

Moral Leadership: The Morality of Leadership

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Abstract

This paper argues there is no leadership except moral leadership and affirms that that leadership does not exist outside of morality. Hence, inviting moral epigones to combat the invading power of modernity, synonymous of moral relativism, this paper claims that modernity is not synonymous of new morality, but highlights that moral pluralism is not moral relativism, and encourages each and every one to stop defining moral leadership over and over, but just do what is right and be an icon for the society, by constantly examining personal moral life in a Coram Deo reflector. To be and remain moral leader, this paper reminds one to beware of illegitimate sources of influence, be oneself, consider how one is brought and be determined to live a responsible and accountable life.

Key words: Leadership, Coram Deo, authentic, morality, ethics

Moral Leadership: The Morality of Leadership

Does the world need another definition for moral leadership or how to understand, what in human beings prevent them to be moral always, and find ways and means to surmount this behavioral handicap identified since the beginning of time? Can humanity claim she does not know what morality is? Is the relationship between knowing what is right from wrong not self-evident just like life, freedom and the pursuit of happiness? How does knowing what is right mediate or moderate moral leadership? This puts an end to all debate and characterize moral leadership as an intentional constant endeavor to behave morally. Jentz (1976) supported this view stating that “our morality is the concrete human reality that we live out from day to day, while ethics is an academic view gained by taking a step back and analyzing or theorizing about (any) morality” (p. 52).

Kunhiyop (2008) espoused the view, affirming that ethics is “the theoretical study of right and wrong. Good and bad,” which this paper doesn’t aim at. This work focuses on the morality “which relates to actual behavior, the living out of what one believes to be right and good” (p. 4). The major discussion here is how to choose to act morally, remain moral and apply morality to every sphere of individual, societal, and organizational life. This work gave no room to moral relativism which is the acceptance of certain forms of pluralism, a kind of “negative theology” (Ih-Ren, 2011). Building on the premise that moral pluralism is *nullis moralis* (*amoralism* or *non-moral*), this paper prioritizes moral orthopraxis, argues that moral pluralism is not moral relativism, examines the pressure that modernity exerts on morality, and draw the leader’s attention to how to be and remain moral by avoiding the illegitimate sources of influence, be oneself, be responsible and accountable to God and others.

A person who is moral is concerned with the principles of right and wrong behavior and the goodness or badness of human character (Merriam-Webster). In spite of the prevailing moral relativism or pluralism, if everybody always knows, wants, and expects to be treated fairly and seeks after personal justice, then morality is universally established. In consequence, moral leadership, in this age, is not about defining new constructs or learning new praxis about what is right or wrong (ethics). Reeck (1982) set the tone, defining morality saying:

it consists of socially approved patterns and norms of proper conduct. Morality shades over into ethics when systematic reflection begins to occur...morality is pre-ethical; it exists prior to systematic, questioning thought on issues" (p. 22).

Reeck's definition excludes any relativism of morality and consequently, brought relative leadership morality to an end. On this pace, morality is not "what I feel like" or "what pleases me." Rather what the social ethics approves. Social approbation signifies the preexisting of patterns and norms. The very preexistence pattern here is the conscience, "the Voice of God in human beings," who know their right from their wrong, who, under normal circumstances will always choose right from wrong, good from bad. Intrinsically fixed, dissociating morality from divinity is endangering personal ethics and worldview (Adadevoh, 2010, p. 9) and beheading leadership. Aristotle argued that everyone will agree that the terms "*eudaimonia*" (happiness) and "*eu zên*" (living well) designate such an end. The Greek term "*eudaimon*" is composed of two parts: "*eu*" means "well" and "*daimon*" means "divinity" or "spirit." To be *eudaimon* is therefore to be living in a way that is well-favored by a god.¹

History and morality are highly correlated. Alasdair (1984) noted that certainly, moral is the etymological descendant of *moralis*. But *moralis*, like its Greek predecessor *ethikos*, Cicero

¹ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-ethics/>

invented “*moralis*” to translate the Greek word in the De Facto- means “pertaining to character,” where a man’s character is nothing other than this set dispositions to behave systemically in one way rather another, to lead one particular kind of life” (p. 38). As stated earlier, moral pluralism is not moral subjectivism or relativism

Moral Pluralism Is Not Moral Subjectivism/Relativism

Our introduction contradicts moral relativism using the universalism of the concept of right and wrong. Failing to do what is right does not mean that the knowledge of right does not exist. Hence, this work supports that “The more God is one, the more plural God is. Thus “God’s oneness and plurality are in direct, not inverse proportion with each other” (Ih-Ren, 2011, pp. 189-0). Hence, *relative moral pluralism* is to be dissociated from *receptive pluralism* which is “an attitude of openness to the Spirit working beyond the confines of an organization, culture (Phan, 2003, p. 138). This means that intercultural or intra-cultural morality is not relativistic morality worse a negation of morality. Actually, Phan (2003) agreed and asserted that relativism destroys the rich meaning of pluralism:

