

Theoretical-empirical Article

Multiple Cases of Pro-Life Volunteering in a Neo-Aristotelian Ethical Approach

Casos Múltiplos de Voluntariado Pró-Vida em uma Abordagem Ética Neoaristotélica



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ABSTRACT

Objective: to understand the relationship between moral virtues and *phronesis* from volunteers of civil society organizations that work for the protection and assistance of pregnant women, known as pro-life. **Theoretical framework:** the perspective of virtue ethics is presented in the neo-Aristotelian approach as a theoretical framework, according to which human conduct is understood as based on the dispositions of character, the moral virtues, as well as through practical wisdom or *phronesis*, with the purpose (*telos*) of human flourishing. **Method:** the research strategy consists of a qualitative multiple case study approach in Brazilian (n = 2) and Spanish (n = 2) organizations, focusing on their volunteers (n = 17 participants). The field was accessed through participant observation, semi-structured face-to-face interview, and documentary research, thematically analyzing their content with the aid of NVivo software. **Results:** the results suggest how they act and learn virtues throughout their experience as volunteers – prudence (*phronesis*), temperance, courage, and hope – to know how to approach, advise, judge, or restrain judgment and help pregnant women establish priorities and perspectives for the future (*foresight*). Evidence supports the relationship of the *phronesis*-temperance and *phronesis*-hope relationship to balance current priorities and future expectations. **Conclusion:** different contexts may reveal similar virtues in volunteer practices. The results reinforce the assumption of the unity of virtues. Evidence, limitations, and research possibilities are discussed.

Keywords: moral virtues; prudence; *phronesis*; volunteering; virtue ethics.

RESUMO

Objetivo: compreender a relação entre virtudes morais e *phronesis* a partir de voluntários de organizações da sociedade civil que atuam pela proteção e auxílio de gestantes, conhecidas como pró-vida. **Marco teórico:** apresenta-se a perspectiva da ética das virtudes na abordagem neoaristotélica como arcabouço teórico, segundo a qual a conduta humana é entendida com base nas disposições do caráter, as virtudes morais, bem como por meio da sabedoria prática ou *phronesis*, tendo por finalidade (*telos*) o florescimento humano. **Método:** a estratégia de pesquisa consiste em uma abordagem qualitativa de estudos de casos múltiplos em organizações brasileiras (n = 2) e espanholas (n = 2), focando-se em seus voluntários (n = 17 participantes). O acesso ao campo foi realizado por meio de observação participante, entrevista presencial semiestruturada e pesquisa documental, analisando tematicamente o seu conteúdo com o auxílio do software NVivo. **Resultados:** os resultados sugerem como eles atuam e aprendem virtudes ao longo de sua experiência como voluntário – prudência (*phronesis*), temperança, coragem e esperança – para saber abordar, aconselhar, julgar ou conter o julgamento e ajudar gestantes a estabelecer prioridades e perspectivas para o futuro (*foresight*). As evidências suportam a relação entre *phronesis*-temperança e *phronesis*-esperança, para equilibrar prioridades correntes e expectativas futuras. **Conclusão:** contextos diferentes podem revelar virtudes semelhantes nas práticas de voluntários. Os resultados reforçam o pressuposto da unidade das virtudes. Evidências, limitações e possibilidades de pesquisa são discutidas.

Palavras-chave: virtudes morais; prudência; *phronesis*; voluntariado; ética das virtudes.

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INTRODUCTION

Volunteering has been crucial in face of social and humanitarian problems and during crises (Komenská, 2017), such as the mobilizations in Petrópolis (Época Negócios, 2022), in face of COVID-19 (Trautwein, Liberatore, Lindenmeier, & Schnurbein, 2020), and in helping refugees from Ukraine (Estado de Minas, 2022). In addition to its presence in the society and public services, volunteering is also promoted at a corporate level (Dreesbach-Bundy & Scheck, 2017). It is one of the projects associated with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Taylor-Collins, Harrison, Thoma, & Moller, 2019).

Solidarity, altruism, beneficence, and justice are some of the motivations most associated with volunteering (Dekker & Halman, 2003). Nevertheless, a more contextualized analysis may uncover nuances about the moral influences of being a volunteer (Puckering, 2015). Volunteering can be beneficial to society (building trust and civic virtues), to the people served, and to the volunteers themselves by contributing to their personal development (Mateiu-Vescan, Ionescu, & Opre, 2021).

Some social movements, however, are little known in practice due to their connection to controversial issues; they are often considered 'ugly movements' (Gillan & Pickerill, 2012). This is the case of the pro-life movement. It aims to defend life from conception, which, because it is framed as contrary to the pro-choice agenda, may be regarded as homogeneous, conservative, and patriarchal (Avanza, 2020; Faúndes, 2015; Sterud, 2020). However, two issues about pro-life organizations deserve attention. Most of the available studies address rhetoric (Sterud, 2020) or legal aspects of it (Álvarez & Mosquera, 2017), analyzing with little depth the daily actions of volunteers (Avanza, 2020; Hussey, 2014). Individual outreach, one of its performance formats (Munson, 2018), is regarded as invisible (Hussey, 2014). Furthermore, in certain contexts, most pro-life volunteers are women who assume that their primary motivation is to help women in vulnerability (Avanza, 2020).

Although volunteers have a sense of responsibility (Maxwell, 2002), studies suggest controversial biases in their reasons for acting as such, such as selfishness, market logic (Gonçalves, Grzybovski, Mozzato, & Toebe, 2017) and cost-effectiveness arguments (Mateiu-Vescan et al., 2021). In certain pro-life groups, cost-benefit analysis is assumed (Maxwell, 2002) and moral motivation tends to be approached according to the consequences of actions (Komenská, 2017).

Paying attention to obligations based on principles and consequences of actions is related to the perspectives

of deontological and utilitarian/consequentialist ethics that have predominated in the field of business (Sison, Beabout, & Ferrero, 2017), due to anthropological assumptions limited to the vision of the *homo economicus* (Melé & Cantón, 2014) and a predominance of instrumental rationality (Hurst, 2013; Queiroz, 2015; Roca, 2007; Santos, Serafim, Pinheiro, & Ames, 2019). However, the limitations of modern ethical approaches, pointed out by the philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe (1958) lead to the resurgence of virtue ethics in moral philosophy. Around the 1990s, this reasoning emerged in studies of ethics in business (Robin & Reidenbach, 1987; Solomon, 1992) as a new theoretical possibility. The perspective of virtue ethics takes up the concept of character excellence (in Greek *areté*, or virtues) as a disposition (*hexis*) that defines us (Hobuss, 2015). The question is asked from the perspective of the whole person, or self, who asks: What should I do? How should I live in society in such a way that I can grow personally and morally and help others achieve that growth as well (flourishing)? (Akrivou & Scalzo, 2020). With these questions in mind, one can judge and deliberate (Steyl, 2020) about the context of their life and make choices through the intellectual virtue called practical wisdom, prudence, or *phronesis* (Bachmann, Habisch, & Dierksmeier, 2018).

