

SOSYAL BİLİMLERİN KESİŞİM NOKTASINDA BİR KAVRAM: CESARETİN DİSİPLİNLERARASI ROLÜ

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REVIEW ARTICLE / DERLEME MAKALE

Makale İlk Gönderim Tarihi / Received (First): 15.11.2025

Makale Kabul Tarihi / Accepted: 24.12.2025

Atıf/Citation: Mert, İ. S. (2025). A concept at the intersection of social sciences: the interdisciplinary role of courage. Scientific Journal of Innovation and Social Sciences Research, 5(2), 166-193. <https://doi.org/10.71284/sjissr.2025525>

Özet

Cesaret, bireysel davranışlardan toplumsal dönüşümlere kadar geniş bir yelpazede etkileri olan temel bir insan erdemidir. Bu çalışma, cesaret kavramının sosyal bilimlerin farklı alt disiplinlerinde nasıl incelendiğini ve neden disiplinlerarası bir kavram olarak ele alınması gerektiğini sorgulamaktadır. Bu bağlamda cesaret konusu psikoloji, sosyoloji, siyaset bilimi, kamu yönetimi, felsefe, eğitim bilimleri, tarih, sağlık bilimleri, işletme ve örgütsel davranış, antropoloji, hukuk, askeri bilimler, tiyatro-performans ve sanat çalışmaları ile din bilimleri/teoloji disiplinlerinde incelenmiştir. Çalışmanın temel argümanı, cesaretin bireysel bir özellik olmanın ötesinde, toplumsal normları, güç ilişkilerini ve değer sistemlerini şekillendiren bir kavram olduğu ve bu nedenle sosyal bilimlerin kesişim noktasında yer aldığıdır. Toplumun temel bir unsuru olan cesaret, henüz tam olarak anlaşılamamış ve hak ettiği bağlama oturamamış bir temel taşı olmaya devam etmektedir. Bu bağlamda, cesaretin disiplinlerarası yapısının anlaşılması, günümüz toplumsal sorunlarının çözümüne yönelik yeni yaklaşımlar geliştirilmesine yardımcı olabilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Cesaret, Disiplinlerarası Çalışma, Sosyal Bilimler, Etik.

A CONCEPT AT THE INTERSECTION OF SOCIAL SCIENCES: THE INTERDISCIPLINARY ROLE OF COURAGE

Abstract

Courage is a fundamental human virtue that has a wide range of effects from individual behaviors to social transformations. This study questions how the concept of courage is examined in different sub-disciplines of social sciences and why it should be considered as an interdisciplinary concept. In this context, the subject of courage has been examined in the disciplines of psychology, sociology, political science, public administration, philosophy, educational sciences, history, health sciences, business and organizational behavior, anthropology, law, military sciences, theater, performance and art studies, and religious sciences and theology. The main argument of the study is that courage is a concept that shapes social norms, power relations, and value systems beyond being an individual characteristic, and therefore it is at the intersection of social sciences. Courage, as a foundational element of society, remains a cornerstone not yet fully understood and placed in its rightful context. In this context, understanding the interdisciplinary nature of courage can help develop new approaches to solving today's social problems.

Keywords: Courage, Interdisciplinary Study, Social Sciences, Ethics.

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1. Introduction

There are some values in social life that are at the center not only of individual choices but also of collective actions, institutional decisions and historical transformations (Miller, 1992; Ostrom, 2000). These values are important determinants of the actions of individuals and groups (Kaasa, 2019). However, the fact that these actions are open to question also reveals their inherently problematic nature (Frankfurt, 1978), while the significance of collective action has been explicitly acknowledged across various disciplines. Over the past decade, a substantial body of literature has emerged across disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, political science, and history, aiming to explain diverse forms of individual and collective action (Miller, 1992) including ethical whistleblowing, moral resistance, conscientious objection, bystander intervention, voting behavior, protest movements, state formation, organizational development, and even altruism.

Such individual and collective actions carry not only behavioral but also moral, social and political meanings. Therefore, understanding which values are effective behind the attitudes that individuals or groups exhibit by taking risks has become an important area of research for social sciences. Actions, especially those exhibited in situations of threat, uncertainty or pressure, provide critical indicators of the extent to which these values have been internalized and how they relate to social structures (Schlenker, 1987). In this context, the concept of courage stands out as one of the basic values that make or trigger such actions possible.

Throughout history, courage has been considered one of the most important virtues. From Aristotle to Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Martha Nussbaum, Henry David Thoreau, and Paul Tillich, many philosophers over the centuries have glorified courage as the driving force of truth, freedom and social justice and have emphasized courage in order to save people's lives, prevent harm to others and support socio-political transformation (White, 2015).

Explaining a concept that is used and observed in such diverse contexts from only one discipline is insufficient to understand the nature of courage. Indeed, courage is examined with different theoretical and methodological tools in many sub-disciplines of social sciences; each one attributes unique meanings to this concept. While psychology considers courage at the individual level and associates it with the ability to take action despite fear, ego strength and self-efficacy (Lopez et al., 2003), sociology interprets this concept in terms of collective resistance, civil disobedience and anti-normative behavior (Sjoberg, 2006). Public administration and political science analyze courage in the context of ethical decision-making, loyalty to the public good, and political risk-taking (Schilpzand et al., 2015). From the perspective of ethical theories, courage is a fundamental part of moral character, a prerequisite that makes possible the applicability of all other virtues (MacIntyre, 1984).

