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Leadership Ethics

Joanne B. Ciulla and Donelson R. Forsyth

INTRODUCTION

A CEO bankrupts the company he is supposed to be leading. A retiree donates thousands of hours to her community. A company's leadership decides not to relocate a factory overseas, for the sake of the residents of an economically challenged town. A president of a club on a college campus encourages members to cheat on their examinations so that the group's members can earn academic honors. An elected public official arranges a tryst with a lover and abandons his duties for days on end.

These behaviors raise questions about motivation, rationality, and intent, but with a difference; these actions cannot only be judged as correct or incorrect in terms of effectiveness or competence, but as ethically right or wrong. Probably for as long as human societies have included individuals who take on extra responsibility for coordinating the actions and outcomes of others – leaders – people have questioned their motivations, fairness, and integrity. Why do individuals who seem to be fair-minded and virtuous change into something less once they gain a position of authority within the group? How can followers distinguish between leaders who have the group's best interests in mind and those who are seeking personal gain at the group's expense? Why would someone who is already respected by others and likely afforded a larger share of the collective's resources undermine the group's good will by seeking even more than their allotted share?

The moral goodness of leaders has been a topic of analysis for centuries (see Grint, Chapter 1, this volume). From ancient times, historians such as Herodotus (1987), Plutarch (1998, 1999), and Suetonius (2007) have described the character

strengths that distinguish leaders from their followers, as well as the consequences that follow when leaders fail to control their emotions and impulses. Political theorists have explored the boundaries that morality places around leaders, with views ranging from the pragmatism of Machiavelli (1954, 2003) to Rawls's (1971) more optimistic theory of justice. More recently and, in part in response to increasing public concern for the morality of leaders in business contexts, those who study management and organizational behavior have intensified their analysis of ethical leadership, with such theorists as Jones (1991), Brown and Treviño (2006), and Vardi and Weitz (2004) offering extensive reviews of the literature on leadership and ethics in work settings.

This chapter contributes to this growing multidisciplinary effort by drawing on philosophy and psychology to explore the moral foundations of leadership. We assume that ethical assumptions, expectations, and implications lie deeply embedded in every facet of the concept of leadership – from the way that leaders behave, to their relationships with followers, to the results of their initiatives. Like other areas of applied ethics, leadership ethics examines the distinctive set of ethical challenges and problems related to an occupation or role of a leader. It draws from the philosophic literature on ethics that spans back to the beginning of the written word and uses some of the tools of philosophy, such as logic and conceptual analysis. Psychology, applied to questions of ethics, does not provide prescriptive recommendations to guide a leader, but it does offer overarching theory and empirical evidence that promises the possibility of predicting how a leader will act with regards to the moral order.

The chapter is organized around some of the ethical aspects and challenges of leadership. We begin by considering the relationship between outcomes and moral evaluations, and ask if the ineffective leader can ever be an ethical one and if the leader who is successful due to sheer good luck is nonetheless more moral than one who fails when circumstances unexpectedly stand in his or her way. We then turn to consider issues of right and wrong that inevitably seem to arise when individuals act to guide, organize, and control the actions of others: the tendency for self-interest to overcome more selfless, pro-social motivations; the role that self-control plays in helping leaders resist the temptations that their positions often create for them; the corruptive effects of power; and the tendency for leaders to rationalize their morally questionable actions by assuming desirable ends justify the use of morally suspect means. The analysis concludes by suggesting that leaders must be ever mindful of the morality of their choices, for a successful leader is someone who not only does the right thing but also does so in the right way and for the right reasons (Ciulla, 2005).

ETHICS AND THE IDEA OF A LEADER

Some scholars draw a distinction between *ethics* and *morality*. Foucault (1990), for example, considered morality to be a codified prescriptive system defined by such authorities as the church or family, whereas ethics are those processes that create the alignment of individual actions and the moral code. Ethics, to some, focuses on the analysis of moral processes – seeking to describe them rather than to evaluate their integrity, adequacy, or goodness. Morality, in contrast, is unabashedly normative, for it seeks to provide the means to distinguish between good and evil, wrong and right. Others have suggested that morality is a more basic, and more personal, evaluation of the rightness or wrongness of an act, whereas ethics are complex decisional processes that reflect moral leanings, but also consider broader social considerations.

Most philosophers and social scientists, however, use the terms interchangeably. For example, courses on moral philosophy or moral development will cover the same material as courses on ethics and ethical development. The two terms describe each other in the *Compact Oxford English Dictionary*. It defines the word *moral* as ‘of or pertaining to the distinction between right and wrong, or good and evil in relation to the actions, volitions, or character of human beings; ethical’ and ‘concerned with virtue

and vice or rules of conduct, ethical praise or blame, habits of life, custom and manners’ (p. 1114). Similarly the dictionary defines *ethics* as ‘of or pertaining to morality’ and ‘the science of morals, the moral principles by which a person is guided’ (p. 534). Those who insist on a distinction between ethics and morals should note that when scholars and ordinary people make a distinction between the two words, they rarely make it in the same way.

