not theoretical or speculative: "Culture, proper conduct, doing one's utmost, and realizing one's word (*xin*)" (Confucius 1998, 7.25).

The Confucian ethical challenge is not to realize our essence but to develop ourselves through acting in opportune ways, which harmonize not with some supposed human nature but with the concrete circumstances of our time (Hall and Ames 1987, 24–35). Confucian harmony with the world or nature does not equate to fulfilling a given a natural capacity through adherence to a fixed, preexisting, or inherited way or *dao*. It is no accident that the famous Confucian Mencius uses organic metaphors of development to describe virtues, characterizing them as "sprouts" (van Norden 2019). Confucius would view any essentialist approach to ethics as dangerous (1) because it can quickly degenerate into inflexible dogma; (2) because we must always be thinking through situations anew (Confucius 1998, 4.1), considering what we might learn from a tradition that we must make our own through lively discourse with our friends and peers (Hall and Ames, 1987); and (3) because even

our human capabilities can alter over time (Confucius 1998, 9.17). To quote Confucius, “The Dao does not shape man, Man shapes the Dao” (Confucius 1998, 15.29). This ongoing process of thinking through courses of action (in terms of their effect on human refinement) and respectfully talking with and listening to other members of the community is the work of harmonizing life. Harmonizing life means something like collectively making the world our own, thereby creating a friendly place for ourselves and for others.

The Confucian emphasis on rituals is another distinguishing aspect of his virtue ethics. We cannot refine ourselves—carve ourselves like a fine piece of jade—unless we bother to learn about our community’s history and its rituals and practices. Rituals, though, should not be followed mechanically. Rather, as we perform the ritual, we should seek to puzzle through its meaning. By doing that, we will discover for ourselves the inner meaning of these inherited behaviors and can make them our own. Confucius pokes fun at the mechanically minded individuals who think that, if it is good to kowtow three times, it must be even better to kowtow more (Confucius 1998, 17.11; 17.21). If we want to advance in refinement, we should reflect before, during, and after acting ritually. Given that bowing only once risks being interpreted as merely perfunctory respect, we may vow next time to bow twice. Later, when we bow twice, we may still feel that the gesture is inadequate, insufficiently solemn. Three bows done slowly may strike us as about right—that gesture seems to convey that we are intentionally and sincerely showing respect. Four times or more veers toward the comical. We might become dizzy or knock ourselves out with ten kowtows.

A final point about the nature of Confucian self-refinement and thriving. In some respects, Confucius stresses action less than Aristotle does. A Confucian ethic, with its intriguing notion of *wú wéi* or action through inaction, looks to the power of examples to inspire us and teach us the best way to live (Snell et al. 2022). Confucius mentions by name far more individuals than Aristotle does and that, I would argue, is far from accidental. We affect one another by how we carry ourselves. We can see whether a mother holds her child roughly or tenderly and then probe the meaning of her behavior and make our own decision as how best to engage with our children. When a son walks slowly so that his elderly parents can keep up with him, we notice such kindness and can then model our own behavior appropriately. When a banker takes her time before making a loan, asking all kinds of searching questions about risk, need, assets, collateral, etc., we can ponder why she does so and then alter how we make loans in the future. Exemplars, ethically good and bad, surround us and are an unending source of education—if we pay attention.

## Section Two: Applying Virtue Ethics’ Conceptions of Humane Work in the Business Context

I now want to consider some specific business applications drawing upon these virtue ethics’ conceptions of human thriving. In this section, I focus on three topics: labor conditions and human autonomy; employee pay equity and transparency; and the issue of genuinely good goods and services that truly serve. While there are many aspects of work to which virtue ethics might be applied (see Section Four’s suggestions for further research), I choose these issues for several reasons. First, the virtue ethics articulated by Aristotle and Confucius were among the first ethics to provide a foundation for human autonomy.<sup>1</sup> Happiness

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle may be the first philosopher to use the term “autonomy” (Aristotle 1984, 1284a18).

and self-refinement alike, I will argue, would necessitate granting a fair degree of autonomy to employees at all levels within the modern corporation. Second, the recent new laws dictating pay equity and transparency, while praised by social progressives and favored by deontologists, pose some challenges to human thriving and self-refinement that no one is discussing. Third, as I noted in the introduction, apart from Kenneth Goodpaster, almost no ethicist has considered the connection between humane work and the actual moral worth of the products and services that this work is yielding. Such a connection is central to what virtue ethics would place at the heart of humane work, so it deserves greater scrutiny that it has received to date.

## Labor Conditions and Human Autonomy

No doubt people of good character would agree that non-life-threatening working conditions are desirable. Few of us would want to work in rooms reaching 125 degrees Fahrenheit, to be compelled to dodge robots that could run us over, or to be forced to inhale dangerous chemicals as we assemble electronic phones or tablets. While we can appreciate the dignity of the peasant depicted in Diego Rivera's famous painting *the Flower Bearer*, most people would not want to haul flowers on their backs, day in and day out. Both an essentialist and a dynamic developmental conception of human thriving would deem such harsh or life-threatening labor conditions ethically problematic. While both Confucius and Aristotle resist equating biological persistence with virtuous living, their conceptions of a good life presuppose that we, as members of the workforce, are not pressured into risking our lives unnecessarily.