The existing literature suggests that courage extends beyond an individual trait and should be conceptualized as an organizational, social, and cultural phenomenon. In the field of psychology, studies have examined the relationship between courage and individuals' perceptions, emotional reactions and personality traits (for example, see Koksall & Mert, 2023; Mert, 2021a, 2023a, 2023b; Mert & Koksall, 2022b), and in the context of sociology, the reflections of courage in daily life practices and social relations have been analyzed (Bayramoğlu & Mert, 2024; Mert, 2021c, 2022b). In the context of political science and public administration, the role of courage in ethical leadership, conscientious stance and managerial decision-making processes has been discussed (Mert, 2022b; Şen & Mert, 2020). In the discipline of philosophy, theoretical analyses conducted in the context of virtue ethics have focused on the moral dimensions of courage (Mert, 2007, 2010, 2018, 2021b, 2021d, 2023c, 2024; Mert et al., 2025). In context of health sciences, the courageous behaviors of critical professional groups such as nursing have been analyzed (Koksall & Mert, 2023; Mert & Holiev, 2024). In the business and organizational behavior literature, the transformative effects of courage on job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and employee well-being have been empirically demonstrated (Koksall et al., 2022; Mert & Bayramoğlu, 2024; Mert et al., 2022; Namal et al., 2023; Namal et al., 2024; Tufan et al., 2024). In the field of military sciences, the role of courage in the organizational commitment of Coast Guard personnel has been examined (Mert & Köksall, 2022a), and in the discipline of history, studies have been conducted on the cultural roots of courage (Aydemir & Mert, 2018; Mert & Aydemir, 2019). In the field of law, lawyers' perspective on courage (Sert et al., 2025) is studied. This diversity shows that courage is not only an individual or singular phenomenon, but rather is conceptualized in almost every subfield of social sciences and defined in different ways according to unique contexts. Therefore, this study aims to rethink and discuss courage as an interdisciplinary concept by bringing together approaches from all these disciplines.

The main purpose of this study is to comparatively analyze the definitions, explanation models and contexts in which the concept of courage is used in different sub-disciplines of social sciences. Thus, it will be revealed that courage is not only an individual but also an institutional, structural and cultural phenomenon. In this context, the following questions will be answered in the study:

1. How is courage examined and used in different social sciences?
2. What is the function and importance of courage as an interdisciplinary concept?

This study is a conceptual and holistic literature review that examines the concept of courage in the context of different sub-disciplines of social sciences. In the research, theoretical and empirical studies published in the fields of psychology, sociology, political science, public administration, philosophy, educational sciences, history, health sciences, business and organizational behavior, anthropology, law, military

sciences, art and performance studies and religious sciences were systematically scanned and examined through content analysis. By comparatively analyzing how courage is defined in these disciplines, in what contexts it is discussed and with which functions it is associated, the common themes and distinctive dimensions of the concept are revealed. With this method, the basic argument that courage is not only an individual virtue but also an interdisciplinary concept that gains meaning at cultural, institutional and social levels is grounded in a conceptual framework.

This study makes a holistic perspective covering various disciplines in order to reveal the multidimensional nature of the concept of courage within the social sciences. Fields such as psychology, sociology, political science, public administration, philosophy, educational sciences, history, health sciences, business and organizational behavior, anthropology, law, communication sciences, military sciences, theater-performance and art studies, and religious sciences/theology address courage in different contexts; they give meaning to a wide range from individual behavior to collective resistance, from ethical decision processes to social transformations. This interdisciplinary approach aims to evaluate courage not only as an individual characteristic, but also as a cultural, moral and institutional phenomenon that is in constant interaction with social structures.

In line with this holistic framework, this study argues that courage is not only an individual virtue, but also a multi-layered value that transforms social structures, shapes institutions and directs historical processes. In this regard, this study will contribute to placing courage in its right place in individual, relational and social contexts by using an interdisciplinary holistic approach. By aiming this, the following sections of the study examine in detail how the concept of courage is defined and used in different sub-disciplines of social sciences. Subsequently, in the conclusion and discussion section, the theoretical and practical contributions of courage as an interdisciplinary concept to social sciences are discussed; suggestions for more effective use of courage in solving social problems are developed.

2. Courage in Psychology

The discipline of psychology explains courage by relating it to the individual's capacity to take action despite fear. In this approach, the "action despite fear" forms the basis of courage (Pury & Mulkey, 2016). Psychological courage is considered together with individual variables such as self-efficacy, resilience and perception of threat, and is used as an important tool in understanding how an individual reacts to challenging situations (Othman, 2020). In the context of positive psychology, courage is considered one of the "virtues" that create meaning in an individual's life and is addressed at two levels, both as a measurable personality trait (trait courage) and as a situational response (state courage).

One of the important studies in the positive psychology literature that systematically addresses courage is the special issue of *The Journal of Positive Psychology* dated April 2007 (Lopez, 2007). This special issue

aimed to add theoretical and empirical depth to the field by examining the implicit theories, subjective experiences, and psychological components of courage. Rate et al. (2007) showed that individuals systematically use their own implicit understanding of courage when evaluating courageous behavior. Pury et al. (2007) drew attention to the importance of behaviors exhibited within the framework of individual limitations by making meaningful distinctions between personal courage and general courage. Greitemeyer et al. (2007) demonstrated that civil courage differs from helping behavior in that the individual defends social and ethical norms at social cost. Hannah et al. (2007) presented a holistic theory that conceptualizes courage in the context of positive psychological states, individual character strengths, and social structures. The studies in this special issue have made significant contributions to the positive psychology literature by positioning courage not only as an individual trait but also as a dynamic virtue shaped by social contexts.