According to a neo-Aristotelian approach, practical wisdom is the intellectual virtue that allows deliberating about the means in the face of circumstances remaining connected to moral virtues (Kristjánsson, 2021). Justice, fortitude, and temperance form, along with prudence, the set of cardinal virtues. For volunteering, studies recognize the role of civic virtues (Taylor-Collins et al., 2019), but little is known about their relationship with moral virtues. Focusing on the agent, neo-Aristotelian ethics understands that human flourishing (*eudaimonia*) is achieved through the cultivation of virtues (Akrivou & Scalzo, 2020; Sison & Ferrero, 2015). We propose this perspective here because it allows us to think of action not only as a calculation of consequences or a duty to follow rules, but also as contemplating intellectual and moral virtues.

Furthermore, while it is recognized that virtues are sensitive to cultures and particular contexts (Hackett & Wang, 2012), there is no consensus on the adequacy of applying virtue ethics perspectives from one cultural context to another (Alzola, Hennig, & Romar, 2020; Koehn, 2020). This underlies the discussions about what is universal and what is contextual (Demuijnck, 2015; Neves & Melé, 2013). Some studies suggest ways of welcoming cultural diversity without falling into the extremes of cultural relativism or rigid universalism (Demuijnck, 2015; Neves & Melé, 2013), but they are only insights yet to be analyzed by empirical studies that seek to understand the 'how' and the 'why' of ethical actions (Grant, Arjoon, & McGhee, 2018).

This study seeks to understand the relationship between moral virtues and the intellectual virtue of *phronesis* from a neo-Aristotelian perspective (Sison & Ferrero, 2015), conducting a multiple and qualitative case study on the daily actions of volunteers in pro-life organizations from two countries. Such organizations are dedicated to the defense of human dignity (Munson, 2018; Williams, 2016) and act together with policies that aim to reduce maternal and child mortality. However, they act in a context contrary to their values, according to legislation and public policies on abortion in democratic countries (Studlar & Burns, 2015). Therefore, this study focuses on the sphere of action (*praxis*), which is proper to ethical conduct and virtuous or vicious habits, because with action volunteers may acquire virtues (Ames & Serafim, 2019; Ames, 2020).

Thus, the starting question of this work is: “How do volunteers from pro-life civil society organizations cultivate virtues when working to protect pregnant women and children?” With this, we intend to contribute to the knowledge about the ‘how’ (actions based on *phronesis*) and the ‘why’ (moral virtues) of the actions of these volunteers.

The study adds to the contemporary administration debate by highlighting the agency of volunteering in meeting demands that are not always met by the government or the market; demands that are not the responsibility of civil society alone but that require a joint action by public and private organizations acting through different means and with ethically deliberate ends. The study approaches organizations involved with sensitively controversial issues involving human rights and reflects upon the ethics of actions of pro-life volunteers in distinct cultural contexts. Through neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, the study presents a perspective open to free deliberation through *phronesis*, through which it is possible to ponder on contextual conditions and circumstances of action.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Ethics of virtues in business

Virtue ethics has been associated with several topics in business, such as teaching-learning ethics (Ames & Serafim, 2019), leadership (Ferrero, Rocchi, Pellegrini, & Reichert, 2020), knowledge and management (Warhurst & Black, 2017), finance (Martins & Serafim, 2020), rationality (Queiroz, 2015) and ethical decision-making (Nguyen & Crossan, 2021). Moral virtues correspond to ethical dispositions expressed in habits that are based on the will to act well in face of various circumstances. A virtue can be defined as “the human inclination to feel, think, and act in a way that expresses moral excellence and contributes to the common good” (Newstead, Macklin, Dawkins, & Martin,

2018, p. 446). The Latin word *virtus* means strength but is also understood as ‘excellence’ (Hooft, 2014); the Greek word *areté* represents ‘what is best’ or ‘excellent’ (Sison & Ferrero, 2015).

In the Aristotelian tradition, virtue is an intermediate point between excess, on the one hand, and the lack of a disposition to act, on the other hand; the poles are considered vices. For example, fortitude is the middle ground between cowardice and temerity, or excessive audacity. This and other such notions of virtue ethics have roots in Aristotle, one of the main names on the matter, and has been reinterpreted over time by authors such as Thomas Aquinas (2014) and Alasdair MacIntyre (2007). The latter currents are known as neo-Aristotelian, Thomist, and MacIntyrean (Sison, Ferrero, & Guitián, 2018).

The framework of virtue ethics places the human beings as a central element (Akrivou & Scalzo, 2020), considering them as social and relational beings capable of cultivating virtues that lead them to achieve excellence in terms of character (Hobuss, 2015). Its purpose is *eudaimonia*, or human flourishing. Such virtuous habits occur in association with other people and depend on this interaction to be perfected. For example, interacting with people creates opportunities to be fair. Secondly, it presupposes that virtues may be learned through repeated actions that become habits (Aristotle, 2009), which constitutes the character (Darnell, Gulliford, Kristjánsson, & Paris, 2019). Third, it presupposes that the intellectual virtue of prudence (*phronesis*) is present in each of the other moral virtues, coordinating them by allowing the choice of means toward ends governed by virtues (Sison & Ferrero, 2015). This characteristic, also known as ‘unity of virtues,’ distinguishes neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics from approaches that do not consider the role of *phronesis* in each virtue (Zyl, 2019), such as Swanton's (2003) pluralist perspective and the emotivist (agent-based) perspective, derived from the contributions of Slote (2001). In short, virtue ethics goes beyond the concepts of moral and intellectual virtues, arguing also for the purpose or *telos* of human life, the *eudaimonia* or human flourishing, and that a good life in society may be achieved when people work to reach the common good (Albareda & Sison, 2020).

There are several approaches to virtue ethics originating from Western and Eastern cultures, some of which are reinterpretations of Aristotle (Ferrero & Sison, 2014). Several studies adopt this perspective to discuss the ethics of corporations (Solomon, 1992), small businesses (Chu & Moore, 2020), family businesses (Sison, Ferrero, & Redín, 2020) and cooperatives (Bernacchio & Couch, 2015), and take into account their relationships with other stakeholders. In this panorama of Eastern traditions (Confucian, Hindu, or Buddhist) and Western traditions (Aristotelian, Thomist, or MacIntyrean) and their approximations (Hartman, 1998;

2008; 2020; Koehn, 2020; MacIntyre, 2007; Sison, Ferrero, & Redín, 2020), the neo-Aristotelian approach understands prudence as an element interconnected with moral virtues (Ferrero et al., 2020; Kristjánsson, 2021; Zyl, 2019), and assumes a non-reductive anthropological reasoning. It encompasses, in addition to *phronesis*, the notions of human nature, actions and habits, character, moral virtues *eudaimonia* or human flourishing, and even the lifestyle someone chooses (Sison & Ferrero, 2015).