The words *leadership* and *leader* have also been the subject of considerable definitional debate. Ciulla (1995) examined the 221 definitions of the word *leader* collected by Rost and then compared and contrasted the definitions based on their social and historical context (Rost, 1991, pp. 7–102). Whereas Rost concluded that most who defined the nature of leadership seemed to think that a leader was little more than an effective manager, Ciulla (1998) noted the strong normative element that permeates conceptualizations of leadership. As a morally laden social construction, the American usage of the word *leader* reflects what people in a certain place and at a certain time think leaders *should* be like. When scholars make statements such as: ‘leaders inspire followers toward common goals,’ they do not mean that all leaders do this, they mean that leaders *ought* to do this. The question, ‘What is a leader?’ is really the question ‘What is a *good* leader?’, with *good* including both a morally commendable, normative component as well as a pragmatic, performance-oriented component.

We see this inclination in scholars who differentiate between people who are called leaders and ‘real leaders’ or ‘true leaders.’ Greenleaf (1977), for example, drew a distinction between run-of-the-mill leaders and servant leaders, and subsequent studies confirmed that the latter were more trustworthy, honest, other-oriented, credible, and competent (Russell & Stone, 2002). Others underscore the separation between leaders and moral leaders with the concept of spiritual leadership (Dent, Higgins, & Wharff, 2005; Fry, 2003), with spiritual leaders providing altruistic love, caring, and support for others. Burns (1978) and Bass (1997) suggest that many leaders – transactional ones – are competent in that they promote exchanges among subordinates in their pursuit of collective outcomes, but that only transformational leaders are leaders in a strong moral sense (see Diaz-Saenz, Chapter 22, this volume). Extending this distinction, Bass attempted to separate leaders who might fit the description of a transformational leader but are not ethical by distinguishing transformational from pseudo-transformational leaders and authentic transformational leaders (Bass & Steidlmeier, 2004). Brown, Treviño, and Harrison (2005) make this distinction

between common leadership and ethical leadership explicit in their concept of ethical leadership: 'the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relations, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making' (p. 120).

Philosopher Eva Kort believes that group actions, not relationships, reveal the features that identify leadership 'proper' or real leadership from cases of 'purported' leadership. Kort uses the following example to illustrate the normative and technical aspects of leadership. A concertmaster holds a formal leadership position. If he conducts the orchestra with instructions that the musicians know are bad, they will follow him because of his position. In this case, Kort says, the concertmaster is merely a purported leader, not a leader proper. She writes: 'It is only when the concertmaster does lead – participate in the plural action in (generally) the right sort of way – that the concertmaster is the leader in the proper sense' (Kort, 2008, p. 422). Notice how Kort's definition includes unavoidable judgments. Leaders are people whom we choose to follow because they seem competent and, where relevant, ethical. For Kort, leaders are those whose ideas are voluntarily endorsed and acted on by others in various situations.

Studies of individuals' intuitive conceptions of leadership similarly suggest that people expect their leaders to be both competent and morally commendable. Although each follower may have a unique conception of leadership, most people's intuitive conceptions of a leader – their implicit leadership theories (Lord & Maher, 1991) – assume the prototypical leader is not only active, determined, influential, and in command but also caring, truthful, and respectful of others and their ideas (Kenney, Schwartz-Kenney, & Blascovich, 1996). When researchers asked individuals in 62 countries around the globe to describe the desirable and undesirable qualities of an outstanding leader of an organization, across nearly all cultures respondents expressed a desire for highly competent leaders: individuals who are able to motivate others to work together to reach collective goals. They also expected, however, that their leaders would hold true to the core values of the community and be trustworthy, just, and honest (Dorfman, Hanges, & Brodbeck, 2004).

Thus, most people agree when evaluating the morality of iconic leaders who are either saints or villains – the morally upright and successful Lincolns, Gandhis, and Mohammeds of the world versus those leaders who are both morally bankrupt and ineffective, such as the Gadhafis, Mugabes, and the Saloth Sars (Pol Pot). But this consensus is lost when they consider individuals who lack integrity yet are effective or are ineffective yet

honorable. As Ciulla (2004) suggests, the 'Hitler problem' illustrates how the prescriptive, normative elements of the concept of a leader create confusions when people encounter leaders who, although effective, are not ethical. The Hitler problem arises from the question, 'Was Hitler a good leader?' (Ciulla, 1995, 2004). Does 'good' refer to the ethics of Hitler's leadership or to his effectiveness as a leader? Does effectiveness mean his success at doing things, his skill in inspiring his followers to pursue their collective goals, or both? An individual who occupies a position of authority within a group or a society – a king, a head of state, or lord – but who does not undertake any actions that improve the outcomes of others within that group or society may be disqualified, on the grounds of inefficacy, from being considered a leader. Similarly, individuals who facilitate the attainment of collective goals but are morally corrupt – they create great harm for others or initiate actions that are inconsistent with widely recognized principles of justice and ethics – may also be eliminated as leaders on normative grounds. To some, Hitler was not a leader because his actions and policies ruined the lives of so many of his followers and because he deliberately acted in ways that are morally detestable. Thus, the overarching question of leadership ethics is: 'What is the relationship of ethics to effectiveness in leadership?'