Psychological courage is increasingly recognized as an important type of courage, especially in internal conflicts and personal development processes. Putman (1997) argues that psychological courage should be recognized as a separate and meaningful form of courage in the ethical field. This type of courage, unlike physical or moral courage, refers to the individual's confrontation with risks to psychological well-being; for example, coping with destructive habits, irrational anxieties, or personally challenging situations (Greitemeyer et al., 2007). Kelley et al. (2019) state that all types of courage are nourished by psychological processes, but emphasize that psychological courage is especially centered on the individual's power to confront their inner fears and overcome obstacles to development. Pajestka and Skłacka (2025) suggest that psychological courage helps individuals cope with fears and anxieties, allowing them to find meaning in their careers. On the other hand, Pury et al. (2014) propose that rather than defining courage through fixed categories, it may be more effective to understand it in terms of the specific risks faced and the goals pursued—highlighting the contextual and integrative nature of psychological courage.

Psychology addresses courage at the individual level and generally defines it as the behavior of "taking action despite fear" (Pury & Mulkey, 2016). In the field of positive psychology in particular, courage is associated with the individual's capacity to take action with a sense of self-efficacy in the face of challenging situations (Lopez et al., 2003). The distinction between trait and state courage examines whether an individual exhibits courage as a permanent personality trait or as a temporary reaction specific to the context. In addition, courage is the subject of research as both an outcome and a mediator variable, along with concepts such as post-traumatic growth, resilience, and psychological resilience. Studies of courage in this context contribute particularly to the concepts of individual decision-making processes, self-perception, and psychological well-being (Lewandowski, 2023; Wilson, 2025; Wolfe, 2023).

3. Courage in Sociology

The discipline of sociology considers courage as a social attitude that is at the center of standing against social norms and participating in collective actions rather than an individual characteristic (Deutsch, 1961). In this context, courage refers to the resistance that an individual exhibit against cultural values and group pressure. Behavioral forms such as challenging social norms, civil disobedience and activism show how courage is given meaning from a sociological perspective (Rodriguez, 2001). Collective courage, which emerges in the context of social movements, carries a motivation that aims at the transformation of not only a group but also society (Nembhard, 2024; Williams, 2016). In this context, courage is an important variable in understanding the active role that an individual assumes in social transformation processes (Todd, 2005). In particular, the concept of “social courage” refers to the individual’s attitude towards defending what is ethical and just despite group pressure. In sociological analyses, courage is closely associated with individuals’ decisions to take part in collective action and is considered one of the driving forces necessary for social change (Hannah et al., 2011; Sonnentag & Barnett, 2016).

The discipline of sociology considers courage not only as an internal characteristic of the individual, but also as a collective phenomenon shaped by social structures, cultural norms, and social relations (Alexander, 2003). This approach emphasizes that the courageous behaviors of an individual cannot be evaluated independently of the value system, group dynamics, and institutional arrangements of the society to which they belong. Swedberg (1999) states that sociology should focus on types of “courage in non-military areas,” and that this type of courage emerges through innovative and disinterested actions that shape the moral and cultural foundations of society. Particularly, individuals who raise their voices in public life take risks to defend moral norms in the face of authoritarian structures or the silence of the majority, representing a fundamental example of social courage (Noelle-Neumann, 1993).

Misztal (2015) defines social courage not only as a counter-stance but also as a building block in the essence of collective actions that are the carriers of social transformation. In this context, civil or social courage includes not only resistance against injustices that have become entrenched in the social order, but also an effort to institutionalize change based on ethical values. According to Misztal, courage strengthens the individual's ability to think independently, provides the courage to question stagnation in public life, breaks the intellectual monotony within the group, and ensures the continuity of critical reason in the information society. Klausner (1961) emphasizes the role of courage in the socialization process; basic social structures such as religious institutions, family structure, and ethnic affiliation both support and limit the individual's experience of courage. Courage is argued to have a direct impact on an individual's capacity to assume and maintain their social roles. Therefore, sociology considers courage to be much more than individual heroism; it is a central concept in the self-construction of society, the critique of the normative order, and the spread of ethical sensitivity (Frisk, 2019).

4. Courage in Political Science

Political science considers courage as an action that carries moral responsibility and involves risk in decision-making processes. Political courage is often defined as the will to make unpopular but ethically correct decisions. Especially in the leadership literature, courage is considered as taking a reformist stance against the status quo, putting the public interest before personal or institutional interests, and risking one's own position when necessary (Schilpzand et al., 2015).

Political courage is of vital importance for citizens as it enables individuals to act and communicate in the public sphere despite conditions of fear and uncertainty (Sparks, 1997). In this context, political courage can be considered in two interrelated dimensions: First, the normative dimension as an ethical principle that directs individuals to speak, listen and seek change; The second is the practical dimension, which expresses the implementation of this principle through concrete actions in political and social life. Therefore, political courage is not only a guiding value, but also a practice of action exhibited and performed in real situations. As a matter of fact, as Bickford (2010) emphasizes, political courage is an indispensable practice for citizens who want to defend their existing community or build a new community through collective reasoning and action.

According to a qualitative study conducted in line with the literature review on definitions of moral courage, there is a relationship between moral motivation and the display of moral courage, mediated by political, social, and psychological factors as well as activist knowledge. Displays of moral courage can have both positive and negative consequences for individuals, organizations, and society. Understanding how the core components of moral courage can trigger political and social transformations provides civil society leaders with the roadmap they need to resist oppression and effect change. While recognizing the risks and potential challenges they face, leaders can continue this struggle by holding on to their moral principles, commitment, compassion, and sense of urgency and contribute to the development of civil society both in a democratizing country and in the broader global context (White, 2015).

Among psychologists and philosophers, moral courage has often been treated as an individualistic phenomenon, independent of sociological analysis (Press, 2018). However, Press (2018) argues that moral courage should be understood as a form of social action comprising four fundamental components: (1) it is guided by strong personal convictions, (2) it challenges established traditions or prevailing attitudes, (3) it is exercised in the face of significant social risks or costs, and (4) it represents a normative act where certain norms are deliberately violated while others are upheld as binding.