Although there are lists of virtues, it is generally accepted that they are organized around four cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude (Morales-Sanchez & Cabello-Medina, 2013). Thomas Aquinas established the number, hierarchy, and universal nature of the moral and theological virtues (faith, hope, and charity) in his *Summa theologica*. Hope is also composed of moral attributes, such as the ability to establish clear and orderly priorities, which depends on the virtue of *phronesis* (Milona, 2020). Very briefly, the cardinal virtues are described as follows for the purpose of this study: (a) prudence: the ability to make good decisions based on reality; intellectual virtue that includes deliberating, judging, and choosing to act (Bachmann et al., 2018) according to the particular context of action; (b) justice: disposition toward the relationship with others, giving each one what is his or her own; it also manifests itself in face of a problem with the law either because the law is unfair or because it is not suitable for a particular case (Aristotle, 2009); it is a moral aspect of motivation, a justification for human conduct (Guillén, Ferrero, & Hoffman, 2015); (c) temperance: moderation and balance over feelings, emotions, and pleasures in the name of a moral purpose; (d) fortitude: or courage, it is the resistance to withstand pressures and opposing forces (Morales-Sanchez & Cabello-Medina, 2013).

In the neo-Aristotelian perspective, virtues are moral goods and their pursuit may generate intrinsic motivations (e.g., the desire to acquire virtues while acting) and extrinsic motivations (the desire to receive such moral goods from others). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations based on self-interest can coexist with altruistic motivations focused on the interests of others (Guillén et al., 2015) — for example, when volunteers donate their time and effort to help people they do not know (Komenská, 2017).

Based on Aristotelian concepts, Thomas Aquinas builds a framework for a theory of action, in which prudence (*phronesis*) occupies the role of coordinator of the other virtues in order to act well based on reason and reality (Aquinas, 2014). Virtue is a good operative habit through which one reasons well about the good, making it even pleasant to do the right thing (Ferrero et al., 2020).

Prudence and the unity of virtues

The virtue of prudence (*phronesis*) is a common element among Aristotelian (Zyl, 2019), Thomist, and MacIntyrean perspectives (Ferrero et al., 2020). Its contemporary translation as ‘practical wisdom’ has roots in Eastern philosophy (Provis, 2010). It is described as a type of practical knowledge — a disposition for wise judgment in face of issues — and as the ability to perceive particular contexts and situations, in the case here those related to experiential learning (Ames & Serafim, 2019).

Through *phronesis* we choose and decide on suitable means, while moral virtues direct us toward ends and enable us to act accordingly. According to the neo-Aristotelian perspective, *phronesis* is perfected — in a learning process — through actions that result from a conscious decision based on correct reasoning (Sison & Ferrero, 2015). The conscious decision comes from a correct appreciation of the circumstances and a practical knowledge on how to proceed. These requirements are usually met over time and accumulate with experience. It indicates a personal inclination to do what is right in a given circumstance focusing on the ultimate human end and informed by moral virtues (Sison & Hühn, 2018). Virtue ethics carries in its presuppositions the notion of harmony between reason and emotion: “The virtue of prudence produces an alignment between right thought or perception, right desire and right action; it creates harmony between reason and sensitivity or emotions and behavior” (Sison & Ferrero, 2015, p. S87).

In the field of business and organizations, there are different conceptions of *phronesis*, going from formal perspectives, which consider it only as practical knowledge without taking into account its moral aspects, to a substantive conception of *phronesis*, in which the moral inclination of the agent is considered, as recognized in Aristotelian-Thomist virtue ethics (Ames, Serafim, & Zappellini, 2020). Although there are attempts to reconcile these perspectives (Bachmann et al., 2018), some of the anthropological and ethical assumptions are significantly different, leading researchers to opt for a specific approach, as this study does by adopting a neo-Aristotelian approach.

The interdependent relationship between Aristotle (2009), Thomas Aquinas (2014), and MacIntyre (2007), consisting of the thesis of the unity of virtues (Zyl, 2019). According to Sison and Ferrero (2015), “each virtue requires all the others in such a way that an individual cannot truly possess a virtue without possessing all the others at the same time, albeit in different development stages or degrees of perfection” (Sison & Ferrero, 2015, p. S92). Zyl (2019) explains that this concept relates to a general conception (knowledge) about ends, of what

is good and worthwhile for human beings. “[P]hronesis may be an intellectual virtue, but it is inseparably linked to moral virtues and the general aspiration to (help each other) become a better person” (Kristjánsson, 2021, p. 12). Although the interdependence or connection between them is recognized, few studies address this interrelation as an object of study (Zyl, 2019). Suggestions of this relationship are found in studies on *phronesis* and its relationship with responsibility (Green, 2009; Rämö, 2011), *techné* (Jacinto & Ames, 2020) and courage (Morrell & Brammer, 2016).

Empirically, faced with the challenge of addressing *phronesis* (Sison, 2016, cited by Akrivou & Scalzo, 2020), longitudinal (e.g., Morrell & Brammer, 2016) and qualitative methods have been sought at micro and organizational levels of analysis (Ames et al., 2020). Another current of thought relies on quantitative methods to measure virtues, such as those reviewed by Ames, Serafim and Martins (2021). However, such instruments rarely consider the unity of virtues (Ames, Serafim, & Martins, 2021). Theorists in this field have suggested narrative approaches as a method (Pinto-Garay, 2019; Sison & Ferrero, 2015). The life narrative is a relevant aspect from the perspective of virtue ethics, and it is a concept inherent to MacIntyre's (2007) framework.

Volunteering and pro-life organizations

The attention volunteering has received in recent decades has promoted numerous concepts, approaches, and topics of interest about volunteering, the volunteers, and its impacts. Volunteering is a phenomenon influenced by context and culture (Mateiu-Vescan et al., 2021) and exercised through the help of volunteers to people with some need, in emergency situations or not. Formal volunteering, that is, volunteering carried out within an organization (Gonçalves et al., 2017), is generally recognized, but informal social support networks also contribute to emergency situations (Carlsen, Toubøl, & Brincker, 2021). It is a concept similar to those of community and service-based learning (Mateiu-Vescan et al., 2021) and civic engagement (Binder, 2020; Taylor-Collins et al., 2019).

Volunteering is considered one of the ways to exercise engagement and civic virtues. Civic engagement may generate impacts on democracy through different means, such as by strengthening virtues (for example, tolerance, respect, attention to the public good) and fostering civic skills (argumentation and participation in political life) (Binder, 2020). Regarding motivations for volunteering, one-dimensional models have addressed altruism, while multidimensional models have argued for factors such as esteem, intellect, and values coming prior to career and protection (Cavalcante, Souza, & Mól, 2015).

