“Taking-Ownership” as a Political Virtue in Aid of Responsibility

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ABSTRACT: This paper introduces a virtue called 'taking-ownership' and analyzes its relationship to the virtue of responsibility. After showing how the virtues are distinct, I suggest ways that they are mutually supportive, and in some cases, required, for the full expression of each other. In certain conditions, being a fully responsible participant in a project requires that one also take ownership in that project. Since these conditions seem applicable to the case of civil servants who participate in governmental organizations, I reflect on ways that taking ownership is a virtue applicable to the responsible management of governmental organizations.

The phrase "taking ownership" is taking the English-speaking world by storm. Business leaders describe good employees as those who "take ownership" of their projects.[1] Students are encouraged to "take ownership" of their learning.[2] Medical patients are exhorted to "take ownership" of their health.[3] In the United States, the military now teaches their Navy SEAL teams about "taking ownership" on the battlefield.[4] And the idea is pertinent to public projects as well. Citizens of Cape Town, South Africa were recently exhorted to take ownership of their local communities;[5] residents of Reading, Pennsylvania were encouraged to take ownership of a

[1] Paul Gustavson and Steward Liff, *A Team of Leaders: Empowering Every Member to Take Ownership, Demonstrate Initiative, and Deliver Results* (United States: AMACOM Books, 2014). See also: Lynn Flinn, "Leader 2 Leader: Find Ways for Employees to Take More Ownership on the Job," *Tulsa Business & Legal News*, November 16, 2017, http://www.tulsaworld.com/business/tulsabusiness/leader-leader-find-ways-for-employees-to-take-more-ownership/article_07bc3ada-00cd-5b1c-af7c-3a1c65469f2a.html; Becky Vaughn-Furlow, "You Can Have Joy in Your Work," *Clarion Ledger*, October 14, 2017, http://www.clarionledger.com/story/news/2017/10/14/you-can-have-joy-your-work/755498001/.

[2] See, for example, Project Tomorrow, "Unleashing the Future: Educators 'Speak Up' about the Use of Emerging Technologies for Learning. Speak Up 2009 National Findings. Teachers, Aspiring Teachers & Administrators," May 2010, www.tomorrow.org/speakup/; Amelia Harper, "Parker Middle Strives to Transform Itself," *Rocky Mount Telegraph*, November 29, 2017, http://www.rockymounttelegram.com/Schools/2017/11/29/Parker-Middle-strives-to-transform-itself.html.

[3] Zal Press and Dawn Richards, "The Power of Patient Ownership: The Path from Engagement to Equity," *Patient Experience Journal* 2, no. 1 (2015): 15–17.

[4] Jocko Willink and Leif Babin, *Extreme Ownership: How U.S. Navy SEALs Lead and Win* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2015).

[5] Dominic Adriaanse, "Hanover Park Community Safety Camp-out Addresses Crime," *Cape Times*, October 30, 2017, https://www.iol.co.za/capetimes/news/hanover-park-community-safety-camp-out-addresses-crime-11766152.

neighborhood development project;[6] and a community activist in New Zealand asked her school district to take ownership in the community gardening projects she is sponsoring.[7]

Obviously, this phrase – taking ownership – is meant to signify some praiseworthy type of activity or way of being that is not related to the sequestration of property, which, I believe, is the etymological use of the term. It rather suggests a way of *relating* to one's projects and activities that involves seeing those projects as one's own. I contend this relation is best understood as a species of psychological attachment. It involves a person "investing" herself in a project and identifying with it as "mine." In recent psychology, this state (or something like it) has been described as "psychological ownership."[8]

This paper attempts to accomplish two things. First, it proposes that "taking ownership," in the special sense described above, is the basis for a human virtue that has not received philosophical attention. I argue that it is possible to be the kind of *person* who is well disposed to taking ownership in all the projects that he or she participates in. Conversely, one may be poorly disposed to taking ownership in one's projects. Second, the paper suggests that this virtue of taking-ownership is important for the virtue of responsibility.[9] In certain circumstances, it is necessary for people to take ownership in their projects if they are to "fully" discharge their responsibilities to them. This conclusion is important for thinking about the responsible

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[6] Ben Hasty, "Editorial: Centre Park Success Story Well Worth Emulating," *Reading Eagle*, November 8, 2017, http://www.readingeagle.com/news/article/editorial-centre-park-success-story-well-worth-emulating#.WiG09lWnGUk.