Pluralism need not always entail a radical subjectivism or relativism, in the sense of claiming that all points of view are equally valid ... Today, there are persons and groups who hold all reality to be relative. For such persons and groups, pluralism means relativism, in the sense that they claim all points of view are equally valid. Such philosophical or theological claims are to be rejected; and, in fact, all the major ... religions condemn such relativizing of reality, especially the relativizing of basic human values (p. 184). Even in the absence of a belief in the existence of a single universal, absolute set of ethical rules, “basic questions can be still be asked: How does it affect the self and others” (Hickman, p. 354).

This is crucially irrevocable when Hickman (2010) evoked that ethics is an evaluative enterprise. Judgments must be made in regard to competing points of view. Even if Dewey (1960: 3-28) argued that at the pre-critical, pre-rational, pre-autonomous level, morality starts as a set of culturally defined goals and rules which are external to the individual and are imposed or inculcated as habits, what is irrevocable is the truth that human beings cannot escape morality. Hence, a morality of amorality still is morality, only a negative one, anti-social ethics, a marginal one. Hence, a marginal morality, an anti-social morality is the amorality of morality. It is a “Non event.” So, relativizing morality is destructive in the sense that, “like it or not, we are by definition moral creatures because our collective existence “condemns” us continuously to make choices about “what we ought to do” in regard to others” (Rousseau, 2000, p. 39).

Moral Leadership: Prioritizing Moral Orthopraxy

Prioritizing moral orthopraxy is first of all to support the assertion that a continual definition or redefinition of morality and moral leadership is obsolete. Rather, encouraging and exemplifying moral leadership is to (1) break the general sense of moral leadership, (2) explore the pressure that modernity exerts on the leader, (3) examine how the leader’s personal moral values match the social ethics, and (4) the impact of education on individual morality.

Breaking the general negative image of moral people.

Breaking the general sense of moral leadership is advertising the beauty in being moral instead of focusing on an image or images of people with destitute looks irrelevant to the world people leaves in and want to connect with and to. It is in that perspective that Gini (2004) stated that the term “moral leadership” often conjures up images of sternly robed priests, waspishly severe nuns, carelessly bearded philosophers, forbiddingly strict parents and something ambiguously labeled the “moral majority.” These people are seen as confining and dictatorial.

They make us do what we should do, not what we want to do. They encourage following the “superego” and not the “id.” The author pictured a moral leader as someone who supposedly tells people the difference between right and wrong from on high through his or her daily behaviors.

Here, the praxis speaks volumes because, there is much more to moral leadership than merely telling others what to do. In consequence, Gini asserted that the vision and values of leadership must have their origins and resolutions in the community of followers, of whom they are a part, and whom they wish to serve. The author affirmed that leaders can drive, lead, orchestrate, and cajole, but they cannot force, dictate, or demand. Leaders can be the catalyst for morally sound behavior, but they are not, by themselves, a sufficient condition. By means of their demeanor and message, leaders must be able to convince, not just tell others, that collaboration serves the conjoint interest and well-being of all involved. Leaders may offer a vision, but followers must buy into it. Leaders may organize a plan, but followers must decide to take it on. Leaders may demonstrate conviction and willpower, but followers, in the new paradigm of leadership, should not allow the leader’s will to replace their own.

Evaluating moral leadership will not or should not be a checklist on how well the leader is doing. Evaluating a moral leader or pointing at a leader as someone moral is to assess how he practically exemplify his *adequation* with social ethics that are the reflection of divine ethos. This implies that if a man is born to labor and bird to fly², leadership is born to be moral and morality to gage leadership. Beyond every definitional problem and the truth that in the popular culture moral leadership constitutes a “null-set” (Hickman, 2010, p. 345), does moral leadership always and only mean doing the right things right? Doesn’t moral leadership indicate that

² Pope Pius XI (1985). On reconstructing the social order. In D. M. Byers (ed.), *Justice in the marketplace: A collection of the Vatican and the U.S. Catholic bishops on economic policy, 1981-1984*. Washington, D. C.: United States Catholic conference, 1985.

leadership is not leadership until it is moral? On this note, moral Leadership becomes the morality of leadership.

Behaviorally, it should not be secluded to faith-based leadership rather the common denominator that each and any leadership style should have. As said earlier, our personal want and desires support the premise that every single individual knows what morality is. This deduction also supports the assertion that it is the human failure to keep up with morality that determines all the efforts to pluralize morality as a highway to free-life meaning “Do as you feel or please.” Actually, morality is morality even when it hurts our feeling.

Moral: whatever the shame or cost.