Pro-life and pro-choice initiatives represent opposing views on abortion. The term ‘pro-life’ is often assigned to people, groups, and organized efforts to restrict or reduce abortion, while the term ‘pro-choice’ is assigned to efforts to ensure or expand access to abortion (Munson, 2018). Currently, they can be found in many countries acting through transnational networks (Bessone, 2017). Pro-life organizations may have different forms of action and purposes (Hussey, 2014; Munson, 2018). For example, while in the North American context the issue of abortion has been discussed more pragmatically and several Confederate states allow abortion, in Japan celebrities have expressed pro-life values and were met with public support (Morgan, 2017). Furthermore, both pro-life and pro-choice movements are much more heterogeneous than is often assumed (Avanza, 2020; Munson, 2018).

The literature review conducted by Avanza (2020) allows observing the plurality of the pro-life movement in Italy when compared to other contexts. The women who are part of the pro-life movement do not form a monolithic group. Quite contrarily, these women differ in terms of their reproductive histories and sociodemographic characteristics, and this translates into diverse ways of being pro-life (Avanza, 2020).

In the North American context, the pro-life movement — which in its history has an initially democratic political perspective that later shifts to the republican one (Williams, 2016) — began through the initiative of the Catholic Church, later growing and diversifying into guidance and forms of support for pregnant women. Munson (2018) identified four formats in the pro-life movement: (a) political, which consists in the political effort to bring about some legislative change in relation to abortion and the right to life; (b) direct action, known as public protest and picket action in front of abortion clinics; (c) individual outreach, usually by women and directly assisting pregnant women, such as the actions of people who try to help and advise other women in some way regarding abortion; and (d) public outreach flow, which consists of trying to reduce abortion through educational and informative means about its practice.

In Spain, certain pro-life organizations influence the political flow (Álvarez & Mosquera, 2017). Spain has a Spanish federation of pro-life associations. Faced with national legislation by which abortion is decriminalized up to the 14th week of pregnancy (Montoro, 2019), these actors encouraged popular initiative laws, adding the interpretative framework ‘protection of life’ to laws of autonomous communities (regional level) and to the implementation of policies to support women, which Álvarez and Mosquera (2017) considered a setback.

In Argentina, Faúndes (2015) describes that the pro-life movement evolved in three stages: cultural and assistance actions aimed mainly at opposing abortion; adoption of advocacy strategies and complexification of Argentine public identities; and federalization of these organizations, called *Red Federal de Familias*. Faúndes (2015) perceives three distinct positions of NGOs in relation to religiosity: some assume religion in the organization's identity (institutionalized religiosity) and others do not; among the latter, some have an internalized religiosity and others a religious disassociation.

In pro-choice groups, the recruitment of members is more active, while in pro-life initiatives there is self-recruitment triggered by a particular experience. Maxwell (2002) reports an altruistic behavior on the part of activists who expand their desire to regard people as their equals for fetuses and pregnant women dealing with abortion. She calls this perception ethics of extensiveness, a convergence between the intellectual and emotional dimensions.

In Brazil, research on such organizations is at an early stage and little is known about ethics in the conduct of volunteers (Ames, 2020). Studies that address moral aspects of volunteering are still incipient (Komenská, 2017; Puckering, 2015).

METHODOLOGY

Considering the assumptions and theoretical-analytical elements of virtue ethics, especially *phronesis* and its relationship with moral virtues, we adopted the multiple-case approach as a research strategy (Stake, 2010; Strang, 2015) in order to access the narrative of volunteers based on their actions in the context of organizations and communities.

As a practical wisdom that allows understanding contexts, *phronesis* proves to be relevant for volunteers to understand the legal, political, and social contexts in which they work as well as the characteristics and practices of their organizations. The aim is to define prudent actions to be taken in face of demands of pregnant women who seek the organizations. It is relevant for this research to understand the context of the cases, as it is not always favorable to the purpose of pro-life organizations. Thus, previous studies have allowed us to understand the legal and value contexts (Álvarez & Mosquera, 2017; Ames, Serafim, Zappellini, & Colonetti, 2021; Chaqués-Bonafont, Palau, & Baumgartner, 2015; Montoro, 2019).

Of a qualitative and interpretative nature, this study seeks to understand the relationship between moral virtues and *phronesis* based on the work of volunteers in pro-life

social organizations, maintaining an inductive approach to field data, that is, which moral virtues could be related to *phronesis*. Initially, two Brazilian organizations were monitored by participant observation. After two years of fieldwork, it was possible to gain access to two Spanish organizations. The level of analysis was individual, and the volunteers were considered mini-cases. They received a code corresponding to the organization (e.g.: C1) and a number (001), thus forming the code C1001. Organizations C1 and C2 are Brazilian and five and seven mini-cases were selected from them, respectively. From the Spanish organizations C3 and C4, two and three mini-cases were selected, respectively. Of these 17 mini-cases, 14 are women and three are men, many of whom are retired professionals who founded the initiative, some with more than 20 years of volunteer work. Access to the field began in January 2018 and ended in May 2020.

The data collection techniques were participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documental research (Stake, 2010). Participant observation took place weekly in the Brazilian context and occasionally in the Spanish context. It resulted in records in field notebooks, totaling 227 hours of observation. The semi-structured interviews took place in person and were recorded in writing, using an audio recorder in one of the cases, according to the participants' preferences. They took place between the second half of 2019 and the first half of 2020 in Brazilian organizations, and during January and February 2020 in Spanish organizations. The exploratory phase in field contributed to prepare a script of questions containing 22 questions that were used as a support for the interviews. The aim was to access the volunteers' trajectory and their perception of the organization. Among the questions, the most fruitful were: (a) Tell us a little about yourself, your history and experiences; (b) Tell us how you started working in this organization; (c) What motivates you to do this work? Why? (d) What does this job represent in your life? (e) What do you learn as a person by doing this work? (f) What is your perception of the organization's volunteers?; and (g) What virtues can they strengthen by carrying out the organization's practices? Finally, 157 documents were collected (informative leaflets, website materials, public videos of volunteers' testimonies, images, books, and statutes).

Most respondents had more than ten years of experience as volunteers, which is a favorable characteristic to assess prudence, which in turn develops with experience and over time (Sison & Ferrero, 2015). Table 1 summarizes the information on mini-cases (volunteers).

Table 1. Data on volunteers, or mini-cases.