Aristotle explicitly states that human beings lie between gods and animals (Aristotle 1934, 1145a15-1145b5). Although other animals possess imagination and have both nutritive and sensitive souls, they lack the capacity for theoretical and practical wisdom. Our upright posture inclines us to consider the heavens and the nature of the cosmos as a whole and our place within that system. Elephants and ants do not engage in such speculations. Because we have unique human capabilities, we should honor and fulfill these capabilities and our specific function, work, or *ergon*. Any leader or any system that reduces human beings to beasts of burden is ethically demeaning or downright vicious. Indeed, Aristotle goes out of his way to say that in households with slaves, those who are genuine rulers of their households never treat any member, including slaves, with brutality or contempt (Aristotle 1984 1252a34-1252b5). That said, while we are not beasts, we do need to acknowledge and to meet our basic animal needs. If we cannot do that, we cannot thrive. People who have suffered great misfortunes (e.g., those who are very poor and forced to spend their waking hours scavenging for food or shelter) are not, Aristotle insists, happy (Aristotle 1934, 1100b25-1101a25). Aristotle, therefore, would likely characterize some of, say, amazon.com's labor policies as inhumane. Drivers who fail to make 300 or more deliveries per day receive black marks or "docks" when they return to the warehouse. The pressure on drivers to keep moving is intense—so much so that Amazon drivers have complained to numerous news outlets that they have been forced to relieve themselves in bottles they keep at the back of the truck rather than stopping at restrooms (Pichee 2021).

For his part, Confucius would have us be attuned to our animal nature and to the propensities of the larger cosmos. On the one hand, all animals feed their young. Like Aristotle,



Confucius would not want us to ignore our basic animal or economic needs. When asked whether a ruler should first feed his people or seek to make them good, Confucius unhesitatingly responds that the masses should be fed. He repeatedly stresses the need for sufficient food (Confucius 1998, 12.7) if people are to be led toward self-refinement. On the other hand, we don't qualify as virtuous merely because we take care of the bodily needs of our family members. Even the lowest of animals do that (Confucius 1998, 2.7). We human beings have a unique capacity for self-refinement, a process requiring tradition, rituals, the arts, and the support of the larger community. We, therefore, have a need to look after the interests of this larger human family. By making it close to impossible for drivers to take care of their basic human functions, much less to look after these larger interests, Amazon shows itself to be an inhumane employer in the eyes of a Confucian.

But a virtue ethics-based analysis would not stop there. Both Aristotle and Confucius would have some home truths to convey to consumers as well. Consumers play a role in whether work conditions are humanizing. To return to the case of Amazon's insane delivery schedules: The company deserves some credit for stepping up during the Covid-19 pandemic to deliver much needed food, medicine, masks, diapers, and other items to those of us who were homebound. We consumers have become addicted to fast deliveries, which has resulted in Amazon, Walmart, Target, InstaCart, and so on ratcheting up the number of daily deliveries drivers must make. As a matter of Aristotelian justice, we all should be thinking about what benefits other individuals, not only ourselves (Aristotle 1934, 1129a1-1130a1). Each of us has a responsibility to reset our expectations and to plan ahead so that we do not run out of diapers or toilet paper and need an instant delivery. Corporations, too, may legitimately act to modify consumer expectations by charging substantial premiums for fast deliveries with a view to making it possible to create less insane delivery schedules for drivers and for those who work in warehouses. Similar logic applies when we adopt a dynamic development perspective. The *junzi* or righteous individual looks inwardly to assess how she may be partly responsible for undesirable work conditions and takes steps to rectify her behavior. In addition, a *junzi* would not be interested in blaming Amazon or other employers. Rather than accusing others of being untrustworthy, we should ask whether we ourselves have behaved in a trustworthy manner (Confucius 1998, 1.4). A *junzi* prefers to think instead about how he or she can help alter the larger energetic flows in ways that will improve conditions for delivery workers while still making it possible for homebound individuals to receive necessary items.

So far, so good. However, matters become more complicated when we shift our gaze to the larger psychological dimensions of humane work. For decades, ethicists and management scholars have been arguing in favor of granting employees greater autonomy when it comes to controlling the production process and workplace conditions (Zimbalist 1975). Let us consider what Aristotle and Confucius might say about the case of the Brazilian firm Semco, a company famous for supporting employee autonomy. Semco allows its employees to set their own pay (within certain ranges), determine their working hours, decide corporate investments, and participate in all hires and reviews. Ricardo Semler, Semco's CEO, has described this approach as managing without managers (Semler 1989). He sees it as a way for employees to be more engaged with work and to feel that they have more power over their lives. From Aristotle's essentialist perspective, this approach looks humane. By enabling all members of the firm to participate in a kind of workplace democracy, Semco has created conditions under which members of the company can act justly, courageously,

generously, with good will, temperately and so on. In this kind of context, individuals have ample scope for deliberating and then for initiating action. They get practice in rendering context-specific judgments, and they learn to live with the consequences of these judgments. When employees are the boss, they can hardly attempt to escape responsibility by blaming the boss when a new product or service fails. In general, Aristotle would support whatever conditions encourage the development and display of justice, courage, generosity, etc. So Semco-style autonomy-encouraging policies look ethically sound and humane from Aristotle's perspective.