[7] Courtney Hammond, "Grant to Feed Sustainable Living Dream," *New Zealand Herald*, October 6, 2017, http://www.nzherald.co.nz/northern-advocate/news/article.cfm?c_id=1503450&objectid=11929350.

[8] See, for example, Philippe Rochat, *Origins of Possession: Owning and Sharing in Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Jon L. Pierce, Tatiana Kostova, and Kurt T. Dirks, "Toward a Theory of Psychological Ownership in Organizations," *The Academy of Management Review* 26, no. 2 (2001): 298–310; Jon L. Pierce, Tatiana Kostova, and Kurt T. Dirks, "The State of Psychological Ownership: Integrating and Extending a Century of Research," *Review of General Psychology* 7, no. 1 (2003): 84–107; Sarah Dawkins et al., "Psychological Ownership: A Review and Research Agenda," *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 38 (2017): 163–83.

[9] Hereafter I will hyphenate "taking-ownership" when I intend to signify the virtue.

management of public projects and governmental organizations, which is related to the theme of this conference.

The paper proceeds in three parts. Part I is a brief introduction to the virtue of taking-ownership that is meant to provide the reader with some necessary background for the discussion that follows. Space, however, does not allow me to fully defend or account for the virtue here. Part II examines the concept of virtue *responsibility* and the relationship between responsibility and taking-ownership. I show that these virtues, while distinct, inform each other in important ways. Part III concludes by considering how the virtue of taking-ownership should inform responsible management of government agencies and organizations. In particular, I argue that a person's disposition to take ownership should be considered by political leaders when making cabinet or other agency appointments to lead governmental organizations.

I. The Virtue of Taking-Ownership

Before describing "taking ownership" as a virtue, I must first say more about what it means to "take ownership" in a *single* project. To take ownership in an individual project is to have a disposition to conceive of that project's ends as one's own. One becomes *attached* to the project and personally *invested* in achieving its ends. Characteristically this involves construing a project under the aspect of "mine" or "ours." Thus, when one "owns" a project, one also possesses a special concern for the project – a concern that supervenes on the concern that one has for oneself.

Taking ownership can be understood as a *virtue* (with related vices) by considering that one can possess a further disposition to appropriately take ownership in every project that one participates in. It is what Christine Swanton has called a "virtue of attachment" – one that

concerns the nature and the strength of human bonds.[10] For it is possible to identify with and become attached to things well or poorly. If a person characteristically identifies with her projects too strongly, we say that person is "over-invested" in her projects. This is incompatible with a proper conception of the self and can lead to other bad behaviors and emotional states. Conversely, people may "lack a sense of ownership" in their projects if they characteristically fail to identify with them to a significant degree, or not at all. This vice results in an unhealthy indifference to one's projects, poor performance, and is contrary to the good of human solidarity. Thus, the conception of this virtue that follows is Aristotelian in the sense that I describe it as a mean state between excess and deficiency.[11]

We do not, however, usually praise or blame people for "being attached" to their projects to an appropriate degree. People praise those who take ownership because the taking ownership attachment produces certain excellences in a person's acting, feeling, and concern for projects. Thus, describing the virtue *merely* in terms of the "strength" of one's attachment provides a limited understanding of the virtue. The virtue can also be described in terms of the excellent feelings and actions that are characteristic responses of the trait.