According to Kotyk (1998), the deliberate attempt of political scientists to transcend party-imposed conceptual limitations and to articulate objective accounts of social reality represents a form of courage, as the consequences of expressing scientific truth are often known in advance.

Brady (2005) states that Aristotle examines the first of the tendencies that imitate courage in different ways as “political courage.” This tendency is characterized by the will to confront dangers; this confrontation stems either from legal obligations or from the honors that can be gained. Although Aristotle states that risking one’s life for honor is the behavior that “most resembles courage,” political courage falls short of real courage because its main purpose is to obtain honor rather than to deserve it.

5. Courage in Philosophy

In the philosophical tradition, courage is considered one of the most basic and ancient virtues of human nature (Müller, 2019). In ancient Greece, Plato defined courage as a state of mind based on true knowledge (Devereux, 1977); Socrates questioned courage in his dialogue *Laches*, showing that it was not a characteristic specific to the battlefield but a value based on knowledge (Futter, 2017). Aristotle, on the other hand, positioned courage as a “golden mean” between cowardice and reckless courage, and argued that true courage was the will to do what was right in the face of great dangers such as death (Miller, 2005).

In Eastern philosophy, Confucius saw courage as a result of moral self-discipline and inner virtue. According to him, courage can be destructive if not combined with wisdom. Therefore, for a virtuous individual, courage must be balanced with honesty and justice (Chen, 2010; Jiang, 2012).

In the Middle Ages, St. Thomas Aquinas evaluated courage in the context of Christianity and defined it as the power to act with faith in God (De Young, 2003; Titus, 2017). In modern philosophy, Immanuel Kant considered courage as the courage of an individual to use their mind in the public sphere, that is, as the basic condition of “Enlightenment”. According to him, “Sapere Aude!” or “Have the courage to use your mind!” is the basis of individual and intellectual freedom (Madore, 2015; Tampio, 2012; Vahabov et al., 2022).

Existentialist philosopher Søren Kierkegaard interpreted courage as the individual’s search for meaning in his loneliness before God. According to Kierkegaard, true courage is being able to take a “leap of faith,” that is, embracing with faith an enigma that cannot be solved on rational grounds (Grøn et al., 2017). Paul Tillich defined courage in his work *The Courage to Be* as a person choosing to exist despite the fear of non-existence. For Tillich, courage is a person’s resistance to meaninglessness, guilt, and fear of death (Tillich, 2008).

Montaigne, on the other hand, viewed courage from a more internal and personal perspective as a person accepting their own flaws, realizing the fragility of life, and continuing to live despite this. According to

him, courage is not only about knowing oneself on the battlefield, but also in daily life (Quint, 2014; Parks, 2016).

6. Courage in Educational Science

In education science, courage is not only an individual virtue; it is also considered as a value that can be developed pedagogically, directly provided by ethical responsibility and social transformation (Halstead, 2007). Schools are social areas that encourage not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the development of rights, reasoning, conscientious responsibility and social courage. In this way, courage is integrated with democratic citizenship, ethical determination and civil responsibility. Halstead (2007) emphasizes that constitutional (moral) and civil courage, in particular, distance students from passive obedience to the superior and direct them towards active citizenship.

Zembylas (2024) argues that courage in education can be possible through the transformation of pedagogical environments, beyond individual competencies. According to him, schools should not be areas where moral and civil courage are taught, but rather where they are made visible. However, today, neoliberal tendencies prevent courage from being considered together with concepts such as imagination and uncertainty. At this point, D'agnese (2018), based on Dewey's thought, argues that education should take place within the triangle of courage, imagination and uncertainty, and that this trio defines real learning processes that involve taking risks.

Stengel (2018) takes courage in education beyond individual heroic narratives and draws attention to a more "quiet" but profound form of courage that emerges in collective action areas. According to him, today's teachers should exhibit not only individual but also community-based resistance against the injustices of the system and integrate courage with the capacity to act together. Pourfalahati (2023) defines educational courage as the highest form of ethical behavior that individuals exhibit when coping with traumatic challenges. All these studies reveal that courage is not only an individual character trait in education, but also a pedagogical, ethical, and socio-political construction process.

7. Courage in Business Administration

Managers and leaders are forced to make important decisions from an ethical perspective, especially in high-risk situations. In environments where uncertainty and ambiguity are part of the natural functioning of organizations, acting in accordance with an individual's ethical principles may mean facing personal risk, social exclusion or physical danger. In such situations, making ethical decisions is possible not only with knowledge and awareness, but also with moral courage. Moral courage refers to a set of ethical competencies and intrinsic motivation that enable an individual to take actions that they believe are right despite threats and obstacles while remaining loyal to their own ethical values (Mansur et al., 2020). Courage

in the business world occurs especially about making strategic decisions in the face of uncertainty, exhibiting an ethical stance, and demonstrating the will to create change. In today's rapidly changing global competitive environment, courage in the workplace is directly related to the ability of employees and leaders to transform institutions by taking individual responsibility (Dess & Picken, 2000). In this context, it is possible to address courage in business life under various headings, including employee courage, managerial courage, courage in leadership, entrepreneurial courage, and courage in business ethics.

The courageous behaviors displayed by employees in their daily duties can often mean questioning the system or higher authority. For example, an employee reporting injustices or unethical practices in the workplace to upper management or defending the rights of teammates is a concrete example of employee courage (Fernando et al., 2022). Such behaviors indicate the existence of psychological safety in the workplace and also show the extent to which the corporate culture is consistent with the principles of transparency and justice (Berry, 2004; Howard & Kasprzyk, 2024).