Two other aspects of Aristotle's ethics and politics reinforce my claim that Aristotle would likely view Semco's policies favorably. In the *Politics*, Aristotle repeatedly argues for a kind of limited republicanism (Aristotle 1984, 1284a1) on the ground that all free persons, especially those who have fought for the polis and who have made other contributions to it, will not settle for being shut out from political deliberations and choices. Thus, while many who make their living by exercising craft lack an aristocrat's leisure for contemplation, they nevertheless have life experience that they can usefully draw upon when participating in politics. And, of course, Aristotle was surely aware that Socrates was a "mere" stonemason. Yet it would be hard to argue that Socrates' craft disqualified him from political participation and practical wisdom! Consequently, it would be a mistake to think that Aristotle would treat employees who produce goods and services as unable to deliberate, to exercise autonomy, and to develop humanizing virtues.

Second, for Aristotle, craft (*technē*) itself has a *logos*. Craft is the exercise of reasoning (Johansen 2017). While it might be argued that (1) Aristotle focuses on free men; and that (2) craft practitioners (which would include skilled workers and employees) are never really free because they take orders from their customers or their bosses, such an objection to extending Aristotelian virtue ethics into the workplace is less compelling that it might initially seem. As Johansen (2017) argues, *logos* is not a theoretical element simply added on to experience. Instead, *logos* is what enables the craft to be productive, thereby distinguishing the craftsman from a simply experienced practitioner. If so, the genuine craftsman gives orders to himself or herself in accordance with what *logos* ascertains to be the demands of the craft or successful production. Qua engineer or carpenter, the engineer or carpenter does not want or desire to please the boss or to hold on to his or her job. A carpenter, strictly speaking, does not improperly mitre a wooden connection simply because the boss orders the carpenter to do so. The craftsman as such takes his or her guidance from the craft because that is what it means to be an engineer or carpenter. As Broadie (1987) puts it, Aristotle does not psychologize skilled production. The *telos* and that which sets production in motion (Aristotle's efficient cause) belong to the essence of a specific craft, not to the desires or wants of the productive agent. On this score, too, then workers and employees with technical skills should be semi-autonomous, a point well-understood by the leadership of Semco. By granting so much autonomy to its skilled employees, Semco can be seen as honoring the demands of Aristotelian craft.

For Confucius, too, a work environment like that at Semco offers opportunities for practical initiative, discernment, and self-refinement. We learn through doing and then through reflecting on our mistakes. On the other hand, Confucius would have us pay close attention to the needs of Semco as a whole. It might suit one team to decide to work Tuesdays through Saturday; however, another team may need to coordinate with this first team on a Monday. Or perhaps the majority of a Semco team opts to work late hours. Such a schedule may suit

most team members, but not the two employees who have young children at home. That kind of outcome would concern Confucius who places more emphasis than Aristotle does on the family as the seat of virtuous development (Confucius 1998). Moreover, while a team may have been empowered to make certain investment decisions, the team still should, from a Confucian perspective, attend to cosmic propensities and flows. We are free only, so to speak, to act in accordance with these flows. So autonomy is a nuanced business, and some of Semco's policies might be judged somewhat less humane from a Confucian perspective than from an Aristotelian point of view. For Confucius, we do not take our stand on the basis of human rationality, of the intellectual virtue of craft, or even of communal habits or virtues. Rather we should be guided by these larger cosmic propensities and the need for collective harmony.

## Employee Pay Equity and Transparency

I turn next to what these two virtue ethics might say about what others have taken to be another key aspect of humane work—employee pay equity and transparency. To focus this analysis, I examine a relatively new Colorado law garnering a huge amount of comment now in the US. Colorado's *Equal Pay for Equal Work Act* went into effect on January 1, 2021. It applies to all entities with at least one employee in Colorado, including public bodies, schools, and private individuals (Mitchell et al. 2020, np):

Beginning January, employers in Colorado must (1) provide formal notice to Colorado employees of “promotional opportunities,” which includes virtually every job movement, and (2) disclose pay rates or ranges in job postings for jobs that will be (or could be) worked in Colorado (including remote or “work anywhere” openings). For many companies, this means creating or revamping practices and procedures for making promotional decisions and processing internal position changes.