In terms of action, people with the virtue of taking-ownership characteristically act in ways that further, enhance, or contribute to the achievement of a project's ends by making those

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[10] See Christine Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 42. The virtue of love (or charity) has also been conceived of as a virtue of attachment. See Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices: And Other Essays in Moral Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 11. Likewise, certain vices, such as avarice, have been called vices of attachment. See Rebbecca DeYoung, *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and Their Remedies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 100–105.

[11] Many scholars have contended that Aristotle's "doctrine of the mean" is an unhelpful analytical model. See, for example, Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana, 1985), 36; Rosalind Hursthouse, "A False Doctrine of the Mean," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 81 (81 1980): 52–72. For a recent defense of the doctrine of the mean against some objections, see Joe Mintoff, "On the Quantitative Doctrine of the Mean," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 51, no. 4 (2013): 445–64. Mueller also presents a very helpful modification of Aristotle's doctrine of the mean. See Anselm Mueller, "Aristotle's Conception of Ethical and Natural Virtue," in *Was Ist Das Für Den Menschen Gute? / What Is Good for a Human Being?*, ed. Jan Szaif and Mattias Lutz-Bachmann (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 18–53.

ends their own. This characteristically expresses itself in terms of (i) *active participation*, (ii) *proactive contribution*, and (iii) *appropriate exertion* of one's energies into a project. Active participation concerns a person's general responsiveness to the present tasks and needs of a project. This manifests itself in a variety of forms, but examples include "jumping in" to perform a task that is assigned or eagerly engaging with one's colleagues. *Proactive contribution*, by contrast, is a way of contributing to a project that attempts to anticipate future outcomes and discover the best ways of achieving the aims and goals of the project. This quality may also be understood as "taking initiative," "being imaginative" or being "enterprising."[12] These contributions are distinct from a person's "active participation" because it is possible for someone to actively participate in a way that is merely *re*actionary; for example, one may actively participate in a project by doing all and *only* the tasks one is assigned. Making a proactive contribution means that a person looks for new ways to help or to improve a project, and she characteristically makes such contributions even if they are not asked for. The proactive contributor also anticipates future problems or issues that may arise in a project, and he or she tries to solve them in advance. Finally, *appropriately exerting* oneself in a project is about appropriately spending one's physical or mental energy for the sake of a project. Examples include exerting mental energy to solve a problem, appropriately working late to help meet a deadline, or exerting the necessary effort to work through interpersonal issues among teammates.

In terms of a person's emotions, taking-ownership does not merely facilitate one emotion type, as some virtues do. (For example, the virtue of compassion characteristically elicits compassionate feelings towards others). This is because human attachments facilitate a wide

[12] Some grammarians consider "proactive" to be a buzzword, and it is associated with business-speak. Nevertheless, it presents a nice conceptual contrast between actions that are "reactive." The alternatives listed are suggestions from Richard Palmer, *The Good Grammar Guide* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 157.

range of human emotions. As William James noticed, people who construe something as "mine" will experience different types of emotions depending on the circumstance: "If [those things] wax and prosper, he feels triumphant; if they dwindle and die away, he feels cast down."[13] By taking ownership in a project a person experiences a range of emotions that are appropriate to furthering that project's ends. For example, he will characteristically feel joy or excitement when the project succeeds. On the other hand, he will feel appropriate frustration or anger at project failures, and anxiety when the project is in danger. Assuming that a person takes ownership in his projects to an appropriate degree (i.e. virtuously), he will experience these emotions to an appropriate degree as well.

Contrast this with people who characteristically lack a sense of ownership in their projects. They characteristically fail to actively participate, proactively contribute, or appropriately exert themselves in projects. Likewise, their emotional responses are characteristically muted or absent, resulting in kind of emotional indifference to a project's successes and failures. Since human emotion is such a powerful motivator, the muted (or indifferent) emotional responses of one lacking a sense of ownership are less excellent than of those who take ownership. Furthermore, this lack of emotional responsiveness can translate into deficient relationships with teammates and coworkers. People who work on projects and care about them are often frustrated when they must work together with those who lack a sense of ownership.