THE CHALLENGES OF TRUST AND SELF-INTEREST

Leadership offers a solution to the age-old problem created by the sociality of the human species. A small group of people may be able to share equally the responsibility for organizing their efforts in the pursuit of common goals, but once the group increases in size or finds itself in a situation that is threatening, one or more individuals are required to carry out executive functions for the group – to make choices between alternatives, galvanize the unenthused into action, to strategize about the means to reach goals, and so on (Van Vugt, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2008). But leadership is not without risks, both for the group that cedes some of its collective authority to the individual who will act as the group's leader and for the individual who accepts the role of the authority. Leaders may help groups achieve their goals, but at too high a cost to the collective. Leaders may use their position to seek their own purposes, ignoring their charge to work for the good of the whole. At the same time, leaders may find that the burden of responsibility for the collective's

outcome may be so great that their own individual outcomes suffer; by serving the collective, they may promote their own outcomes, but self- and other-interest may become unbalanced if the collective requires much from the leader without offering enough in return.

The motivation to lead

The earliest writings on leadership addressed this tension between self-interest and the collective good, and the moral issues it raises. The most extraordinary thing about ancient depictions of ethical leaders is how similar they are to the way that we think of them today. One of the oldest writers on this subject is the Egyptian philosopher and vizier, Ptahhotep (2450–2300? BCE). Few of us today would argue with his emphasis on the importance of generosity, virtue, trust, and restraint in a leader. Ptahhotep offers this advice to leaders:

If you are a man who leads,
Who controls the affairs of the many,
Seek out every beneficent deed,
That your conduct may be blameless...
If you are among the people,
Gain supporters through being trusted;
The trusted man who does not vent his belly's
speech,
He will himself become a leader. (Lichtheim, 1973,
p. 61)

Plato, too, directly addressed this tension in his analysis of the motivations of those who can no longer avoid the duty of serving their community's need for direction and guidance. Plato believed that democracy, with direct self-rule by the populace, is no more just or reasonable than tyranny, for the masses are too influenced by their emotions and too little by their rationality and good judgment. So in the *Republic* he emphasized the need for leaders who were willing to sacrifice their immediate self-interest. In Book II Plato writes:

In a city of good men, if it came into being, the citizens would fight in order not to rule.... There it would be clear that anyone who is really a true ruler doesn't by nature seek his own advantage but that of his subjects. And everyone, knowing this, would rather be benefited by others than take the trouble to benefit them. (Plato, 1992a, p. 23)

Plato acknowledges the stress, hard work, and frequently thankless job of being an ethical leader. The ethical leader must respect the autonomy of followers, yet constrain them somewhat to create a degree of collaborative cooperation in the pursuit

of collective goals. Ethical leaders must be impartial, and render decisions that may displease as many as they please. Plato goes so far as to suggest that ethical leaders are not motivated to take on their position by egoism – a desire to pursue their self-interests – or even by altruism – a selfless desire to help the collective reach its goals. Rather, ethical people take on leadership roles to protect the group from the hardship of rule by an incompetent, immoral leader: 'Now the greatest punishment, if one isn't willing to rule, is to be ruled by someone worse than oneself. And I think it is fear of this that makes decent people rule when they do' (Plato, 1992a, p. 23). Plato's comment sheds light on why we sometimes feel more comfortable with people who are reluctant to lead than with those who are eager. Today, as in the past, we worry that people who are too eager to lead want the power and the position for themselves or that they do not fully understand the burdens of ethical and effective leadership.

Plato also tells us that while it is not in the just person's self-interest to become a leader, it is in his or her enlightened self-interest. He does not require leaders to be altruists who, in the strict sense of the word, sacrifice their own interests for the interests of others. Instead he tells us that morality sometimes calls upon leaders to do things that are against their self-interest. This is less about altruism than it is about the nature of both morality and leadership. We expect leaders to put the interests of followers first, but most of the time, the interests of leaders are the same as the interests of followers. Those who influence, guide, and/or look after the interests of groups, organizations, countries, ideas, or causes are called leaders. When people do this, they are leading; when they do not do this, they are not leading. Altruism describes behavior that is usually admirable, but altruism does not in and of itself result in morally laudable action. To the members of their cultural group, suicide bombers may behave altruistically. They give their lives for what they believe is a just cause – but that does not make blowing up innocent people ethical. The case of the suicide bomber illustrates someone who may have the right reason, such as social justice, but does the wrong thing, the wrong way.

Psychological studies confirm Plato's insights, in part, but suggest that leaders are both proself and prosocial rather than purely egoistic or altruistic (Avolio & Locke, 2002). In many cases personality factors that are markers of self-centeredness, such as narcissism (Brunell et al., 2008), dominance (Smith & Foti, 1998), and the motivation to lead (Chan & Drasgow, 2001), are reliability associated with emergence as a leader – if not with success in acting ethically once in the position. Followers, however, generally assume

that leaders are motivated by a desire to promote the group and its outcomes, and are sensitive to signals that the leader is acting to secure personal gains (Reicher, Haslam, & Platow, 2007). Social identity theory, for example, maintains that in many cases both leaders and followers identify so closely with the group and its causes that the distinction between self and other no longer holds; when leaders act in ways that benefit the group, they are benefiting themselves (Hogg, 2007). In general, followers prefer a leader who is willing to share his or her influence and resources with them. The leader who is unwilling to put the interests of others first is not as successful as the leader who is, or at least appears to be, acting from collective rather than egoistic motivations (Cronin, 2008).