Workplace social courage in business life refers to behaviors such as expressing an opinion, objecting, and defending what one sees as right by taking risks when necessary, rather than remaining silent in the face of injustice, unethical practices or problematic processes within the organization. Such courageous behavior is not just an individual character trait; It is also closely related to organizational climate, perception of justice and employee well-being. As a matter of fact, Mert et al. (2022) show that workplace social courage plays a mediating role in the relationship between organizational justice perception and life satisfaction and happiness, pointing out that social courage is a critical mechanism for employee well-being. Similarly, Mert and Köksal (2022b) revealed that the concept can be reliably addressed in the context of business life by focusing on the measurement of workplace social courage and its connection with employees' life satisfaction.

Managers' initiation of change processes, making difficult decisions and standing behind these decisions are fundamental indicators of managerial courage (Harris, 2001). Especially when it comes to difficult decisions regarding employees (such as layoffs, restructurings, wage freezes), managers need to be both humane and consider organizational goals (Perry, 1985; Rosanas, 2008). Such decisions define courage not only as action but also as perseverance and generosity. Organizations can foster a culture of courageous behavior by promoting perseverance and generosity, while empowering individuals to transcend perceived limitations. Furthermore, when leadership practices are aligned with ethical principles, courage is more likely to be expressed within a strong and coherent moral framework (Mert et al., 2025).

Leadership, by its very nature, requires courage (Batagiannis, 2007). Visionary leaders often reshape their organizations by thinking outside the box (Yeo, 2006). Especially in times of crisis, leaders' ability to make quick, consistent, and risk-taking decisions builds trust in their followers (Aboramadan & Dahleez, 2022).

Courageous leadership is not only evident in strategic decisions, but also in the leader's ability to admit his or her own mistakes, encourage different views, and take responsibility for institutional failures (Hannah et al., 2011).

Another important issue that comes up when examining the issue of courage in business management is entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship is a process associated with uncertainty and risk (Gifford, 2010). Bringing a new business idea to life, assuming financial risks, navigating market uncertainties, and persisting despite the threat of failure all reflect the courageous nature of entrepreneurship (Naughton & Cornwall, 2006). What distinguishes successful entrepreneurs is often their resilience in the face of setbacks and their capacity to extract valuable lessons from failure. Entrepreneurial courage should be understood not merely as an economic endeavor, but also as a form of psychological resilience, an expression of innovative vision, and a catalyst for social transformation (Namal et al., 2023).

In the complex landscape of modern organizations, ethical behavior often demands extraordinary courage. In this regard of business ethics, courage means standing up for what is right, even in the face of personal or professional risk (Sekerka et al., 2009). Whether it is an executive confronting a conflict of interest, an employee refusing to follow unethical orders, or a supervisor insisting on transparency, these acts reflect moral integrity in action (Schwartz et al., 2005). Ethical courage becomes especially vital in environments where silence is implicitly rewarded and ethical resistance may result in social exclusion, stalled careers, or direct retaliation. In such settings, the true test of character lies not in compliance, but in the willingness to speak up and act ethically despite the consequences (Chen & Treviño, 2023).

8. Courage in Anthropology

In the discipline of anthropology, courage is considered both a cultural value and a functional observation tool in understanding the individual-society relationship (Brendtro et al., 1991). Rituals, rites of passage, and heroic narratives are important cultural forms that show how societies define and reward courage. For example, in some societies, courage is identified with physical strength and warriorship; in others, it can be defined as silent resistance, wisdom, or endurance. The definition of courage is shaped by cultural norms, rituals, and symbolic systems that vary from society to society, rather than a universal individual characteristic (Marcus & Fischer, 1999). In this context, courage is evaluated not only by the individual's behavior in the face of danger or risk, but also by the social meaning of this behavior, its place in collective memory, and culturally approved forms (Yang & Milliren, 2009).

Anthropological studies show how courage is produced and legitimized, especially in contexts such as rites of passage, war and conflict practices, honor and shame cultures, masculinity and gender roles (Peteet, 1994). For example, in some cultures, courage is seen as a basic condition of social respect and belonging;

in other cultures, it is understood as an individual deviating from group norms and exhibiting an ethical stance (Heelas & Lock, 1981). Therefore, courage functions as a concept that both reinforces collective identity and can trigger cultural change (Nembhard, 2024).

As a result, anthropology considers courage not only as an individual psychological trait but also as a culturally constructed symbolic form of action that organizes social relations (Carrithers, 2005). This perspective allows us to understand courage at historical, ritualistic and collective levels.

9. Courage in Legal Science

In legal scholarship, courage is most commonly associated with the moral and ethical integrity required to defend justice, particularly in the face of power imbalances, political pressures, or public hostility (Wendel, 2001). Legal professionals, such as judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and human rights advocates, often face situations that require resilience, risk-taking, and principled action in contexts where legal correctness may conflict with established interests or public opinion (Brafford, 2014; Green & Roiphe, 2017; Moorhead et al., 2018)

Thus, courage in the legal field means not only acting within legal boundaries but also defending the spirit of justice, even when this defense may be unpopular or dangerous (Bandes, 2000; Kronman, 1987; Markovits, 2010). For example, judges who make decisions that confront powerful political actors (Ferejohn, 2002) or lawyers who defend individuals who are marginalized by society often take great personal and professional risks (Menkel-Meadow, 1987). These examples show that legal courage involves both ethical autonomy and the will to stand up to institutional or societal resistance (Sarat, 2017).

Legal scholars argue that law is not a neutral or static field, but rather that interpretive discretion and moral courage play a central role in its application (Dyzenhaus et al, 2007; Sarat, 2017). This situation becomes particularly evident in transitional justice processes, where legal actors must confront historical wrongs, balance conflicting narratives and ensuring accountability in complex circumstances (Leebaw, 2008; Teitel, 2002).