On the other hand, it is possible to take ownership "too much" – what I previously described as being "over-invested" in a project. People who are over-invested in projects characteristically experience self-esteem issues, unhealthy emotional swings, and obsessive

[13] William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: Dover, 1890).

mental preoccupations. For example, people who identify too strongly with projects have developed unhealthy conceptions of their own self-worth, making it hard for them to receive constructive criticism.[14] In more extreme cases, people have even lost the will to live when they were involuntarily removed from a project.[15] In terms of emotional responses, being over-invested may cause one to experience feelings of extreme loss (and extreme elation) at project failures (and successes). It may also cause excessive frustration or anger when a project is hindered or blocked. These intense emotional experiences can cloud a person's judgment and also contribute to poor interpersonal relations with other project participants. Finally, people with the vice of over-investment may find themselves obsessively preoccupied with their projects. This can prohibit one from giving appropriate attention to other important aspects of one's life, including family and friends. It can limit a person's ability to "be present" or "in the moment" in non-project related situations.[16]

As one can see, the disposition to appropriately identify with and invest oneself in projects (to an appropriate degree) can be a human virtue. Of course, much more can be said about the topic. I have done so over several hundred pages elsewhere, and I do not presume to have provided a full defense or account of the virtue here.[17] Nevertheless, my hope is that this brief introduction will allow the reader to consider taking-ownership as a potential virtue that may plausibly have important interactions with the virtue of responsibility.

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[14] See Jon L Pierce, "Toward a Theory of Psychological Ownership in Organizations," *The Academy of Management Review* 26, no. 2 (2001): 298–310.

[15] See Pierce, Kostova, and Dirks, "Toward a Theory of Psychological Ownership in Organizations"; F. Cram and H. Paton, "Personal Possessions and Self-Identity: The Experiences of Elderly Women in Three Residential Settings," *Australian Journal of Aging* 12, no. 1 (1993): 19–24.

[16] "Being present" or "being in the moment" are popular expressions which symbolize the fact that a person is able to give their full attention to both the people and experiences that she is presently surrounded by, instead of being distracted. "Being present" and "being in the moment" are generally thought of as good ways of being, and I assume without argument that this is true.

[17] I give a full defense of this virtue in my dissertation, "The Virtue of Taking Ownership."

II. Taking-Ownership and Responsibility

Before discussing the relationship between taking-ownership and responsibility, I first must note that the term "responsibility" is not a single or unitary concept. In fact, most philosophers studying the concept of responsibility now recognize that the term "admits of a variety of uses."[18] Nicole Vincent, for example, has developed a structured taxonomy of six related responsibility concepts. These include: (1) *virtue* responsibility, (2) *role* responsibility, (3) *outcome* responsibility, (4) *causal* responsibility, (5) *capacity* responsibility, and (6) *liability* responsibility.[19] These concepts have distinct senses or meanings and yet are interrelated. Since my interest is in virtue, I focus here on what Vincent calls virtue responsibility.

Virtue responsibility is the idea that responsibility can name a praiseworthy disposition or character trait – i.e. it is possible to be a responsible *person*. The complementary vice is being irresponsible. Garrath Williams has described this character trait as a "readiness" to respond to "a whole host of normative demands, within a field of mutual accountability."[20] Vincent alternatively describes the virtue when she says: "A person who is responsible in this virtue sense will discharge their responsibilities – i.e. they will see to it that the things that it is up to

[18] For example, compatibilists consider whether determinism rules out "responsibility;" luck egalitarians consider whether entitlements should be aligned with a person's "responsibility;" virtue ethicists argue that "responsibility" is a virtue concept. The quoted text is from John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control: A Theory of Moral Responsibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2, note 1.