Moral luck and leadership

Followers do not demand complete self-sacrifice in their leaders; they recognize that leaders are entitled to prosper, to some extent, from the work that they do on behalf of the group or organization (Frank, 1996; Bligh, Chapter 31, this volume). Followers do expect their leader to be competent. People are more accepting of leaders who have previously demonstrated task ability and are more willing to follow the directions of a task-competent person than those of an incompetent person. Given enough experience in working together, most people can distinguish between those who are skilled and those who are unskilled, and they favor those who are skilled when deciding who should lead rather than follow. The 'romance of leadership' that is so common among followers stems from their certainty that the leader can ease their burdens and lead their group through times of turbulence and hardship (Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985).

Success and morality tend to be confounded in the minds of followers, so that leaders who fail – even though no fault of their own – are often viewed as less moral than those who succeed. Conversely, those who are in leadership positions during times of prosperity or great gain are often viewed as effective and morally praiseworthy, even if they were not responsible for the positive outcomes. Some leaders are neither ethical nor effective, but historians or the public think that they are because they were lucky. Leaders have moral luck when events outside of their control conspire to make them appear to be good leaders (Williams, 1981).

Most of the difficult moral decisions leaders make are risky ones, because they have imperfect or incomplete information and no control over

some of the variables that affect the outcome. Unlucky leaders who fail at something are worthy of forgiveness when they act with deliberate care and for the right moral reasons – even though followers may not forgive them or may lose confidence in their leadership. Americans did not blame President Jimmy Carter for the botched attempt to free the hostages in Iran, but it was one more thing that shook their faith in his leadership. He was unlucky because, if the mission had been successful, it might have strengthened people's faith in him as a leader and improved his chances of retaining the presidency. The irony of moral luck is that leaders who are reckless and do not base their actions on sound moral and practical considerations are often condemned when they fail and celebrated as heroes when they succeed. That is why Kant (1993) maintained that since we cannot always know how things will turn out, moral judgments should be based on the right moral principles and not on outcomes. The reckless, lucky leader who fails to demonstrate moral or technical competency often gets credit for having both because of the outcome of his or her action. Since history usually focuses on outcomes, it is not always clear how much luck, skill, and morality figure in the success or failure of a leader.

THE CHALLENGES OF SELF-DISCIPLINE AND VIRTUE

Ethics of Eastern philosophers, such as Lao-tzu, Confucius, and Buddha, tend to center on the problem of self-discipline. Lao-tzu warns leaders against arrogance and vanity: 'He who stands on tiptoe is not steady' (Lao-Tzu, 1963, p. 152). He recommends modesty: 'The best rulers are those whose existence is merely known by people' (Lao-tzu, 1963, p. 148). Confucius focuses on the importance of duty and self-control. He states, 'If a man (the ruler) can for one day master himself and return to propriety, all under heaven will return to humanity. To practice humanity depends on oneself' (Confucius, 1963, p. 38). He ties a leader's self-mastery and effectiveness together when he writes, 'If a ruler sets himself right, he will be followed without his command. If he does not set himself right, even his commands will not be obeyed' (Confucius, 1963, p. 38).

Contemporary analyses similarly trace leaders' ethical integrity to their capacity to remain true to their chosen goals, procedures, and values, even in the face of strong social and external pressures. Theories of authentic leadership take seriously the Delphic Oracle's injunction to seek

self-knowledge (*nosque te ipsum*) by suggesting that most effective, and most ethical, leaders have a strong and relatively stable core of moral beliefs and practical values that significantly determine the way they conduct themselves as leaders. Authentic leaders are, in theory, self-aware individuals who know their strengths and weaknesses, so they are less likely to need to bolster their sense of self-worth at the expense of others. Their self-awareness extends to their emotions and motivations, and so they are more likely to control their feelings in situations that might provoke others to display hostile, threatening, or contentious emotions, and they help other members of the group moderate their affective reactions as well (Iliev, Morgeson, & Nahrgang, 2005). This self-stability further augments their capacity to profit from feedback about their performance, and so authentic leaders are more likely to learn from their mistakes and thereby improve their effectiveness over time – sustaining the tendency for moral leaders to also be effective leaders (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009; Caza & Jackson, Chapter 26, this volume).

Studies of self-control in other types of pursuit, such as the task pursuit and interpersonal relations, suggest that the continual need to exercise self-control in the face of multiple temptations is psychologically taxing. Baumeister (2001), in his ego-depletion theory, maintains that self-control is muscle-like, in that it can be strengthened through use and experience. However, self-control requires cognitive resources, and so constant self-control can limit the amount of energy available for subsequent self-regulation needs, just as a fatigued muscle becomes less powerful. When people become highly practiced in self-regulation, to the point that their self-regulation is nearly automatic rather than reflective, then the exercise of self-control is less taxing (Moller, Deci, & Ryan, 2006). Extending this theory to leadership, leaders who experience stress, must make difficult decisions, resist temptations, or stifle their emotions are at risk for the loss of self-regulation, with the all too often seen consequences (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000).