In determining the standards of judicial review, the area of freedom of expression constitutes one of the most powerful examples of judicial courage (Fisch, 2004). Consequently, courage in jurisprudence is the active defense of justice and law, and often requires great costs. This courage is embodied in the ethical subject of legal practitioners and plays a fundamental role in preserving the legitimacy and moral authority of the law.

10. Courage in The Discipline of History

In the historical context, courage has been conceptualized not only as an individual virtue but also as a reflection of the value systems and ideological structures of certain periods. According to Ogden's (2023)

interpretive approach, courage is redefined according to the ideological goals and dominant belief systems of a particular culture; in this respect, courage has been the object of not only individual heroism but also intellectual and philosophical inquiry throughout history. The way courage is shaped in historical narratives is also directly related to the power relations, social structure and cultural expectations of that period.

The science of history is not only a record of past events, but also a practice of questioning aimed at understanding the present. Within this framework, courage for historians manifests itself in the effort to challenge dominant narratives while seeking objective truth and to produce alternative interpretations, often despite political pressures (Chandio, 2023). For example, E.H. Carr's definition of "the endless dialogue between the past and the present" reveals the responsibility of the historian to re-evaluate the past courageously. At the same time, the concept of "world-historical courage" in Hegel's philosophy is defined as a personal virtue possessed by great individuals who oppose the decaying constitutional order and become the driving force of historical transformation (Hristov, 2022). These individuals not only oppose the existing order, but also become the subjects of great destruction and transformation in the historical sense. According to Hristov (2022), in violent environments where borders disappear, such as total war, such world-historical courage combines with political courage and gives birth to the most radical forms of historical transformation.

On the other hand, Mert's (2023) findings reveal that the public's criteria for evaluating historical figures as brave are very diverse. Qualities such as leadership, artistic production or military success play an important role in seeing historical figures as brave. This shows that historical bravery is not only a military or political stance, but can also be evaluated as an aesthetic, intellectual or ethical stance.

In the context of historical science, courage emerges in the process of reconstructing the past through critical questioning, developing alternative interpretations against dominant narratives and sometimes making visible narratives that have been silenced in social memory. This type of courage allows historians to connect the past with the present by taking moral, intellectual and political risks (Berkhofer, 1995).

11. Courage in Health Science

Courage in health sciences is a multidimensional concept that refers to the resilience, determination, and ability to assume ethical responsibilities in the face of challenges faced by both health professionals and patients (Mosaad Mohamed Elghabbour et al., 2023). Courage is of central importance for both practitioners and service recipients in fields that directly affect human life, such as medicine, nursing, and psychology. Therefore, a significant portion of courage studies have been shaped, directly or indirectly, in the field of health (Mert, 2022a).

In the professional lives of healthcare professionals, courage often becomes apparent when they encounter ethical dilemmas (Kim et al., 2015), continue to perform their duties in crisis situations (Currin-McCulloch et al., 2022), or take professional risks (Ali & Khalifa, 2025). Especially in nursing, error reporting courage is a fundamental indicator of a professional stance that prioritizes patient safety (Cole et al., 2019; Ibrahim, 2024). A healthcare professional voluntarily reporting an error despite possible professional or administrative sanctions is an example of ethical courage in which they prioritize patient benefit over individual interests (Crigger, 2004). Such behaviors increase patient safety in clinical settings and directly contribute to the improvement of quality standards.

In clinical settings, courage comes to the fore, especially in situations where uncertainty, time pressure, and insufficient resources are at stake (Buchbinder et al., 2024). In extraordinary circumstances such as a pandemic, healthcare professionals who continue to care for patients while taking personal risks have been cited in the literature as examples of courage integrated with professional responsibility and ethical attitudes (Shanafelt et al., 2020). Doctors and nurses who continue to provide services despite factors such as personal protective equipment shortages, high risk of infection, and emotional exhaustion have become concrete representatives of courage during this period (Bondjers et al., 2023).

In addition, for health professionals struggling with burnout syndrome, courage is not limited to resisting external conditions; it is also related to the individual's efforts to mobilize internal resources, increase psychological resilience, and preserve their professional identity. In this context, courage is considered one of the basic conditions for recovery and professional sustainability (Koksal & Mert, 2023).

In health sciences, courage is not only a quality specific to practitioners; it also plays a serious role in the diagnosis, treatment and recovery processes for patients. In the face of chronic diseases, terminal stages or traumatic experiences, individuals maintaining their hopes, deciding to continue treatment and trying to maintain their quality of life are indicators of “courage to cope with illness”. Vital courage is the courage to thrive in the face of serious illness (Pury et al., 2010). An individual exhibiting vital courage endures adversity by actively striving for change and staying committed to treatment and counseling processes. (Pury & Mulkey, 2016). Especially in elderly individuals, trying to maintain an independent life despite physical weakness or taking an active decision-making role in treatment processes demonstrates that courage is an effective value even in the last stages of life (McPhee et al., 2016).

In psychological disorders, difficult diseases such as cancer or rehabilitation processes, patients embracing their inner strength and continuing treatment is often an invisible but extremely powerful form of courage (Hockenberry-Eaton & Minick, 1997; Rawnsley, 1994; Seibaek et al., 2016). In this context, courage is a meaningful response not only to external threats but also to internal fears, hopelessness and uncertainties.