No.	Mini-cases	Gender	Age	Volunteering time (years)	Occupation	Marital status
1	C1001	Female	>75	33	Nurse (retired)	Married
2	C1002	Female	>75	25	Stay-at-home spouse (retired)	Widow
3	C1003	Female	>75	21	Accounting technician (retired)	Single
4	C1004	Female	60-74	12	Stay-at-home spouse (retired)	Married
5	C1005	Female	>75	26	Businesswoman (retired)	Widow
6	C2001	Female	>75	37	Doctor (deceased)	Widow
7	C2002	Female	60-74	37	Catholic	Single
8	C2003	Female	60-74	4	Nurse (retired)	Married
9	C2004	Male	60-74	4	Sales representative (retired) and community health counselor	Divorced
10	C2005	Female	50-59	9	Accounting technician	Married
11	C2006	Female	>75	30	Businesswoman (retired)	Married
12	C2007	Male	25-34	5	Volunteering	Single
13	C3001	Male	>75	43	Doctor and teacher (deceased)	Single
14	C3002	Female	50-59	14	Pedagogue	-
15	C4001	Female	60-74	18	Nurse (retired)	Single
16	C4002	Female	35-49	6	Social worker	-
17	C4003	Female	35-49	10	Adwoman	Married

After the transcription of field notebooks and interviews, the files were organized in the NVivo application to conduct data analysis in a more orderly manner. Thematic content analysis was used based on 20 previous categories in addition to 218 categories that emerged from the field (open coding) resulting from the reading and coding process. The previous categories (Strang, 2015) relate to virtue ethics, while open coding kept the words as found in field. In a second step, they were analyzed again and grouped, thus reducing their number. The coding identified excerpts from speeches and documents containing narratives related to actions and practices (Stake, 2010) perceived as expressions of moral virtues and prudence. The process of validation of the coded analysis took place gradually through dialogue between the authors throughout the period of coding and identification of themes and conceptions.

The themes found with the open coding maintain links that relate to *phronesis* and virtues (Newstead et al., 2018) and the evidence results from the cross analysis of cases according to the data structure (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013) listed in Table 2.

The observation of daily practices and interviews with volunteers, in addition to documentary research, allowed us to gather themes that described the virtues of volunteers, which were analyzed per mini-case and then together. We sought to maintain the meaning of the accounts made by the respondents themselves to build this evidence base (Gioia et al., 2013), from which the researchers interpreted the findings in light of virtue ethics. It is understood that, in this process, researchers recognize virtues (Newstead et al., 2018).

Participants were informed of the research objectives and methods and that they could withdraw from participating in the research at any time. The ethics committee of the participants' university affiliation approved the research. The names of organizations and participants have been omitted to ensure privacy and anonymity of those involved.

An emerging theme was the organization's religious positioning, for which the reports revealed a salient issue on organizational identity. The presentation of the results below arises from a narrative constructed based on cross-analysis of mini-cases, with small pieces of articulated data, as Stake (2010) suggested.

Table 2. Data structure.

First-order data	Second-order data	Aggregate category	Conceptual model	Aggregate category	Second-order data	First-order data
Loves what he/she does Culture of life Defense of life Example Helping the woman Responsibility	Motivations				Judgment	Consciousness Knowledge Judgment criteria Not making prejudgments Reflection
Realized in actions Giving hope to children Give alternatives Faith in what each one can offer Future Message of hope					Decision	Decision Doubt 'Connecting the dots'
Courage, bravery Patience Personal risk Be tolerant	Fortitude	Moral virtues	Unit of virtues	Phronesis or practical wisdom		Answering Knowing Socializing Living with problems Communication Listening Ways to reach 'Winging game' Guide Wisdom Personal testimony Transmitting Living
Helping Reconcile Caring Gratitude Indignation Obligation Respect	Justice				Action	
Accepting Generosity Humility Giving in Group work	Temperance					

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the main evidence found. Regarding the context of the organizations, it is worth noting that Brazil and Spain have different laws in relation to abortion. Brazil has a restrictive legislation for abortion (as a crime), with exceptions of impunity (Ames, Serafim, Zappellini, & Colonetti, 2021), while in Spain abortion is decriminalized until the 14th week of pregnancy (Chaqués-Bonafont et al., 2015), which causes changes in the strategies of pro-life organizations (Hussey, 2014).

A common point between the four organizations is that their founders have a professional background in the health area (medicine and nursing), influencing the type of help provided: health and nutrition guidance, psychological counseling, and medical consultation. Table 3 summarizes information on the year of foundation, objectives, religious positioning, main practices of the organizations, and number of volunteers.

Brazilian organizations help through social assistance and information, while Spanish organizations include

medical services. C1 only works by individual outreach and the others disseminate information too, according to the public outreach flow type (Munson, 2018). It is formal volunteering (Gonçalves et al., 2017), but each has a support network of informal volunteers (Carlsen et al., 2021). All organizations assist pregnant women at a fixed location or through visits to the community (case C2), but only Spanish organizations have established support services for pregnant women with doubts about their pregnancy through 24-hour telephone lines and a psychological support service.

Two organizations are based on the precepts of the Catholic Church, but they are ecumenical (C2) and *multi-confessional*, or open to all religions (C3), thus having an institutionalized religiosity (Faúndes, 2015). Another one is characterized as open to all religions (C1), and the last is said to be *non-confessional* (neutral or indifferent to any doctrine) (C4), being an organizational positioning disassociated from religion (Faúndes, 2015), and justified as a means of adapting to a culturally diverse audience of pregnant women from several countries.

Table 3. Main characteristics of the organizations studied.

Case	Foundation year	Main objectives	Religious background	Main practices	No. vol. Local/national
C1	1987	Assistance to pregnant women in poor communities through guidance, workshops, food donations, and layette kits.	Ecumenical, pluralist	Weekly welcoming, knitting workshops, orientation lectures, and donation of materials.	10
C2	1983	Reduce infant mortality and malnutrition rates; development of children from pregnancy to six years old, guidance for pregnant women, and Christian mysticism.	Catholic and ecumenical base (open to religions)	Home visits to families; meetings of celebration, reflection, and training. Welcoming and guidelines.	30/+160 thousand
C3	1977	Defend life from conception to natural death; medical, psychological, and material support for pregnant women and motherhood.	Catholic; <i>multi-confessional</i> (open to religions)	Services and guidance to pregnant women; donation of materials for maternity. Home aid for the elderly and guidance for young people.	13
C4	2007	Offer maternity support services; help pregnant women by defending life and women.	<i>A-confessional</i> , open to all faiths	Medical, psychological, and legal advice; assistance with materials; information dissemination; defense of the rights of pregnant women and children.	10/+1,500

Regarding the expressions of virtues of volunteers, we present below a narrative articulation of what we inferred as the perspective of volunteers.