In the First Sermon, the Buddha describes how people's uncontrolled thirst for things contributes to their own suffering and the suffering of others (Dhamma, 1996). Like psychologists today, he too realized that getting one's desires under control is the best way to end personal and social misery. This is a particular challenge for leaders, because power and privilege allow them to indulge their material and personal desires. Compassion is the most important virtue in Buddhist ethics because it keeps desires and vices in check. The Dalai Lama (1999) concisely summed up the moral dynamics of compassion in this way:

When we bring up our children to have knowledge without compassion, their attitude towards others is likely to be a mixture of envy of those in positions above them, aggressive competitiveness towards their peers, and scorn for those less fortunate. This leads to a propensity toward greed, presumption, excess, and very quickly to loss of happiness. (p. 181)

VIRTUE ETHICS AND LEADERSHIP

Both Eastern and Western writers think about ethics in terms of virtues that are formed through discipline, practice, and social norms. Virtues provide a useful way of understanding leadership development and selection. The properties of a virtue are very different from the properties of other concepts such as values and traits. Virtues are moral qualities that you only have if you practice them. Values are things that are important to people. A person may value honesty but not always tell the truth. Values influence actions in most cases, but they are only one behavioral cause among many. An individual who possesses the virtue of honesty has intentionally chosen to accept the moral correctness of honest action and has learned to act in ways that are consistent with that virtue. Virtues, like traits, are dispositions to behave a certain way but, unlike traits, virtues are intentionally selected, deliberately strengthened, and behaviorally predictive.

Aristotle likened virtues to habits, suggesting that people acquire them from society and from their legislators. But even though virtuous actions become habitual over time, they are not mindless habits. When a person practices a virtue, he or she must also be conscious that it is the right way to act. So, to possess the virtue of courage, people not only have to act courageously but also they must be conscious of why courage is morally good. They also need to know how and when to practice the virtue of courage. Aristotle says that a virtue is the mean between extremes, so courage is the mean between the extremes of foolhardiness and cowardice. We learn how to practice a virtue like courage and honesty through experience, social sanctions, and role models. Aristotle would agree with James MacGregor Burns' (1978) idea that transforming leaders elevate the values of followers. Aristotle writes, 'Legislators make citizens good by forming habits in them' (Aristotle, 1984, p. 1743). Whereas virtues come naturally to those who practice them, they are not mindless habits or personality traits.

The Greek notion of virtue (*areté*), which is also translated as excellence, does not separate an individual's ethics from his or her occupational

competence. When writing about ethics, both Plato and Aristotle use numerous examples of doctors, musicians, coaches, rulers, and so forth, to talk about the relationship between moral and technical or professional excellence. Aristotle writes,

Every excellence brings to good the thing to which it is the excellence and makes the work of that thing be done well....Therefore, if this is true in every case, the excellence of man also will be the state which makes man good and which makes him do his work well. (p. 1747)

Excellence is tied to function. The function of a knife is to cut. An excellent knife cuts well. The function of humans, according to Aristotle, is to reason. To be morally virtuous, you must reason well, because reason tells you how and when to practice a virtue. If you reason well, you will know how to practice moral and professional virtues. In other words, reason is the key to practicing moral virtues and the virtues related to one's various occupations in life. Virtue ethics does not differentiate between ethics and effectiveness or the morality of the leader and the morality of his or her leadership. Hence, on Aristotle's account, a morally virtuous leader must also be a competent leader, or conversely, it is immoral for a leader to be incompetent. Virtues do not tell leaders what to do, they tell them the 'right' way to be and, hence, to act.

This emphasis on virtues is consistent with the growing interest among social scientists in positive personal and interpersonal processes that sustain happiness and well-being. Positive psychology, for example, focuses on human strengths and virtues, whereas positive organizational scholarship considers aspects of organizations that foster resilience, happiness, and human flourishing. All of these concepts were central to Plato and Aristotle's ethics. Positive psychologists Christopher Peterson and Martin E. P. Seligman (2004) suggest that effective leadership is likely associated with such cardinal virtues as wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. These virtues came into Western thought via the writings of Plato (1992a, 1992b) and Aquinas (2008). Other leadership scholars such as Kanungo and Mendonca (1995) also use the cardinal virtues as a basis for their discussion of ethical leaders. Peterson and Seligman (2004) also suggest that leadership, if not one of the basic virtues, certainly qualifies as a character strength. Strengths, they suggest, are few in number but all share a common set of features: they contribute to positive outcomes for the individual and for others; they are morally valued in their own right; they have trait-like qualities of consistency and

generality; groups and societies encourage the further development of these qualities; and their display 'does not diminish other people in the vicinity' (2004, p. 21). Peterson and Seligman conclude that leadership, along with citizenship and fairness, regulates the relationship between individuals and larger social collectives, such as groups, organizations, and communities.

THE CHALLENGES OF POWER AND PRIVILEGE

The more power leaders have, the greater their responsibility for what they do and do not do. The empirical evidence for moral problems of power is quite old and documented in history books, religious and philosophical texts, literature, and art. For example, Plato's 'Ring of Gyges' is the story of a shepherd boy who discovers a ring that makes him invisible. Once he is invisible, he seizes power from the king (Plato, 1992a). The story raises the question: Would you be moral if no one were watching? Leadership is like wearing the Ring of Gyges. Without oversight, checks, and balances, leaders can do what they want and they possess the resources to at least try to conceal their actions. Followers may enable leaders to do good things and bad things, but they also have a responsibility to watch their leaders. It is the obligation of institutions and organizations to ensure that leaders are subject to some form of oversight that will help leaders avoid the temptations of power and privilege.