12. Courage in Military

When courage is associated with a profession, military service is undoubtedly the first that comes to mind (Mert, 2025). The discipline of military sciences is one of the most classical and extensively studied fields concerning the concept of courage (Olsthoorn, 2010). Throughout history, in the context of wars, conflicts, and military interventions, courage has often been associated with facing physical danger, obeying orders, maintaining unit cohesion, and exercising leadership, with the motivational language directed at soldiers fundamentally serving to encourage and reinforce such courageous conduct (Olsthoorn, 2007; Mert, 2011; Mert et al., 2011). Aristotle defines a brave person as someone who fears the right things, at the right time, in the right way, and for the right reasons, yet endures despite these fears. In his view, bravery is a virtue guided by reason and exercised in accordance with the specific nature of each situation. While Aristotle's method acknowledges distinctions found in everyday language, it also enables him to identify unnamed psychological states that relate to bravery. His emphasis on the battlefield as a central context for bravery illustrates his recognition of the concept's inherent ambiguity. By framing bravery as a "relative mean" -a context-dependent balance rather than a fixed or mathematically precise standard- Aristotle underscores his commitment to practicality and experiential understanding. Furthermore, he regards the cultivation of bravery not only as an individual pursuit but as a shared civic responsibility. This perspective positions bravery as both a personal virtue and a collective moral duty within the fabric of society (Ladikos, 2004). Then, today, military courage is no longer limited to physical endurance or battlefield heroism. It has evolved into a multi-dimensional concept encompassing responsibility in strategic decision-making, upholding human values, and acting within the framework of military ethics (Evans, 2001). Military academies and war colleges acknowledge that courage is not merely an innate trait but a character dimension that can be developed through training (Sarjito, 2024). Therefore, military education focuses on cultivating skills that support courage, including physical endurance, moral reasoning, accountability, leadership, stress management, and composure in crises. Simulated combat environments, scenario-based exercises, and discipline-centered pedagogies are utilized to reinforce courage-related competencies.

Especially in today's hybrid warfare and contexts with increasing civilian-military interaction, personnel are expected to exhibit not only physical but also moral courage (Boëne, 2018). Conscientious courage becomes essential when questioning unlawful orders, opposing operations that may harm civilians, or challenging actions that contravene international law. Mechanisms such as the "right to object," ethical advisory services, and military ombudsman offices support courageous behavior within institutional structures.

Furthermore, war, conflict, and post-deployment trauma require military personnel to demonstrate courage not only during but also after their service. A soldier struggling with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) who seeks help, returns to duty, or reintegrates into society is also demonstrating a form of courage.

Similarly, the rehabilitation journey of a wounded veteran who has lost a limb is viewed through the lens of vital courage (Pury et al., 2014).

13. Courage in Theatre, Performance and Art Studies

In art and performance studies, courage is not only an attitude exhibited on stage, but also the boldness to challenge dominant aesthetic norms and stay faithful to the essence of the creative process. Within this framework, the notion of the “aesthetics of imperfection” shifts focus away from formal perfection, instead embracing improvisation, spontaneity, deviation, process fidelity, and raw energy. Although often overlooked by critics or narrowly attributed to improvisation, this approach manifests as a powerful act of artistic courage across diverse fields, ranging from music and visual arts to dance, architecture, and design. Contributions from both theorists and practicing artists emphasize that imperfection is not merely a shortcoming but a deliberate aesthetic stance and a form of creative defiance. Artistic forms rooted in both Western and non-Western traditions demonstrate how improvisation and spontaneous expression enrich the artistic experience. From this lens, an artist’s departure from perfection to voice their inner truth and cultural identity is recognized as an act of authentic artistic courage (Durà-Vilà, 2020).

Art plays a significant role in shaping social values and assigning cultural meaning to the concept of courage. Across different societies, courage is not merely an individual virtue but also a symbol of collective strength and resilience expressed through artistic practices. In this context, Chinese martial arts provide a compelling example of how courage is formed through deeply rooted philosophical traditions. The conceptualization of courage within Chinese martial disciplines is shaped by the combined influence of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. Confucian courage is grounded in the principles of virtue, justice, propriety, and wisdom, aiming to guide the individual’s decision to engage in or abstain from combat in line with societal order (An et al., 2024).

Similarly, in the Indonesian context, *kenrung*, a traditional Javanese art form that combines poetry, music, and ritual, emerges as a cultural embodiment of courage and perseverance. Particularly vital within coastal Javanese communities, *kenrung* has become a vehicle for resisting the pressures of modernization. Far beyond a traditional performance, *kenrung* functions as a social institution, symbolizing cultural resilience and the enduring strength of the Javanese spirit in the face of external change (Yuwono et al., 2025).

On a more individual level, experiences of bullying and exclusion often lead to deep psychological consequences such as trauma and shame. In such cases, creative arts-based group interventions offer transformative potential. The CAPG (Creative Arts Personal Growth Group) program has demonstrated how compassion, community, and artistic expression can help individuals confront and process fear and shame. Through this process, participants not only regulated emotional symptoms but also reconstructed a renewed sense of self and belonging (Sosin et al., 2022).

15. Courage in Theology

In religious studies, courage is not only an individual virtue, but also a value intertwined with faith, moral determination, and spiritual responsibility. Courage is defined in theological literature as both persevering in devotion to God and resisting worldly pressures for the sake of moral truth. In this sense, courage includes a stance strengthened by faith, taking risks for the sake of justice, and preserving spiritual integrity.

In theological terms, courage is not merely a mental competence but also a heartfelt disposition that manifests as the ability to confront danger without succumbing to fear or retreat. In ancient Greek philosophy, courage was regarded as one of the four cardinal virtues, a foundational quality essential to the pursuit of goodness. In Christian theology, however, these cardinal virtues are understood to be fulfilled and elevated through the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. Within this framework, courage becomes a moral force that empowers individuals to act in accordance with what faith demands in the journey of fulfilling God's will (Zehner, 2025).

In the Islamic perspective, courage is not merely a physical act but a profound spiritual value intricately tied to belief in divine destiny, the afterlife, and the purity of intention. In Islam, true courage is not defined solely by bold action but by alignment with divine purpose. It is a moral stance rooted in faith, ethics, and intention. In this sense, courage becomes not only the strength to confront worldly hardship but also the steadfastness to walk the path of God's will (Eren, 2017).