Many employees view this law favorably because it seems to promote pay equity. Persons negotiating a salary level within Colorado have a better sense of what amount they might ask for when they come on board. Men and women alike see the same band of salary opportunities. Women, in particular, have historically tended to be underpaid relative to men:

...[E]ven when women and men work the exact same jobs, men earn more. That's partly because women are less likely to negotiate for higher pay and more apt to be penalized when they do. “Instead of being seen as shrewd, a woman negotiating is seen as complaining,” said C. Nicole Mason, president of the Institute for Women's Policy Research. “Literally just for articulating what she says she deserves for her skills” (Goldberg 2021, np).

This law would seem to give women some objective place to stand when they ask for higher pay. In addition, one significant problem employees (especially women and minorities) have faced in the past is that those who joins a company at the lower end of a salary band never catch up with their peers. With this law, Colorado employees would appear to have a better opportunity to receive equal pay for equal work when they join a company, regardless of their race or gender.

I do not think Aristotelians or Confucians would have much difficulty with the concept of equal pay for truly equal work. That principle seems completely consistent with the virtue of justice understood as a rendering to each person/employee his or her due. At the same time, as I have been at pains to stress, both of these thinkers defend the notion of equity—i.e., the notion that different cases require different treatment. Aristotle explicitly discusses the need for real justice to have an equity dimension that is intrinsically variable (Aristotle 1934, 1134a10–1135a10). For his part, Confucius is quite suspicious of those who are inflexible and who treat everyone in exactly the same manner (Confucius 1998, 1.8; 9.4). Consequently, presumably even under this new Colorado pay equity law, a new hire with better credentials or a higher level of experience could receive a salary at the upper end of the band without either an Aristotelian or Confucian objecting. To the extent that the Colorado law itself appears to allow for exactly this sort of variation in pay, virtue ethics would support this legal approach.

Some employers, though, have already begun to refuse to allow Colorado residents to apply for national postings because these employers do not want to be forced to disclose salary bands (Desai 2021). They claim to be worried that, to entice top performers, they may have to offer more than the publicly disclosed preset band maximum. However, the easy way to address that concern is for firms to offer a wider salary band and to be very explicit about which skill sets will command higher pay within the band. One suspects that the real issue is that the Colorado law makes it more difficult for employers secretly to discriminate against certain groups or to engage in cronyism. Both Aristotelians and Confucians would raise ethical objections to such cronyism or discrimination on the grounds that these behaviors are unjust and do not foster friendly feeling among community members.

Aristotle might raise another issue. Aristotle's republicanism prompts him to evaluate whether political communities are recognizing the actual and potential contributions made by every member of the community. We should not forget that for Aristotle, ethics is part of politics. One of the main concerns of Aristotle's *Politics* is the need to avoid civil war and to encourage friendly feeling among community members. Making salary offers more transparent does not address the very high compensation of those in the C-suite relative to other workers. Aristotelian virtue ethicists might plausibly argue that legislation should be less focused on salary transparency and more on large salary differentials that lead to many employees feeling under-valued and alienated from their work and from corporate leaders.

A rather different ethical objection comes from a Confucian dynamic developmental perspective. The Colorado pay transparency law risks encouraging jobseekers to become fixated on how much they are being paid relative to their peers. For Confucius, only small-minded or mean-spirited persons are always worrying about how they stack up relative to other people, while the virtuous devote themselves to self-examination (Confucius 1934, 1.4; 15.19; 15.21). Those walking the *dao* are more concerned with how they are carrying themselves, how they are treating other people, whether they are progressing in understanding rituals, and what it means to be a *junzi*. The danger with this kind of law is that it may encourage people entering the workplace to become envious of others instead of attending to their own development. Envy and resentment are an ever present danger (Confucius 1934, 14.11). In more general terms, Confucius is far less keen than Aristotle on deploying laws to get people to do the right or humane thing. Confucius preserves space for individuals to act in the moment in compassionate, generous, and exemplary ways. Those who are always looking to others to usher in virtue are failing self-refinement (Confucius 1998,

12.1). To take a concrete case: When one of my colleagues who was pregnant needed to be confined to her bed for several months, departmental members spontaneously volunteered to teach several of her classes. We did not need the dean to force us to cover her classes or to pass a rule that every department must take measures to ensure that faculty classes are taught. Neither did we demand more pay for the additional classes we taught. On our own, we engaged in a bit of Confucian humanizing work.

## Humane Work and the Production of Goods that Are Really Goods, Services that Really Serve

I will end Sect. 2 with an analysis of an aspect of humane work that has been consistently overlooked and under-theorized by academics and corporate leaders—namely, the need for employees to consider what exactly they are producing in order for their work to be genuinely humanizing. As I noted above, Aristotle embeds all craft or technical production of goods and services within the larger political context. The good or end of the polis constrains production. That is, the political community encourages and supports those crafts that enable the large community of free citizens to become ever more virtuous and to have the subordinate goods needed (e.g., healthy horses; leather reins) for crucial political actions such as self-defense. From an Aristotelian perspective, Goodpaster (2011) is on the right track when he makes the teleological argument that businesses are obligated to serve the common good by producing goods that are genuine goods and services that really serve.<sup>2</sup> While I think there are some difficulties with Goodpaster’s way of framing of this argument, he is, I would contend, correct that, insofar as businesses are like professions, they must aim at a true good. Medicine aims at health, law at legal justice, the priesthood and ministry at salvation. The genuine goodness of the end is what gives these practices their political legitimacy and makes them trustworthy in the eyes of their clients (Koehn 1991). Like professions, businesses have political legitimacy by virtue of the goods and services they produce and sell. If so, then businesses that serve the political goal of human flourishing must have employees who are producing genuine goods and services.