Regarding motivations, the aspects that guide this volunteering over time are “helping pregnant women in need” [C1001], responsibility for the “human being, the person I need to help” [C2004], “not only as a nurse, but as a person” [C4001]. In one of the cases, the organization does not take an anti-abortion stance, but a stance in favor of women: “by helping women, everyone helps effectively” [C4002]. The initial motivation for some was “working with children” [C2002], while for others was “what unites us is life, each life... because everyone matters” [C3002]. For those who assume coordination or leadership roles, “the soul of it is to keep the flame lit” [C2002], “I have a much greater commitment than an institutional one” [C2007]. In addition, the invitation to join volunteering generally came from friends who already were volunteers. In general, these aspects are connected with the defense and culture

of life and the purpose of serving, which occurs through helping pregnant women. Such findings illustrate the moral dimension of volunteer motivation (Taylor-Collins et al., 2019).

The relation ‘prudence and moral virtues’ or the ‘unity of virtues’

Ethically, motives or ‘ends’ are adequately achieved if carried out by appropriate ‘means,’ which involves, in turn, deliberating and choosing those means. Thus, if motivations (indicated by virtues) and *phronesis* are together, volunteers develop their moral identity (character) and their actions consolidate into habits (Taylor-Collins et al., 2019). Attitudes and examples of leaders contribute to cultivating virtues. Temperance, fortitude, justice, prudence, and hope are highlighted, as well as some interrelationships between them, thus corroborating the assumption of the unity of virtues. Next, we articulate evidence of this relationship. Figure 1 summarizes the main findings.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidences of the relationship <i>phronesis</i>-moral virtues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Temperance and prudence: knowing when to judge and when not to judge; accept, moderate temper, be humble. Hope and prudence: helping pregnant women envision a future and clear priorities, contributing to their foresight — providing alternatives of possible futures for motherhood.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little evidence of the relationship <i>phronesis</i>-moral virtues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fortitude: courage to assume pro-life principles and values, to join the community and take personal risks; patience and tolerance. Justice: responding to perceived social or legal injustices; improve treatment among volunteers and interpersonal relationships.

Figure 1. Unity of virtues or the relationship between *phronesis* and moral virtues.

The unity of virtues is perceived as the interdependence between moral virtues and the intellectual virtue of *phronesis* (Sison & Ferrero, 2015; Zyl, 2019). However, it does not mean that actions are perfect at all times or that someone cannot make mistakes, but rather that these dispositions of character are cultivated and sought after by volunteers, manifesting themselves at different degrees. For example, although there was little evidence of a relationship between *phronesis* and fortitude, this moral virtue could explain the continuity of volunteer engagement over time.

Prudence proved to be essential for knowing how to approach women, knowing how to guide volunteers, and knowing how to listen and understand the community and its relational contexts. Evidence that suggests the relationship between moral virtues and *phronesis* reveals that voluntary service contributes to acquiring temperance, courage, and practical wisdom. Supporting and helping pregnant women proved to be important for the *eudaimonia* (human flourishing) of volunteers, i.e., people who find meaning in volunteering.

Temperance and *phronesis*

Temperance has to do with what the volunteers mentioned about having “to overlook a lot of things” [C1005] and having “winging game,” understanding people taking into account their temperament and emotional state, which is good for their self-knowledge. Self-control, in order to deal with the opinions and behavior of others (“there are days when people come spitting fire,” a reference to the organization’s leader [C1004]), allows a volunteer not to be negatively affected by the context, thus understanding the emotions and circumstances of others.

Self-control is also important to know some of the harsh realities and situations of vulnerability under which some families live and to be able to help them without being overly sensitive to the perceived conditions, especially to the proactive practices of volunteers in the community. C2 tries to help solve the problem, but “without taking the emotional baggage” home [C2005].

Volunteers also reveal the need to be careful and contain judgment in moments of contact with pregnant women and communities. To gain the trust of a pregnant woman or family, it is necessary to listen and be open to understanding and refrain from making judgments, that is, not to judge at certain times. Judgment is one of the acts of prudence (Aquinas, 2014; Ferrero et al., 2020) and temperance may help contain it while the act of helping is taking place. Mastering the impulse to speak, calmly controlling expressions of opinion, and moderating words are important ways to help pregnant women who are going through a difficult situation or who do not know whether

they will be able to raise their child. Temperance may help be more sensitive (Morales-Sanchez & Cabello-Medina, 2013) in interactions with pregnant women, to know how to approach, respect, and not prejudge, to gain the trust of the family to welcome the volunteer throughout the growth of the child, according to C2001. C2 recommends to “talk politely” about the most delicate situations, so as not to hurt family members. Well-cultivated self-control may help overlook the excesses or faults of other people and even recognize that maybe a person is in need of help and so reasoning may be a better way to understand the behavior of a specific attitude.

Fortitude or courage

Fortitude, courage, or bravery has become a common virtue for volunteers in different organizations. It contributes to putting motivations of defending life and protecting pregnant women and the unborn into practice, especially in a context of much criticism toward the religious precepts of this type of volunteering (Faúndes, 2015). It takes courage to be pro-life, “courage because this goes against society, against society as it is today” [C4002].

Volunteers seek to follow the dynamics and political and legal changes of their context (Hussey, 2014) and certainly have more satisfactory experience to know how to act in face of challenging scenarios as well as from what moment should some modification be promoted in this sense (Munson, 2018). Any change that deals with values, purpose, and strategies of an organization requires prudence in order to make adjustments, understand the context, and consider changes (Chu & Moore, 2020).

Fortitude is present in other situations of volunteer service. It is related to the willingness to fight, the willingness to face problems, to having the courage to act in contexts that involve personal risk, in which, even with fear, it is possible to carry out the work. Sometimes one has to persist, one has to have the strength to stand firm when one knows that “right is right” [C1002]. The volunteers said that they need to be strong to continue because sometimes “the family does not support us in helping others; either the husband or the granddaughter.” The family would like the grandmother to stop volunteering [C2003]. In other situations, volunteers find themselves judged by society, and it is necessary “not to listen [because] we are judged” [C2004]. Fortitude is also necessary for those who defend the right to life of babies who may have a physical disability. As mentioned by someone of the C3 organization, “the capacity for resilience may help build a more inclusive society with those who have some impairment.” Volunteers from different organizations mentioned courage, but especially in contexts that mean going “against the current,” that is, against public opinion or against public actions and policies that decriminalize

abortion (Álvarez & Mosquera, 2017), which is something found in voluntary public outreach participation in the Spanish context (Munson, 2018).