[19] Discussing each of these concepts would be well beyond the scope of this paper. For those interested, the concepts are nicely illustrated in H.L.A Hart's parable of the ship captain. See H.L.A Hart, "IX. Postscript: Responsibility and Retribution," in *Punishment and Responsibility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 210–37. Vincent adapts this story in: Nicole A. Vincent, Ibo van de Poel, and Jeroen van de Hoven, eds., *Moral Responsibility*, Library of Ethics and Applied Philosophy 27 (New York: Springer, 2011), 17.

[20] Garrath Williams, "Responsibility as a Virtue," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 11, no. 4 (2008): 458. Interestingly, Nietzsche also attributes the origin of the concept of responsibility to man's ability to *promise*, or put himself under obligation to another. Frederick Nietzsche, *On the Geneaology of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson and Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 36–37.

them to do get done."[21] Virtue responsibility is thus a disposition to be conscientious about the normative demands that apply to oneself and to live up to, fulfill, or meet those demands.[22]

A person possessing the virtue of responsibility appropriately *takes responsibility*. Taking responsibility, however, is a tensed concept with three senses. The first is future oriented. It concerns agreeing to, or putting oneself under, a normative demand (including the demands of a role) and forming an intention to remain conscientious and ready to fulfill that demand at some point in the future.[23] The second sense concerns the present fulfilment of a normative demand. In this sense, one "takes responsibility" *now* by discharging a responsibility that one is already under. Taking responsibility in the present tense normally issues forth in some form of responsible action.

The final sense of taking responsibility is backward looking. It is what people mean when they speak of "taking responsibility" for their past. To take responsibility in this sense requires that a person accept the praise or blame for some past action or event.[24] Usually, but not always, this praise or blame is accepted because the person identifies with the action or accepts it as something she caused or could have prevented.[25]

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[21] Nicole A. Vincent, "Responsibility: Distinguishing Virtue from Capacity," *Polish Journal of Philosophy* 3, no. 1 (2009): 112.

[22] The normative demands to which one can be responsible include the normative demands associated with Vincent's second concept – role responsibility. The concept of role responsibility is simply the recognition that people may have certain responsibilities that attach to them in virtue of their roles. These responsibilities may be explicit (as often happens in workplace settings), or they may be implicit (like many of the responsibilities attached to being a parent). One of the great difficulties in being a responsible person is "negotiate[ing] the particular, diverse and sometimes conflicting claims" that often derive from a person's various roles. See Williams, "Responsibility as a Virtue," 460.

[23] Notice that to "take responsibility" in some particular case does not require that one also have a dispositional readiness to satisfy all one's normative demands. In other words, I can take responsibility for something even if I do not possess the virtue.

[24] On Vincent's taxonomy, she refers to this as *liability responsibility*. See also, Vincent, van de Poel, and van de Hoven, *Moral Responsibility*, 23–24.

[25] It is not necessary that one have a causal role in some action or event to take responsibility for it. For example, a good manager may take responsibility for her employees' actions even if though she was not causally

All three senses of "taking responsibility" may be relevant for a complete discussion of taking-ownership, but I will here focus on the first two. At least in these two senses, it is possible to see a clear distinction between taking responsibility and taking ownership. The distinction is evident because the characteristic response of virtue responsibility involves a readiness to respond to *normative demands*, whereas the characteristic response of taking-ownership is to form of a certain kind of *attachment* to a project by identifying with it as "mine" or "ours." A person can be invested in and attached to a project even if she is irresponsible to the normative demands the project places her under.[26] Conversely, it is possible to take responsibility for things that we are not invested in or attached to.

The distinction is easily illustrated with a workaday example. My friend Nick recently asked me to look after his cat one weekend. I was able to *responsibility* take care of his cat without becoming attached or taking ownership in the project. Taking responsibility only required that I feed the cat, let it outdoors, etc. This did require that I conceive of the project as "mine" in some minimal sense, insofar as it was something *I* agreed to do. But this is not the same as taking ownership in the cat's care. I was able to discharge my responsibilities in a manner similar to how an office worker who "lacks a sense of ownership" in his projects may still discharge his responsibilities each day. It would of course have been *possible* for me to take ownership in the care of Nick's cat. For example, I might have taken extra time to play with it, brush its hair, or thoroughly clean the litterbox. And that certainly would have been

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involved. Here we see that Vincent's concept of "causal responsibility" is often, although not necessarily, an important component of liability responsibility.