Confucian virtue ethics arrives at a similar point by focusing not on the end or goal of the essence of craft or of politics, but by tying good leadership to the encouraging and support of communal self-refinement. Good leaders in all contexts, including corporate workplaces, do not set up their subordinates or those who work with them to fail by demanding that they make bricks without straw (Confucius 1934, 20.2). Neither do they demand that those over whom they have authority engage in demeaning activities or activities that pit people against one another. Confucius, for example, subtly but firmly pushes back again the King of Wu who boasts of having “good” sons who turn in their own fathers for alleged crimes (Confucius 1934, 13.18). For Confucius, the son’s “service” to the community may be no such thing. Presumably Confucius would have similar doubts about corporate executives

<sup>2</sup> Goodpaster draws upon the rich Catholic intellectual tradition and Catholic social teachings. There are some key overlaps between these teachings and the virtue ethics approaches of Aristotle and Confucius. For example, both are concerned with the good of the larger community and both are committed to the objectivity of ethical goodness. However, the Catholic approach is fundamentally more personalist, rooted in the sanctity of the human person who is created in God’s image. Aristotelian and Confucian ethics are more inclined to see personhood as an achievement, rather than as a given (although this claim needs to be appropriately nuanced with some caveats), and neither of these virtue ethics grounds itself in transcendental divinity.

who encourage employees to self-righteously accuse fellow employees of wrongdoing. He would not be against speaking out against wrongdoing—e.g., an engineer should report that managers responsible for manufacturing safe automobile engines are taking shortcuts that put people’s lives at risk. The company should be striving to produce genuinely “good goods.” But Confucius does not favor any corporate measures that can lead to widespread suspicion in the workplace. Working in that kind of environment would not be humanizing.

In both of these virtue ethics, then, attention needs to be paid to corporate products and services and the conditions under which these things are being manufactured, marketed, and sold. What, though, does this claim mean in concrete terms? Presumably the effective COVID-19 vaccines developed and sold by Moderna, Pfizer, AstroZeneca, and other companies would qualify as genuine goods on both Aristotelian and Confucian models. It is difficult for us to lead active lives if we are sick and confined to our beds. We cannot enact the just, courageous, temperate, and generous behaviors that constitute a thriving and self-refined life. Nor can we be out among friends and practicing our important social rituals if we are dead or dying. Employees working for these pharmaceutical companies producing effective COVID-19 vaccines can thus take justified pride in this work, which qualifies as humanizing.<sup>3</sup>

Matters, though, become trickier when we look at other products corporations are producing. Vaping products, for example, may or may not be good goods, depending upon which aspects of these products is considered. Juul and other vaping firms have argued that their pods make it easier for cigarette smokers to quit smoking, and there is some evidence that this claim is true (Russell et al. 2019). The pods use nicotine salts to deliver a nicotine buzz deep within the lungs. The claim is that vapers avoid exposure to many of the toxins released in the burning of tobacco. Smokers get a safer nicotine hit and get it far cheaper because vaping products are not subject to the same high level of taxes as cigarettes. From an Aristotelian essentialist perspective, any addiction is a form of intemperance. So, from this Aristotelian perspective, products that truly do help individuals combat an addiction to tobacco might be interpreted as humanizing (given some assumptions about the efficacy of vaping products in reducing nicotine dependence, etc.), and Juul employees might be deemed to be doing humanizing work.

From a developmental Confucian point of view, however, the issue looks somewhat different. Employees of firms who make vaping products need to look inwardly and examine their own motives. Vaping products have produced a new generation of addicts—younger people who think that vaping is cool and without dangers. In fact, companies like Juul have intentionally added nicotine salts and other elements that have increased the risk of addiction (Leventhal et al. 2021). Addicts provide a steady stream of revenues and generate profits, so it strains credulity to believe that vaping companies, their leaders, and those who work for these leaders have been motivated primarily by a desire to foster temperance among the populace at large. If so, then it is far from clear that working for a vaping company counts as humanizing.