When discussing the intersection of religion and courage, the first two thinkers who come to mind are undoubtedly Paul Tillich and Heinz Kohut. Both philosophers go beyond offering psychological definitions of courage; they also evaluate and rank its forms. Kohut considers the highest form of courage to be "heroic courage." In his view, true heroes are exceptional individuals who remain loyal to their ideals despite external pressure, even embracing martyrdom if necessary. These individuals stand apart from the majority who abandon their values to conform to social norms. Kohut distinguishes authentic courage from the kind displayed by those who act under coercion within rigid groups, true courage, he argues, lies in preserving one's "core self" without succumbing to fear (Haitch, 1995).

Tillich, by contrast, emphasizes that courage and surrender are not mutually exclusive, so long as the surrender is to God. For Tillich, the highest form of courage arises from "absolute faith": the ability to affirm God's presence and purpose even in the absence of rational proof. While Kohut's heroic courage calls for unswerving loyalty to the self, Tillich's courage of faith centers on a spiritual surrender to the divine. In his view, the essence of courage is the act of entrusting one's moral integrity to God's will (Haitch, 1995).

16. Discussion and Conclusion

Social sciences, which aim to understand human nature and investigate the fundamental dynamics affecting human relations, self-perception and social integration, maintain their importance despite technological advances. This study has focused on the concept of “courage” within the realm of the social sciences, precisely because the social sciences aim to comprehend human nature and investigate the underlying factors that influence interpersonal relationships, self-perception, and social integration. Numerous subfields within the social sciences have developed with the purpose of understanding these dynamics. Among the many common denominators of these fields, courage emerges as a key variable—one that holds greater significance than generally assumed.

Courage, as examined in this study, demonstrates its relevance not only in the formation and evolution of civilizations but also in understanding and anticipating future societal developments. Although the concept of courage is addressed in multiple social science disciplines, often with overlapping perspectives, there are also notable divergences in how it is approached and interpreted across fields. Recognizing and sharing these differing disciplinary perspectives contributes not only to the enrichment of courage studies but also supports the development of each individual discipline within the broader social sciences.

Courage is seen to be addressed as a common aspect in social sciences as showing value-based action under conditions of threat, uncertainty or social pressure. Courage is related to the individual or group exhibiting an ethical, social or moral stance in situations involving risk in many disciplines such as psychology, sociology, political science, education, health and law. It is accepted that courage is a value that triggers the individual's decision-making processes, social change or organizational transformation. Within the scope of interdisciplinary differences; psychology defines courage as taking action despite fear at the individual level, sociology as the practice of collective resistance and opposing social norms, political science as assuming moral responsibility and ethical risk-taking behavior, philosophy positions courage as the basic condition of all other virtues, history redefines courage in the context of the ideological structure of the period, anthropology considers it as a symbolic form of behavior shaped in a cultural context and law operates as the practice of defending justice in the face of power relations.

Understanding the interdisciplinary nature of courage allows us to address social problems from a multi-layered perspective rather than a one-dimensional one. For example, problems such as climate change, gender inequality, bureaucratic corruption, ethical breakdowns or discrimination should be addressed not only at structural but also at ethical, psychological and cultural levels.

This study offers important theoretical and applied contributions by overcoming the limitations of a single discipline's explanation of courage. First of all, an interdisciplinary conceptual reconstruction process is presented by revealing the various meanings that courage has gained in different disciplines. In this way, the multidimensional structure of courage is better understood. Secondly, this study provides theoretical

integrity by considering courage as an integrative concept that bridges approaches such as virtue ethics, ethical leadership and criticism of social norms. In this context, courage is a fundamental virtue that enables moral judgment and right action in the context of virtue ethics; as a capacity that supports ethical leadership in the organizational and managerial context and enables responsible decision-making under risk. At the social level, it is discussed as a transformative power that enables individuals and groups to oppose established and unjust norms. Thus, the study reveals that courage is a multi-layered value that connects the planes of individual morality, organizational behavior and social change. This allows approaches from different fields to come together on a common ground. Finally, the study presents a multiple conceptualization by distinguishing and correlating the individual, collective, moral, psychological, social and symbolic dimensions of courage at a theoretical level. This separation and association provide the opportunity to analyze the different manifestations of courage in more detail. In terms of practice, it is suggested that courage is a critical capacity that enables leaders to make ethical decisions in times of crisis, and its integration into management development programs is suggested; a concrete framework is presented on how to develop courage in the context of ethical risk-taking behaviors of public administrators and legal professionals; courage is shown to be a teachable value, enabling its integration into educational practices; the importance of courage in terms of developing ethical responsibility and resilience in the health sector and patients is revealed; and finally, the psychosocial conditions necessary for individuals to take more active roles in practices such as civil disobedience and ethical whistle-blowing are analyzed on the axis of courage, contributing to the increase in social participation.

Today, in the environment of intense interaction, widespread communication and increased awareness provided by advanced technologies, human nature has become more visible and effective with both its constructive and destructive aspects. In this context, courage gains even more central importance as a critical determinant shaping human behavior and attitudes. This study examines courage in different disciplines such as psychology, sociology, political science, management, education, health and law; For example, it reveals that it is addressed by relating it to different variables such as individual coping with fear, ethical decision-making, organizational justice, leadership, resistance to social norms and collective action. This diversity shows that courage is not a one-dimensional concept, but rather a multi-layered and context-sensitive value. Therefore, current academic studies in this field are of great importance in understanding the function of courage at individual, organizational and social levels; However, considering the interdisciplinary nature of the concept, the need for new, more holistic and comparative research clearly emerges. In this respect, the study serves as both a starting point for future research on courage and a call for the development of this literature.

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