[26] It does seem, however, that being psychologically attached to a project should cause a greater *willingness* to be responsible to the project. Insofar as a person identifies with a project, they should be more likely to respond to the normative demands that arise within the scope of that project. However, one could also imagine a person taking ownership in a project who is not conscientious about the demands placed on them, and thus is irresponsible even while taking ownership in the project.

praiseworthy. But being a responsible person did not require that I take ownership in that way. It merely required that I fulfill the promise I made to Nick.

The distinction between virtue responsibility and taking-ownership can also be seen in the way each motivates action. If I am *merely* taking responsibility for some task, then my motivations are primarily external.[27] I can thus act responsibly in a *detached* way. The taking-ownership attachment, by contrast, is a source of internal motivation. As I become attached to a project and see its ends as my own, I experience a sense of oneness with the project. I am therefore moved to act because of an internal desire to achieve a project's ends. This explains why it is characteristic of those who take ownership to make proactive contributions and go "above and beyond" what is demanded of them – such people are not responding *primarily* to external demands.[28]

Of course, taking ownership and responsibility can also co-exist; people may be motivated both by internal and external sources. The virtues of responsibility and taking-ownership can also work together in mutually reinforcing ways. At times each may be required for the full or most excellent expression of the other. For example, it seems obvious that a person would not be acting *well* if she takes ownership in a project but is not conscientious of the normative demands placed on her. On the other hand, being fully responsible for a project can require that one take ownership in it too. This is true in two important circumstances. The first occurs when projects do not have clearly defined *ends*, and a person is responsible for shaping

[27] Admittedly, the motivational structure of responsibility may be more complex that the discussion here allows, depending on the context of the situation.

[28] If a person has *already* taken ownership in a project, then her sense of ownership will likely increase her conscientiousness and responsiveness to the demands of the project, but that is a secondary effect of taking ownership and remains conceptually distinct from taking ownership itself.

those ends. The second occurs when *the means* to achieving a project's ends are not well defined or are unclear, and a person is responsible for determining the best means to be pursued.

Let us begin by examining projects whose *ends* are not well defined. In such cases, it is common for certain people to have the responsibility to "shape" or direct a project's ends and goals. For example, the shareholders of a corporation often make it the responsibility of a CEO to shape the company's ends. If such a person is to discharge that responsibility in the most excellent way, she will in most cases need to take ownership in the project. That is because, as a general rule, the creating and shaping of ends is done best when a person identifies with and is invested in the ends he or she is shaping. Although it is *possible* to shape a project's ends in a purely detached way, this task is best performed when one is invested in what one is doing. That is because creativity and ingenuity are cognitive faculties that require genuine personal investment.

Although it is true that a responsible person can ask herself questions like, "How would I shape the aims of this project if it were my own?" or "What would I want for myself in this case?" the answers to those questions will likely be different – qualitatively or quantitatively – if she is detached from the project. When a person takes ownership in a project, it induces a concern for the project that is qualitatively different from the concern of mere responsibility. The project becomes a more personal concern, and this concern shapes the way a person thinks about a project and its ends. This, of course, is a claim that I cannot prove deductively.[29] But I think it will ring true for those who have participated in many and various kinds of projects.[30]

[29] It is an interesting question whether empirical research might be constructed to validate this claim. I imagine that people could be screened through questioning as to whether they have a sense of ownership in a project and then studied to find general patterns of behavior.

[30] I also imagine that counter examples exist that are contrary to this general rule. But as Aristotle says, the truths of ethics are "truths for the most part."