A key difficulty here lies in how actual or prospective employees are to think through whether their company’s product or service is a genuinely good good. A product’s goodness is not simply a function of the product’s features but is often crucially dependent upon how

<sup>3</sup> Whether the pricing of these vaccines has been just is another issue. Here I focus only the issue of the humanizing aspect of the product being manufactured.

the product is used by consumers and upon environmental and contextual factors.<sup>4</sup> Corporate managers should be anticipating and addressing such dimensions through prudential discernment. To take a case in the news recently: Consumer products companies have been producing and selling detergent pods. These would seem to be good goods that help us clean our clothes better, removing possibly lethal germs as well as dirt from these items. On the other hand, a significant number of children have been poisoned when they ingested these pods. So is working for a detergent pod company humanizing work? Aristotelian and Confucian ethics would not allow managers and employees to deflect responsibility by arguing that they cannot control how consumers misuse products. Yes, detergents are not meant to be eaten like candy, and, yes, parents should proactively adopt measures to keep children from having access to these pods. These virtue ethics, though, impose a higher standard. Confucian *junzi* push themselves to identify and implement practical and productive processes that invite trust by meeting people's basic needs and minimizing needless suffering (Confucius 1934, 12.7). A refined Confucian leader would try to anticipate these avoidable poisonings and press employees to recommend how to make packaging more secure and to make the pods less attractive to children. Aristotelian virtue ethics, too, requires that we not settle for claiming that we did not know the pods we are making might poison small children or that we did not intend for our pods to be misused in these ways. Aristotle explicitly discusses self-caused ignorance and insists that agents exert themselves to consider in advance what might go wrong or what will be the consequences of their laziness or indifference (Aristotle 1934, 1110b18–1111b3).

In both Aristotelian and Confucian virtue ethics, the reasoning of prudential and refined individuals is active and defines for itself the relevant scope or arena in which it should be operating with respect to practical matters of action and production. Discernment itself emerges as the central and necessary genuinely good good. A workplace cannot be humanizing if those who are working in that space and who are leading their fellow employees are not anticipating how their companies' products and services should be designed, manufactured, and sold in order to enable consumers to lead safer, more secure, and ultimately more refined lives.

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<sup>4</sup> Even genuinely good goods could over time cease to be such, so perhaps formerly humane work could become non-humane or, at least, less humane. Public education and health presumably would qualify as timeless goods, given that it is difficult to see how human thriving at the individual and communal level would be possible without these goods. But a corporately provided service or product, even if it was once quite valuable, might cease to be so if circumstances and operating conditions change significantly. For example, cash management consulting was a major bank service in the 1980s when interest rates were very high. Companies reasonably wanted to get earnings into their bank accounts quickly in order to capture significant interest earnings. If they failed to manage their cash carefully, the company would lose money as inflation ate away the value of uninvested cash. If vendor checks languished in an employee's mailbox, then the company was essentially throwing money away since those checks could have been deposited and could have been earning a 14% return. But, in an era of very low interest rates, cash management consulting, if it is offered at all, would be perceived by executives as of low value. It wouldn't necessarily qualify as a service that genuinely serves others.

### Section Three: Limitations in Applying Aristotelian and Confucian Virtue Ethics to Humane Work in a Business Context

Classical virtue ethics frameworks, while quite powerful in some respects, have some noteworthy limitations. As I noted in the introduction, although Aristotle and Confucius are both aware of group activities or enterprises (e.g., ship-building; farming), corporations did not exist in ancient Greece or China. To the extent that in the modern world much work is done within corporate settings, classical virtue ethics inevitably must be extended in a somewhat speculative fashion. However, this stricture is not as limiting as it initially appears, because corporations are group enterprises in which individuals have specific roles. Consequently, they can be analogized to political communities, and virtue ethics has much to say about political life and action in these communities (Hartman 2013).

A more damning objection centers on who is doing the actual work in the communities. Aristotle explicitly states that his ethics speaks to adults who have been well-brought up. While this limitation does not exclude the middle class, it would initially appear to exclude slaves and the very poor who must do manual labor and who thus lack the leisure and material resources needed to exercise the humanizing virtues. For example, the virtue of courage, so central to the Greek self-understanding, is, for Aristotle, a warrior virtue, and only those with a modicum of wealth could afford the armor needed for fighting (Adkins 1984). In addition, the poor and slaves in Athens lacked the wealth requisite for exercising the virtues of liberality and magnanimity. While this objection has merit, it, too, should not be overstated. In the first place, the poor of ancient Greece managed their own households. Aristotle considers household management to be a type of work (*ergon*). Virtues such as kindness, good will, and practical wisdom can and will be exercised by fathers and mothers and husbands and wives throughout an economy. Even slaves have a distinctive *ergon* requiring some form of virtue (Adkins 1984), although slaves will never lead fully happy lives insofar as they lack the autonomy of free men and women.

Second, care needs to be taken when interpreting the word “work” within an Aristotelian virtue ethics context. Like other classical Greek writers, Aristotle distinguishes *kopos* (labor), *ponos* (distressing or exhausting straining), and *ergon* (work or activity that realizes specific human capacities of reasoning and perception). In the context of the *Ethics* and *Politics*, *ergon* is the controlling usage (Adkins 1984). Furthermore, an *ergon* is primarily defined politically, not biologically (Adkins 1984). To the extent this latter claim is true, work (and, by implication, humane work) will be understood somewhat differently in different regimes. In this paper, I have focused on Aristotle’s own preferred republicanism, setting aside the complication of the myriad forms of other regimes such as aristocracies and tyrannies analyzed by Aristotle in the *Politics*. This narrowing of the focus has enabled me to simplify an already complex argument, but it does constitute a limitation to the approach I have adopted here.