Justice and pro-life volunteering

In addition to justice being perceived in the relationships with others, it also manifests itself in face of a problem with the law either because the law is considered unfair or because the law does not suit the particular case (Aristotle, 2009). Brazilian volunteers consider the situation of socioeconomic vulnerability of pregnant women and the low level of assistance provided by public authorities to be unfair in a scenario of misery and malnutrition, which still persists. They understand that their engagement manages to “reach where the public power does not reach” [C2002], offering welcoming and care. Differently, in the Spanish context, the perception of the abortion decriminalization law as unfair stands out. Common between the two contexts is the perception of injustice when the dignity of the developing embryo/fetus is denied. However, while in Brazil they help pregnant women who have opted for pregnancy, in Spain they go further and try to advise pregnant women who are in doubt or are thinking about aborting. Volunteers from both contexts recognize, based on experience and reality, that it all starts with helping women. One of the most important implications of this for pro-life and pro-choice volunteers is that “helping women” and “defending life from conception” are interdependent reasons to act. A simple example is that, for the child to be born healthy, “the mother needs to eat well” [C1001], justifying the donation of food to women. On the other hand, the way of approaching pregnant women may become unfair if respect for the pregnant woman’s choice is neglected, an act that requires moral sensitivity (Morales-Sanchez & Cabello-Medina, 2013).

In addition to respect, justice is associated with helping, reconciling, caring, gratitude, and complying with what is agreed upon in relationships. Some problems that occurred with the teams reveal dissatisfaction with situations that seemed unfair from the volunteers’ perspective. There was a perception of injustice when a decision was made without consulting the people involved: with the arrival of a new volunteer, some tasks of C1005 were withdrawn and passed to another volunteer [C1004] without prior notice or debate, which was considered unfair and bent into conflict. In another situation, the choice of a coordinator in C2 did not include the volunteers who could at least apply to participate in the choice; instead, the person was chosen by a person of a religious organization in the region who did not take part in anything, which is crucial in volunteering work (Binder, 2020), and this led to difficulties in coordinating activities. The volunteer had to gradually build trust and

resume dialogue. The perception of injustice arising from differences in treatment is complex as it depends on one’s perspective and on the care for others. Regaining some moral and civic virtues could re-balance relationships and improve participation (Taylor-Collins et al., 2019).

Prudence or practical wisdom

From the field emerged the expression “the discernment of seeing and doing” [C2005], which seems adequate to introduce the evidence of *phronesis*. Volunteers exercise practical wisdom to act in some situations, but especially to understand the context of action. The guideline for “understanding the context or working environment is to follow good sense and the heart” [C2003] is because sometimes situations demand quick decisions. “It takes skill, sensitivity, to act at the right moment. One must have presence of mind. Especially from the perspective of leaders, who go to the community. What to do in difficult situations? ... Example: What to do when a child has been beaten? Call the Guardianship Council? [The person] visited and saw that there is only water in the fridge: How to guide them? The father abuses the children or the husband beats his wife. It involves knowing how to proceed and forward it to the authorities” [C2002].

Understanding the context of action suggests a support of *phronesis* in two situations. The first situation is the relational context in interactions between volunteers and coordinators and volunteers and pregnant women. In order to resolve relationship conflicts, for example, C2002 describes how she manages the situation to solve the relationship problem by saying: “understanding the facts, listening to the parties, and connecting the dots.” The second situation refers to understanding the social context during home visits and during the first conversations with pregnant women. There may be conflict, submission, violence, and other problems affecting families and, in order to capture what actually happens, it is necessary to have the wisdom of knowing how to approach women, being temperate, getting to know them, and gradually guiding them.

For volunteers, contact with the social reality of families promotes learning (Mateiu-Vescan et al., 2021), as well as it strengthens virtues. In the community, “you feel it, you live with the problems, it’s different” [C2002]. Volunteer work in the community allows experiencing the dramas of families and women because they know aspects of the context and talk about each one’s situation. Volunteers benefit mutually (Mateiu-Vescan et al., 2021): “You hear those stories, you come back with another one, your problems mean nothing. You are helped!” [C2002]; “We cling to what we do. Good for me and for those who receive it” [C1003]; and “a great medicine. I began to give myself”

[C1005]. Facing a larger reality or problem helps give them a correct sense of proportions.

Prudence seems to contribute to the guidance of pregnant women, especially in face of uncertainties and doubts about what to do when considering whether to continue with the pregnancy, situations in which pregnant women feel insecure and may be alone, without support. According to Spanish volunteers, there are reports of pregnant women who have made the decision to have an abortion hastily and then they regretted it. Being aware of the situation is perceived as necessary: “two paths: challenging one’s consciousness or not having it at all” [C3002].

Relying on scientific knowledge about pregnancy and abortion, the volunteers seek to inform and guide pregnant women who are in doubt or who are very young and do not yet know about procedures, risks, possibilities, opportunities for help; in short, alternative pathways for the continuation of pregnancy. However, the way this is done is important: it must be guiding and not imposing, taking into account the good ends achievable by the people involved. Prudence is the practical disposition to act based on the reality of human life and, in this specific case, based on the reality of abortion, and it is the disposition to help those who suffer this drama to find alternatives, giving them hope by showing alternatives and helping pregnant women to visualize more clearly what the priorities (*telos*) of their lives are.

The judgment act of prudence: Judging and not judging

Volunteers, based on their sensitivity and experience with problems, act with wisdom (prudence) based on the intuition of what is best to do in a given situation. C2 volunteers suggest a way of understanding what to do in a given situation more by an intuitive way than by rational deliberation. There are times when not judging can be more relevant than judging, because, as we saw above, people often judge conditions, justifications, and other people. The social problems present in communities and the drama of being pregnant without knowing what to do are issues that accentuate vulnerability. It is up to the volunteers to help them and not judge the conditions and acts because of a single moment. Doing so, they can actually guide people and preserve their dignity and freedom. This means containing judgments, with the help of temperance, so that judgment is given at an opportune moment for the good of the pregnant woman.

Some volunteers commented that there were moments when a non-judgmental attitude should be adopted. They told about cases of pregnant women or assisted families, in which, before guiding or advising, one should be open

to listening, listening carefully, and capturing the reality about the pregnant woman or the family. Non-judgment was also important for volunteers who visited families in the community served by C2, who stated that it is necessary to know “the way to approach people” [C2002], that is, how to initiate contact and address problems of the family, as volunteers proactively go to them and end up getting to know how they live, how parents, children, and couples relate to each other, what life is like in the community. To achieve this understanding, it was necessary to contain judgment at times in the sense of not criticizing behavior and pointing out problems, rather understanding and then guiding. Based on this ‘knowing how to approach’ (prudential means), a relationship of trust is established between volunteers and beneficiaries (Mateiu-Vescan et al., 2021), so that people understand that the volunteers are intending to help. When asked how to be a volunteer and what has changed since becoming one, C4001 answered: “Patience, empathy, understanding toward people. ... [It made it possible for me] to know more about the world, the difficulties and reality of other people, for example the situation of people who get involved with prostitution. And so many other situations, difficult situations for many women and families. ... What would we have done in their place?” [C4001].

Although some activities are sporadic, they are perceived as a sign that someone cares, which is recognized by the communities according to volunteers from the four organizations. In this sense, the volunteer C2006 said: “The organization gives hope to children. When they see us wearing the C2 shirt, they eagerly point the finger at us: ‘Look, look!’” [C2006].