Let us next consider cases where the *means* to achieving the ends of a project are not obvious or well-defined. Here taking-ownership complements responsibility for similar reasons, but an example will again prove useful. My home institution, Baylor University, has a well-defined end with a mission statement that reads:

> The mission of Baylor University is to educate men and women for worldwide leadership and service by integrating academic excellence and Christian commitment within a caring community.[31]

That is a well-defined mission statement. But the means to best achieve that mission are not well defined or obvious, and there is a broad range of ways that a university might go about it.[32] If one is to be fully responsible for selecting the best means to implement that mission, it will require that he or she take ownership in the project as defined by that mission. We can understand why by thinking about a case where the person responsible for Baylor's mission could *not* take ownership in it.

Assume, for example, Baylor's Board of Regents decided to hire an *atheist* Provost. This is a key position with many responsibilities to determine the best means of implementing the university's mission, and I take it this would be an *irresponsible* hire. It also seems like it would be irresponsible on the part of an atheist to accept this job. But why? If we assume the candidate possesses virtue responsibility, couldn't she, at least to the best of her ability, make choices that would further the university's ends? It seems that she could, at least to some extent.

But what, then, motivates the intuition that this would be an irresponsible hire? The obvious answer is that to be *fully* responsible in an important role like this requires that one

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[31] See http://www.baylor.edu/about/index.php?id=88781. Accessed October 2, 2017.

[32] The statements found in Baylor's *Pro Futuris* documents do attempt to provide further clarity on the ways the University should achieve its end. But these statements still leave much open to interpretation and require people to make many decisions about how the mission should be implemented at a detailed level.

identify with and take ownership in the mission. Here, of course, I am presuming that an atheist Provost could not *take ownership* in Baylor's mission[33] because of her belief commitments. I assume they would prevent her from fully identifying with the university's ends as her own. And if other things are equal, one should expect that the means chosen by an atheist to execute Baylor's mission would be different, and less fitting, than those that would be chosen by a Christian leader. A Christian leader is thus better suited to be *responsible* to the mission of the Baylor University because she can take ownership in it.

Notice the point here is not merely epistemological. It is true that a Christian Provost would likely have more knowledge about Christian traditions, and perhaps be better educated about standards of Christian higher education. But another important difference concerns the way people engage their cognitive faculties, including their emotions, when taking ownership in projects. In identifying with a set of ends as one's "own," a person's motivations, emotional responses, and other faculties are more properly aligned with those ends. Thus, a person who can take ownership in Baylor's mission is in a better position to fulfill the normative demands of that mission – i.e. she can act more responsibly to it.

To summarize, then, virtue responsibility and taking-ownership are distinct but importantly related. Virtue responsibility is a dispositional readiness to meet a plurality of normative demands in the context of mutual accountability, whereas taking-ownership is a disposition to identify with and become attached to a project and its ends. The virtues are also distinguishable in terms of how they motivate action. Nevertheless, the virtues are

[33] An atheist Provost might take ownership in some relevantly similar mission by changing how they construe or understand the project. But this "project" would then be different than the project as it is understood by the Board of Regents, and re-construing the project as something else would also be a failure of responsibility.

complementary and often mutually supportive for living and acting well. At least in some cases, to *fully* take responsibility in a project requires that one also take ownership in it.

III. Taking-Ownership as a Political Virtue

The analysis presented above has interesting implications for the responsible management of political institutions and governmental organizations. It is often the case that civil servants, whether elected or not, are given the responsibility to shape the ends of government organizations. Likewise, some governmental organizations with well-defined ends (like "improving education" or "reducing unemployment") have unclear or ill-defined means to achieving those ends. In such cases, it seems that civil servants in positions of leadership – if they are to be fully responsible – should also be the kind of people who take ownership in their projects.