The moral foible people fear most in leaders is personal immorality accompanied by abuse of power. Dean Ludwig and Clinton Longenecker (1993) call one such failure the 'Bathsheba syndrome', based on the biblical story of King David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11-12). They argue that the biblical story tells us about how success may be morally dangerous to leaders. In the story, King David is a successful king who one day comes home from the battlefield and seduces Bathsheba, the wife of one of his generals. When David discovers that Bathsheba is pregnant, he engages in escalating cover-ups that end in David ordering Bathsheba's husband to be killed. Ludwig and Longenecker use the story to show how success can make leaders overconfident, go on autopilot, and fail to properly attend to their duties. Leaders who fall prey to this syndrome lose strategic focus, overestimate their ability to control outcomes, and abuse their power to cover their misdeeds. The longer leaders successfully stay in their jobs, the more difficult it is for them to maintain their own moral and operational standards

and those of their associates. Leaders have been repeating the David and Bathsheba scenario for thousands of years. They do something unethical, try to cover it up, and get caught by a whistleblower. In the process, the cover-up is often worse than the original ethical lapse. Leaders tend to most abuse their power and the confidence of their followers during the cover-up. For example, the American public felt more morally offended by President Clinton when he lied about having an affair with an intern than about the affair itself.

Leaders face more temptations than the rest of us because they often have special privileges, which may make them think that they are above others and not subject to the same rules. These privileges may include everything from private jets, to special access to information and resources, or exceptional privileges vis-à-vis the rules and regulations of an organization. In addition to perks, subordinates often treat leaders with deference. Price (2005) argues that when followers grant privileges to leaders, they make it easier for leaders to believe that they are outside of the scope of common morality. Leaders make moral mistakes because they do not think that certain rules apply to them or they are ignorant of what is right. Simply being identified as the leader prompts individuals to claim more than the average share of the resources, especially since members often think the leadership role entitles them to take more than others (De Cremer & Van Dijk, 2005). This is why ancient Eastern and Western philosophic traditions identify reverence as the key virtue for leaders. Reverence is the virtue that reminds leaders that they are part of a larger whole. It is the virtue that keeps them from trying to act like they are gods (Woodruff, 2001).

THE CHALLENGES OF POWER AND EXPEDIENCY

Leadership is generally viewed as a voluntary, mutual association between the leader and the follower, but leaders' power is greater than that of those who follow them. Their power may be power with people, rather than over people, but they nonetheless have a greater capacity to influence than do others (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003; Raven, 1992).

The metamorphic effects of power have long fascinated observers of the human condition. In their tragedies, the Greeks dramatized the fall of heroes who, swollen by past accomplishments, conceitedly compared themselves to the gods. Myth and folklore are replete with tales of the consequences of too much power, as in the case of

Icarus, whose hubris caused his death. Lord Acton warned, 'Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely', suggesting that the power that often comes with leadership can distort leaders' capacity to judge themselves and the means that they take to reach their ends.

Approach/inhibition theory, developed by Dacher Keltner and his colleagues (2003, 2008), agrees with the wisdom of the ancients, for it assumes that power – having power, using power, even thinking about power – transforms individuals' psychological states. Power is energizing, and so motivates leaders to expend effort on behalf of others. Power is also associated with optimism about the future and enhanced executive functioning. These positive consequences of power are counterbalanced by power's liabilities. Powerful people are proactive, but in some cases their actions are risky, inappropriate, or unethical ones. When individuals gain power, their self-evaluations grow more favorable, whereas their evaluations of others grow more negative. If they feel that they have a mandate from their group or organization to get things done, they may do things they are not empowered to do. When individuals feel powerful, they sometimes treat others unfairly, particularly if they are more self-centered rather than focused on the overall good of the group. Some individuals (primarily men) associate power with sexuality, and so when they are empowered, they engage in inappropriate sexual behaviors, including sexual harassment (Keltner et al., 2003, 2008).

Power is also associated with the tendency to assume that the value of the ends one seeks justifies the use of means that would otherwise be morally suspected. This possibility has occupied observers of leadership for thousands of years. It is the underlying theme of Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1954), which wrestles with how the necessities of a leader's job challenge his ability to act morally. Machiavelli observed that when the stakes are high for a leader, the ends sometimes justify the means, but he also understood the dangers of leaders who easily succumb to expediency over morality. Similarly, Friedrich Nietzsche's analysis of the will to power suggests that leaders must, to fulfill their responsibilities, be free to act in ways that are outside of traditional conceptions of morality. Nietzsche (1989) held that individuals, although autonomous creatures, are part of the natural order, and that order determines how they will act across situations. Extending his analogy of the bird of prey and lambs to leadership suggests that, just as it is the nature of the bird of prey to snatch little lambs, so it is natural for leaders to dominate others; the leader is no more free to be weak as the follower is free to take charge. Nietzsche suggests that only people who resent

their inferiority think that leaders should mute their natural tendency to dominate. According to Nietzsche, real leaders ought to be different from everyone else. Their morality does not rest on conventional behavior, but on their creativity. He writes, 'one must still have chaos in oneself to give birth to a dancing star' (Nietzsche, 1978, p. 17). In this respect, Nietzsche rebels against the idea that leaders 'are just like you and me.'

THE CHALLENGE OF CARING

Embedded in the concept of a leader is the idea that a formal or informal leader cares about something, whether it is a group of people, a cause, or an idea. Care can mean paying attention to or looking after something, as in 'I take care of him,' or it can mean an emotion, as in 'I care for him,' or a concern, as in 'I care how people think about him,' or some combination of the three. Erikson (1982) says that the human inclination to care is rooted in the impulse to 'caress' someone who in his helplessness emits signals of despair. The interesting question is whether leaders have a moral obligation to care, and if so, is this obligation simply a duty to care (in the sense of a duty to look after the interests of followers, organizations, etc.) or are they morally required to have the appropriate feelings of care too?