Third, in his *Politics*, Aristotle evinces concern for the poor and the marginalized. His concern is tied to his preoccupation with the ever present threat of civil war and revolution, both of which frequently arise from inequalities in income, wealth, and opportunities. He explicitly argues for the need for and desirability of fairer income distribution. To the extent that a more just income distribution and/or higher wages enforced by a regime could free community members from grinding and soul-crushing labor, Aristotle’s notion of “humane work” can justifiably be enlarged to include members of the lower classes.



Confucius is less susceptible to the charge that his ethics do not apply to the poor. He is famous for having accepted and educated many poor students (e.g., Yuan Xian), charging them no fees. Confucius said, “I have never denied instruction to anyone who, of his own accord has given me so much as a (small) bundle of dried meat as a present” (Confucius 1934, 7.7). His best student Yan Hui was dirt poor. Although Confucius’ own family was apparently once aristocratic, it had fallen on hard times. Confucius himself had to do manual labor (Confucius 1934, 9.6) It is not so surprising, then, that Confucius repeatedly states that leaders at all levels should act in ways that ensure that wealth is equitably distributed so that no one is poor and everyone feels secure (Confucius 1934, 16.1). It would not be a stretch to turn to Confucian ethics to argue for, at the very least, a living wage, one that enables employees to take care of their families without having to worry about slipping into debt, being evicted from their homes, and so on.

However, a Confucian approach has its own limitations. To cite one significant issue: Confucius’ referent community is his own group of students who travelled and lived with him. This community was exclusively male, so his ethics have little to say about equalizing work between the sexes or creating opportunities for women to engage in activities leading to higher levels of self-refinement. His edict that husbands must be husbands and wives, wives has been seen as enshrining a status quo not equally respectful of all genders. To put the objection in slightly different terms: Confucian virtue ethics would benefit from a greater degree of intersectionality where the effects of gender, class, race, nationality, etc. on the possibility of humane work are examined more systematically.

A related objection concerns Confucius’ distinction between rulers and the ruled. Unlike Aristotle, Confucius does not consider the possibility that the privilege and duty of ruling should rotate among individuals so that more people have a chance to develop the virtues connected with leadership and to have their personal experiences shape collective life. There is a danger in that the Confucian conception of self-refinement will prove to be sclerotic. Simply saying that “rulers should be rulers and subjects subjects” may result in institutions and workplaces that are not sufficiently dynamic to develop the human person in a full manner.

#### **Section Four: Implications of Aristotelian and Confucian Virtue Ethics for Humanizing Work and Avenues for Future Research**

The above analysis suggests that the meaning of humane work is far from settled. As I noted in the introduction, one of the goals of this paper has been to demonstrate that, when applying even the restricted framework of virtue ethics, the concept of humanizing work depends upon which particular virtue ethics framework one is invoking. As we have seen, Aristotelian and Confucian virtue ethics sometimes pull in different directions. Confucius is more inclined than Aristotle to emphasize that the family is the nursery of virtue; to rely upon moral exemplars as central to virtue acquisition; to mistrust the law as a shaper of behavior, and to stress adaptation to cosmic propensities. For his part, Aristotle stresses the demands of craft and habituation, the need for political virtues such as military courage, and the ethical goodness of products generated by craft and art, topics that are not at the heart of Confucian virtue ethics. Given that there are tensions within classical virtue ethics, progress in making work more humane is unlikely to occur if employees, leaders, management

scholars, and ethicists do not specify the meaning of the term more clearly; do not indicate explicitly which framework they are using to underpin the norms to which they are appealing; and do not flesh out this framework sufficiently so that any invoked norms appear at least somewhat grounded.

The good news is that Aristotelian and Confucian virtue ethics do agree on some key aspects of humane work. As we have seen, both think of humanizing work as activity that engenders and reflects virtue. For Aristotle, virtuous activity is habitual excellence achieved by exercising context-sensitive judgment to hit a mean lying between extremes. Confucian virtue consists in the activity of self-refinement supported by rituals and encouraged by exemplary behavior on the part of members of the community. For both thinkers, self-refinement is a disposition to look carefully and honestly at one's own behavior before blaming others for their flaws. Other shared aspects include (1) an ability to act upon highly context-specific practical judgments; (2) a willingness to exert oneself to anticipate possible problems or harms that one's business and productive activities might create; and (3) a sensitivity to the manner in which one's choices either promote or inhibit friendly feeling within the larger community.