The female volunteers report that there is a respect between C2 volunteers and the people involved in drug trafficking, so that they may enter communities and act. It is a kind of “truce” of other interests for the good of the families. The most vulnerable communities recognize this role, according to C2002.

The relationship between prudence and hope

Considering that pro-life volunteers seek to help pregnant women and show alternatives when they have doubts about pregnancy and abortion, they guide pregnant women at a time when a dimension related to prudence — foresight (Aquinas, 2014) — is confused, that is, at a time when women find it difficult to foresee the significance of pregnancy, motherhood, and the bond with the baby. When someone already has experience with it, they may retrieve that experience from their memory to make a decision. This has to do with a good retrospective understanding — hindsight — of a lived experience, a reflective understanding

of women in this situation (e.g., [Avalos, 1999](#)). They reveal that women who had abortions experienced an ambivalence, a ‘reason and heart’ conflict ([Kimport, 2012](#)) in their life narrative, in which abortion is difficult to harmonize with their constitutive biography.

Along these lines, by showing alternatives and helping envision the future — foresight — through an ordering to a good end, moved by hope, understood as the willingness to establish clear priorities ([Milona, 2020](#)), the guidance and help of volunteers allow pregnant women to make a slightly more prudent choice. The experience of volunteers, which is rooted in the traditions of their community, helps expectant mothers to have an orderly vision of the future and of life. In a situation of great doubt and uncertainty or insecurity about the future, people may find themselves unable to make an adequate judgment of reality and visualize a possible future, needing the help of someone willing to help them discern and order priorities. Restoring this capacity, with the help of volunteers who work to help and protect pregnant women, may be a form of excellence of immeasurable value to the community.

Discussion, limitations, and future research

Pro-life volunteering is permeated by motivations or reasons to act through pro-life initiatives. The perspective of volunteers reveals altruistic motivations to help and give hope ([Cavalcante et al., 2015](#)). At the same time, it is associated with being a better person ([Mateiu-Vescan et al., 2021](#)) from a moral point of view (be patient, courageous, have good sense). Justice is connected to reasons for being pro-life, as well as the desire to be respected in relationships and to be considered in the organization (extrinsic motivation, according to [Guillén et al., 2015](#)). For this, *phronesis* proves to be crucial to voluntary action.

The objectives and services offered by organizations accommodate the beliefs and values of volunteers but go through care of their public image on religious grounds. As this study focused on multiple cases at the individual level, future research should address the practice-institution relationships from a MacIntyrean perspective in order to explore issues such as religiosity. Organizations that deal with salient ethical issues, such as pro-life and pro-choice organizations, are a promising context for the study of religion and spirituality in organizations.

This study draws on the perspective of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics ([Guillén et al., 2015](#); [Sison & Ferrero, 2015](#)) to empirically address how pro-life volunteers cultivate virtues, finding how judgment and actions, based on *phronesis*, are connected with moral influences ([Puckering, 2015](#)) founded on courage, temperance, justice, and hope. This study suggests a relationship between the moral virtues

of temperance and hope with *phronesis*, in line with the assumption of the unity of virtues ([Sison & Ferrero, 2015](#); [Zyl, 2019](#)) as an ideal for volunteering. It exemplifies the willingness to act ‘against the current,’ which demands courage and prudence, especially in adverse and uncertain contexts. Knowing, first, and then experiencing, guiding, and transmitting may be steps on how to act in pro-life volunteering, which seeks to simultaneously help women and defend life.

In theoretical terms, this article offers evidence that different contexts, considering the legislation on abortion, may reveal similar virtues by delving into cases from the Brazilian and Spanish contexts in light of virtue ethics. Both demand practical wisdom to understand the context. Although the situations may be different, as well as the services provided and the forms of pro-life action (individual reach and public flow) ([Munson, 2018](#)), the character attributes perceived as necessary — courage, justice, good sense — are similar. Among the differences, in turn, there is a greater specialization in the services provided in Spain, in addition to one of the organizational cases adopting a position disassociated from religion.

Among the limitations, there are those resulting from methodological and contextual choices, such as results that cannot be generalized and joint reports of cases and languages. For future studies, we suggest qualitative and inductive strategies using methods such as grounded theory and interactive methods between theory and data, such as flexible pattern matching ([Bouncken, Qiu, Sinkovics, & Kürsten, 2021](#)).

CONCLUSION

This article argues for the ethics of virtues as a theoretical possibility for the study of ethics in business. The relationship between moral virtues and *phronesis* is suggested as characteristics of the conduct of volunteers. Despite contextual differences, to become a pro-life volunteer it is important to develop habits of courage, temperance, prudence (*phronesis*), and hope. In addition to relational issues that demand justice, at times judgment must be moderated given the circumstantial aspects of pregnant women in order to better help them, which highlights the importance of the relationship between temperance and *phronesis*.

Considering the contemporary business debate, this article shows that, in order to understand moral issues, it is necessary to consider an ethical perspective open to deliberation, plural in possibilities of solutions to problems, and that presupposes a non-reductive anthropology of the human being, for which we proposed the neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics perspective.

We adopted a multiple-case study aiming to investigate two Brazilian and two Spanish organizations within which volunteers were considered mini-cases. The results show the assumption of the unity of virtues by highlighting the relationship between *phronesis*, temperance (self-control), and hope in situations in which one should know how to approach families and know when to not judge. The foresight, a component of *phronesis*, is essential for volunteers to help pregnant women establish priorities in their choices and see more clearly the difficulties and future developments. In addition, practical wisdom or *phronesis* appears to be relevant to deal with issues of a relational and cultural context, such as religious plurality.

Temperance and fortitude are required to act in situations that demand patience, willingness to relate, and listening. Courage is important for volunteers to participate in organizations and assume their values in front of the

community. Justice, in turn, promotes engagement and is required in unfair situations perceived in the internal relationship. Prudence, especially, made it possible to understand the context of action and make decisions to find the best way to help and defend life. These virtues allow volunteers to present alternatives to pregnant women, helping them project a possible future for pregnancy and motherhood and generating hope based on better selected priorities.

Considering the limitations, future studies should articulate moral and intellectual virtues with the civic virtues of volunteering to understand their joint role for volunteers, organizations, and society. The moral disposition of volunteers may contribute to the understanding of dedication over time, how they learn, and how they strengthen bonds. In addition to motivations, the concepts of *eudaimonia* and the common good may be related to volunteering.

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1st author: conceptualization (equal); data curation (lead); formal analysis (lead); investigation (lead); methodology (equal); project administration (lead); resources (lead); software (lead); supervision (lead); validation (equal); visualization (equal); writing – original draft (lead); writing – review & editing (equal).

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Data Availability

The authors claim that all data used in the research have been made publicly available through the Harvard Dataverse platform and can be accessed at:



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