This conclusion has practical applications. If it is true that being fully responsible to a project may require one to take ownership in the project, then we should want to hire or elect public leaders who possess the virtue of taking-ownership. This should also inform the way elected leaders *appoint* civil servants to run government agencies – agencies like the Department of Labor, the National Park Service, or the Mine Safety and Health Administration (in the United States), the Department for Work and Pensions (in the UK), and the Bundesamt für Wirtschaft und Ausfuhrkontrolle (in Germany). Agency officials are often appointed to positions of leadership for political reasons or as political favors by those elected. Of course, one might hope that such appointments are also based upon personal competence and other virtues, including responsibility. But the analysis above suggests that a person's management competence, subject

matter expertise, and other virtues should be complimented by evidence that he or she has a disposition to take ownership in projects.

Moreover, appointees should be able to identify with the missions of the agencies they are put in charge of. For example, the appointed head of the National Parks Service should not be someone without any experience or appreciation for hiking and being outside. Likewise, the head of the Mine Safety and Health Administration should be able to identify with what it is like to be a coal miner. Otherwise these will be irresponsible appointments. I would even suggest that, sometimes, a person's ability to take ownership in the mission of an organization is more important than his or her competence in other areas, especially when the person is responsible for shaping the organization's ends or for determining the means to implement those ends.

An interesting example of this can be found in U.S. history. In January of 1861, just prior to the breakout of the American Civil War, President Lincoln needed to appoint a Secretary of War to replace Simon Cameron in his cabinet. Quite surprisingly, Lincoln chose a man named Edwin Stanton, an attorney general and appointee of the former administration. Stanton was a talented man and a capable lawyer, but he had been publicly contemptuous of Lincoln on numerous occasions, and he had no obvious competence to plan a war. But Lincoln's biographer William Miller notices that an important aspect of Lincoln's decision was Stanton's strong identification with, and deep commitment to, the project of keeping the Union together. In other words, Lincoln foresaw that Stanton would truly take ownership of the War Department, and this quality of Stanton was at least as important to Lincoln as the other competences that he possessed.[34] In retrospect, the decision turned out well, as Stanton did a much better job than Cameron in administrating of the department, and ultimately the side of the Union won the war.

[34] See William Lee Miller, *Lincoln's Virtues: An Ethical Biography* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002), 419–23.

As one can see, a person's ability to identify with the ends of a project as "mine" or "ours" may be important for many areas of government leadership. But before I conclude, there is one more aspect of taking-ownership that I would like to point out. Because a person possessing the virtue will be the kind of person who takes ownership in *all* her projects, she is less likely to join or participate in a project that she can't identify with.[35] For that would require her to participate in a detached way. A person with the virtue is thus more likely to say "no" to leading a project that she cannot identify with, and this in turn helps to prevent failures in responsibility. Thus, we can see that encouraging and cultivating the development of taking-ownership in educational programs would be of great benefit to the public by promoting the responsible management of public projects.

IV. Conclusion

This paper introduced the virtue of taking-ownership as a disposition to become attached to and invested in a project as "mine" or "ours." Unlike people who possess the vice of over-investment or who "lack a sense of ownership," those with the virtue live happier lives and are more productive contributors to their projects. Moreover, I argued that the virtues of taking-ownership and responsibility are mutually supportive, and that in some cases being fully responsible requires that a person take ownership in a project. These cases include situations where one has a responsibility to shape the ends of a project, or where the means to achieving a project's ends are not well-defined or unclear. The cognitive faculties of one who takes ownership are better recruited and engaged than of those who participate in detached, even if

[35] This may be partially explanatory as to why some people step down from positions of power during regime change while others do not. When the mission of a project changes radically during a regime change, those with the virtue of taking-ownership who can no longer identify with the mission are more likely to step down.

responsible, ways. Finally, I suggested that taking-ownership can be thought of as a political-virtue. If civil servants in leadership positions are to act in ways that are fully responsible to the governmental organizations they run, they must be able to take ownership in the mission of those organizations and identify with them. Thus, those in power should look to find people with the virtue of taking-ownership when they make key appointments at governmental agencies and organizations.

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