What are the practical and theoretical implications of this focus on virtuous work as humanizing? I begin with the practical side. Aristotelian and Confucian virtue ethics both would push for greater employee autonomy at work. Indeed, precisely because Aristotle is so committed to the autonomy of craft, Aristotelian virtue ethics might productively be used to argue for the professionalization of business and to specify in a still more rigorous fashion the connection between autonomy and realization of our human capacity for reasoning and perceiving. In the traditional professions of medicine, law, and the clergy, professionals have a high degree of autonomy. They are bound to act in accordance with the goals they espouse in their *professio* or their professional oaths (Kass 1985; Koehn 1991). Doctors interpret their professional oath and are guided by that interpretation. They do not take orders from their patients or even, in some cases, from hospital administrators. So, too, Aristotle would defend the "right," if you will, for skilled employees (blue as well as white collar workers) to be self-guided by the end of their craft-profession. But how far should this autonomy extend? And what would virtue ethics have to say about how the work unskilled employees might become more humane? These questions need further investigation.

These two virtue ethics frameworks would also ask corporate managers to consider ways to foster greater friendly feeling among employees and to develop employees' ability to make sound practical judgments. Humane work does not engender envy, resentment, or pit people against each other. It would be better, for example, for corporations to stop referring to their "hot lines," a term which inevitably invites employees to report on other individuals' alleged wrongdoing. Some corporations have moved to adopt the language of "advice lines," promoting them as a service where employees can call in not only to express concerns about others' behavior but also to ask for advice about how to act better themselves. As Confucius stressed, before accusing others of acting badly, we should first consider whether we ourselves have acted in trustworthy ways. Aristotle's notion of rotating rule as a way to create opportunities for many individuals to gain experience in ruling or managing might also be adopted by corporations. In Europe, worker representatives are included on the board of directors. While Aristotle's republicanism might favor such a measure, he would take it further. All board members, including worker or union representatives should serve limited terms so that more individuals have a chance to experience and to learn from

the challenges of managing a company. Thought would have to given, though, to how long terms ought to be for service on the board to have a chance of truly developing individuals' capacity for judgment.

Other practical implications would include, but not be limited to, the desirability of adopting appropriate workplace rituals supportive of self-refinement and enhanced discernment and of instituting more vocational training for the acquisition of enhanced craft skills (which, as we have seen, can involve virtue acquisition). There are numerous theoretical implications as well inherent in applying these two virtue ethics. The first major implication is that the conception of humane work should not be divorced from the larger political sphere and the ends or *teloi* of the regimes in which people are working. Insofar as our work or human function is defined politically—especially in the case of Aristotle; to a lesser degree in Confucian virtue ethics—whether and how humane work can be realized will inevitably be affected by the character of rulers and the nature of the regime. As Confucius puts it, the *junzi* or refined person cooperates with leaders who are virtuous but withdraws into a more private sphere when those in power are vicious or corrupt. While participating in ruling is generally a good thing for Confucius, it is not always so. As we saw in Sect. 1, both forms of virtue ethics envision virtues being realized in specific contexts. In Confucian language, the practically wise person adapts his or her work to the propensities of the times. To date, this linkage between humane work and the larger political context has not been much explored.

Second, humane work ought not be divorced from the *teloi* of corporations. If the corporations are not producing generally good goods, it is doubtful how humane the work of their employees truly is. Employees should be asking themselves, “Is my company offering genuinely good goods and services that truly serve?” If a company's products are harmful to others in foreseeable ways, then employees at all levels who turn a blind eye to these deleterious effects are at least somewhat complicit in the destruction of our human world. Such work hardly qualifies as humane. It is not so easy to specify what products are genuinely good goods, so here, too, is an area for additional exploration by management theorists and ethicists.

Third, these two virtue ethics frameworks require all members of the community to think more broadly about the conditions of humane work. Past academic discussions of humanizing work have tended to focus almost exclusively on employees and employers. The above analysis provides grounds for urging those who want to humanize work not to concentrate so narrowly on the behavior of managers. As the example of Amazon in Section Two shows, from a virtue ethics perspective, what a company's customers choose to do can directly affects working conditions at that company in significant ways. Although in this short paper I have touched only upon customers' effects on the humaneness of the workplace, this line of argument should be extended to include the choices made by stakeholders such as the government and stockholders. A Confucian humanizing of work equally requires that stakeholders such as politicians, employers, union leaders, investors, and academics who are pushing for more humane work take into account the effect of their choices on the flourishing of employees. Such an extension, though, likely would raise its own ethical challenges. Corporate leaders typically have a fair amount of control over employee working safety, pay, autonomy, etc. They have far less control over what customers or governments choose to do. How, then, from a virtue ethics perspective, should business leaders and employees who desire to make work more humane set about appropriately influencing these

key stakeholders? How can they effectively encourage stakeholders to be more reflective about the effects of their choices?

The concept of humane work is a powerful one. Additional research to clarify, extend, and apply the notion using virtue ethics frameworks would be most welcome.

**Authors' Contributions:** Not applicable.

**Funding** Not applicable:

**Data Availability** Not applicable.

**Code Availability** Not applicable.

## Declarations

**Conflicts of interest/Competing Interests** None.

**Ethics Approval:** Not applicable.

**Consent to Participate:** Not applicable.

**Consent for Publication** Not applicable.

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