The ethic of care

In the twentieth century, feminist scholars formulated an ethic of care. Carol Gilligan (1982) discovered that girls progressed up Kohlberg's (1981) scale of moral development more slowly than boys. She conducted her own study of women and found that they spoke in 'a different voice' than men when they discussed their moral choices. She concluded that instead of reasoning from moral principles, females were more concerned with care based on feelings, relationships, and contexts. Some feminist philosophers contrast the ethic of care with the ethic of justice. For example, Held (2006) describes an ethic of justice as one that focuses on fairness, equality, individual rights, and abstract principles as well as the consistent application of them. An ethic of care is about cultivating caring relations, attentiveness, responsiveness to need, and narrative nuance (which includes time and place). Held argues: 'Whereas justice protects equality and freedom, care fosters social bonds and cooperation...' (Held, 2006, p. 15).

The basic ideas behind the ethic of care, such as the role of emotions, empathy, and sympathy, are

neither feminine nor masculine. Many scholars in the history of philosophy discuss these concepts. For example, Kierkegaard (1958) introduced the notion of care as a means of counteracting the excessive objectivity of philosophy in the early twentieth century. Similarly, the Roman philosopher Seneca (1953) observed that behaving rationally is only part of morality. He said humans were given reason so that they can achieve the good. They were given the capacity to care so that they can perfect the good. More recently, studies of the values associated with moral judgments across situations converge on empathy, for humans are biologically ready to experience distress when they see other members of the species suffering (Haidt & Graham, 2007). Forsyth finds that concern for others' outcomes is recognized in cultures around the world, but is more likely to be emphasized by individuals who are residents of collectivistic societies (Forsyth, O'Boyle, & McDaniel, 2008).

Reciprocity and duty

One of the oldest and ubiquitous moral principles is the golden rule: 'Do unto others as you would have others do unto you' or 'Do not do unto others as you would not have them do unto you' (Wattles, 1996). The rule does not actually require people to empathize, it asks them to reciprocate. All it says is: 'We all know how we want to be treated and should use that as a guide for how to treat others.' The golden rule gives us guidance on how to treat people, but does not capture what it means to care. Perhaps that is why it is such a useful principle. Care requires attention, solicitude, and active involvement. Unlike the golden rule, which is objective and egalitarian, care can be highly subjective and selective. Leaders would face problems if feelings of care and empathy were their only moral guide. Because most leaders have multiple constituencies, ethical leadership requires some rational and evenhanded way of thinking about moral obligations. So while moral feelings toward others are a part of ethics, they are not sufficient without a commitment to act according to duty.

Kant describes duties as absolutes that we apply to all people. His categorical imperative is fundamental to justice and to building trust. Kant emphasizes the importance of moral consistency and respect for the dignity of all human beings, and he prohibits using people as a means to an end (Kant, 1993). Kant offers two principles that are at the heart of a leader's work. First, he asserts that morality is based on doing your duty, *especially* when your inclination or your feelings tell you to do otherwise. Secondly, he says to make moral choices that you would want to make into a

universal law (the categorical imperative). This principle is loosely derived from the golden rule. It says, make choices based on how you would want everyone to choose if they were in your place. When a leader makes an ethical decision, followers tend to regard the decision as a precedent. So, if the president decides to let one person who did not pay his taxes serve in his administration, he must also let other people who did not pay their taxes serve in his administration. If the president lets one person with a tax problem serve, and disqualifies another person with the same problem, he will appear to be a hypocrite who is playing favorites. Objectively acting on duties facilitates moral consistency and establishes trust and credibility.

THE MORAL CHALLENGE OF HAPPINESS

Moral theories from both Eastern and Western traditions discuss the relationship between morality and happiness. Aristotle said that happiness is the end of life because it is an end in itself, meaning there is no other reason to be happy than to be happy. His concept of happiness, *eudaimonia*, means happiness in the sense of flourishing as a human being. The actual details of what it means to flourish vary, but philosophers like Plato believed that you could not lead a happy life if you were not moral because your soul would not be in harmony (Plato, 1992a). For Aristotle, human flourishing consisted of physical and mental well-being and living morally (Aristotle, 1984, 1996). So, happiness is not simply pleasure: it is an expansive notion of growing, learning, and thriving as a rational human being. In one way or another, it is the job of leaders to, at best, make their constituents happy or at a minimum, try not to make them too unhappy. Drawing from Aristotle, Ciulla argues that 'The relationship between leaders and followers and the ends of that relationship must rest on eudaimonia' (1995, p. 19 fn72). It is the goal and the ultimate test of ethical and effective leadership.

Servant leadership captures what Aristotle meant by flourishing. Robert Greenleaf (1977, pp. 13–14) says a servant leader must pass this test: 'Do those served grow as persons? Do they while being served become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?' Burns argues that end values or quality of all aspects of leadership rests on how well they promote the end values of liberty, justice, equality, and happiness (Burns, 2003).

Recently, work on positive psychology has explored in detail the role of happiness and human flourishing in leadership. Positive psychology is an emerging subfield that stresses adaptation, growth,

health, and strengths rather than dysfunction, stress, and burnout (e.g., Seligman, 2002). Positive psychology assumes that the effective leaders are also the positive leaders: the ones who promote the well-being, autonomy, growth, and the moral integrity of others as they go about their work (Cameron, Bright, & Caza, 2004). Such leaders focus on the happiness of the people with whom they work, rather than merely profit margins and tangible products, and they tend to rely on modes of influence that typify transformational forms of leadership by creating work settings where 'followers are rewarded internally with achievement and self-actualization rather than externally with safety and security' (Turner, Barling, & Zacharatos, 2002, p. 721).

Confirming the idea that ethical leadership has practical as well as moral benefits, meta-analysis indicates work environments that promote employee well-being are more productive and profitable (Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2003).

There is a sense in which utilitarianism, the moral principle of seeking the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people, is also part of the job description for most leaders. At the beginning of 'What Utilitarianism Is' (1987), John Stuart Mill entertains several objections to utilitarianism. One objection is that most people cannot or do not know what the greatest happiness is for the greatest number of people. Mill points out that most people do not make utilitarian judgments that concern everyone in the world. We know from our own experiences and from history what other people want and usually we make choices based on what is good for a specific group of people, not the whole world. Yet, it is the case that some leaders do make choices that affect large numbers of people, many of whom they will never know. Hence, one might argue that a leader's job is to find the greatest happiness or good for the greatest number of his or her constituents.

Kant's moral emphasis on the principle of an act and Mill's emphasis on the act itself converge when Mill talks about happiness. A point frequently missed in Mill is that the principle of utility is not based on majority opinion of what will make people happy. Mill says that some kinds of happiness are better for people than others. As he famously notes, the happiness of a Socrates (e.g., learning and discussing ideas with others) is better than the happiness of a pig (e.g., eating and rolling around in the mud). The most difficult moral decisions leaders make are those where they opt for the happiness of a Socrates when their followers prefer the happiness of a pig. Utilitarian ethics does not require a leader to provide 'bread and circuses' to the masses even if they create the greatest happiness for the greatest number. As Burns points out, transforming leadership is when leaders and followers debate and eventually elevate each other's values, which also entails

elevating their ideas about what will ultimately make them happy (Burns, 1978).

Another objection to utilitarianism is that the moral cost/benefit analysis used to determine what will bring about the greatest happiness is too cold and calculating and does not consider individual relationships. Mill replies that morality is about objective ideas and the minute you start molding your idea of ethics to the relationship you have with particular individuals, you lose your ethics. Like Kant and Plato, Mill's emphasis on moral consistency does not allow leaders to make exceptions to the greatest happiness principle for themselves, their family, or their friends. Moral objectivity is such a fundamental part of our concept of a leader that no one would describe their ideal leader as one who makes exceptions to the rules, policies, and procedures for friends, family, ethnic and religious groups, and people they like. If anything, this sort of behavior describes corrupt leaders. Furthermore, leaders are challenged to make sure that in seeking the greatest happiness, they do not cause a handful of people great misery. The greatest happiness that is based on callous expediency or the suffering of a few is a base notion of happiness – the happiness of a pig, not the happiness of a Socrates.

CONCLUSIONS: THE CHALLENGE OF GETTING ALL OF IT RIGHT

We have catalogued some of the philosophical and psychological challenges that are distinctive to the idea and role of leaders and the practice of leadership. These challenges exist within the general question of how to be a good leader, where good is defined as both ethical and effective. We have also looked at a variety of philosophic theories, each of which highlights a different aspect of leadership. There are three moral facets to the ethics of leaders:

1. The ethics of *what* a leader does or the ends of a leader's actions (Mill).
2. The ethics of *how* a leader does things, or the process of leadership (Aristotle).
3. The moral reasons of *why* leaders do things, or their moral intentions (Kant).

In short, as noted earlier, an ethical and effective leader is someone who does the right thing, the right way, and for the right reasons (Ciulla, 2005). Public discussions about leaders are complicated because some leaders' actions are only morally right in one or two of the three areas. For example, a leader may do the right thing the wrong way for the right reason. Leaders sometimes face the

problem of 'dirty hands,' where they must choose to use unsavory means to do the right thing and prevent an imminent disaster (Temes, 2005).

Both major streams of research in leadership ethics – psychology and philosophy – fail to offer a complete account of ethics. Most of the leadership literature on ethics is based on normative leadership theories/models such as transformational and pseudo-transformational leadership (Bass & Steidlmeier, 2004), transforming leadership (Burns, 1978, 2003), servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977), and authentic leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). This research stream offers rich descriptions of leader behavior but tends to rest on narrow and somewhat simplistic characterizations of ethical concepts (Price, 2003). Philosophers have a more sophisticated understanding of ethical concepts but without a solid foundation in the empirical literature on leadership – i.e. how leaders really do behave and what kinds of behavior is effective, for example – their analysis is of limited use because it does not have a specific application to actual leaders and leadership. Progress in leadership ethics requires serious interdisciplinary research and collaborative research between philosophers and other humanities scholars and psychologists and other social scientists.

The ethics of leaders are not different from the ethics of everyone else, but because their actions take place in public and affect larger numbers of people, morality and immorality are magnified in everything they do, which is yet another reason why we find moral assumptions and expectations deeply embedded in the idea of a leader. As we have seen, the ethical assumptions about what leaders are and what they should be like vary surprisingly little throughout history and across cultures. They have been well documented and offer us insight into the place of leadership in our common humanity.

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