This operation consists of dissociating morality from desires and passions. A moral leader does behave morally even when it is painful. A leader is not moral because he feels like, but he or she chose to be moral with all the readiness to pay the price it entails. The journey from knowing about moral leadership and exemplifying morality is to transition from the “conception that moral reasoning and moral judgments are primarily functions of intellect and cognition” (Singer, 1999: 156) to really proving through attitudes, behaviors and reactions that one has really injected what is right and doing right into his daily undertakings, thoughts and emotions. Leadership is not leadership until it is moral.

This morality indicates that moral leadership should be first of all authentic. An authentic person cannot be moral in a moral sense of the term. Yukl (2010) noted that authentic leaders are leaders whose self-concepts and self-identities are strong, clear, stable, and consistent. These leaders have a high self-awareness about their values, beliefs, emotions, self-identities, and abilities. In other words, Yukl (2010) stated that “they know who they are and what they believe. They also have a high degree of self-acceptance, which is similar to

emotional maturity” (p. 424). With all the definitions of leadership, a leader who is not authentic cannot be moral

Examining Individual Moral Match With Divinely Right

If there should be any effort to engage, it should be to fight back the deconstruction society or societal standards. Because deconstructing society, family is deconstructing morality. Morality, family and society are the three variables humans came to find. The three are superior to individuals. Deconstructing them is annihilating life itself. Gini (2003) was not wrong to observe that that ethics is primarily a communal, collective enterprise, not a solitary one. It is the study of our web of relationships with others. This means that morality is non-egoistic or pluralistic in nature. Its primary paradigm of evaluation is always self in relation to others. The ethical point of view, says Bowie, requires that an actor take into account the impact of his/her action on others. It is said that morality in leadership matters a lot for the moment you accept a leadership position, you have to be prepared to be in public gaze³.

To that end, the conduct of the leader needs to be impeccable, that is, what you say and do needs to be measured. As a leader, you are accountable to the employees and to the society at large. Every word or action of a leader is watched by countless followers. The implication and impact of anything that a leader says and does can range from small to immense. Leadership, therefore, comes with responsibilities to take care of and being extra cautious. As important as the individual preparation is, the expectations from others are the basis for moral leadership.

One simple argument to support the claim that leadership is not leadership unless it is moral is the truth that first of all there is a difference between leadership and *driveship*. Second, moral leadership is not about self-satisfaction rather the encouragement of self-determination to

³ <http://www.globalethicsnetwork.org/profiles/blogs/what-do-you-mean-by-moral-leadership>

grow followers to “enable them to fulfill their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness” (Yukl, 2010, p. 424). A person who is moral is concerned with the principles of right and wrong behavior and the goodness or badness of human character (*Merriam-Webster*). In that perspective, moral leadership “Involves ethical conduct on the part of leaders, as well as the capacity to inspire such conduct in followers” (Rhode, 2011, p. 20).

Growing Fruits of Morality

It will be good to list, amplify, and categorize the benefits of moral leadership (Beard, 2012). But how to produce moral fruits in leadership is the goal of this paper. In consequence, Rost (1991) defined leadership as a power- and value-laden relationship between leaders and followers/constituents who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes and goals. Hence, the critical elements of this definition that need to be taken into account is followership, values, mutual purposes, and goals. Thus, Gini (2004) consistently affirmed that leadership is always about self and others. Like ethics, labor and business leadership is a symbiotic, communal relationship. It’s about leaders, followers-constituencies, and all stakeholders involved. And, like ethics, labor and business leadership seems to be an intrinsic part of the human experience. On this note, though the terms “leadership” and “leader” are not strictly synonymous, the reality of leadership cannot be separated from the person of the leader and the job of leadership. Given this caveat, and leaning heavily on the research and insights of

Always moral.

Moral leadership does not have vacuum tempo on his continuum framework. Morality is not geographical. This means that moral leadership is not time-oriented or time-determined. Moral leadership is not circumstantially generated. A moral leader is moral whatever the time,

the location, and the circumstances. Hence, for a leadership to be moral, he or she should beware of illegitimate sources of influence, be yourself, and check how he was raised up.

Beware of illegitimate sources of influence.

A leaders who does not have a checking gage for what the Blackaby and Blackaby (2001) called the illegitimate sources of influence cannot be moral. This raises the question, “Why does a leader wanted to be a leader?” Is it for power, position, and personality? Moral leadership would be contrary to all the three reasons mentioned for, “insecurity and need for affirmation drive some people to seek leadership positions...insecure leaders find it much simpler to label their opponents as unspiritual or rebellious than to actually examine the truth of their critics’ words” (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2001, p. 94). The authors concluded that position, power, and personality are all misconceived sources of influence for leaders. Thus, moral leadership is parallel to the aforementioned concepts though they are not outside of leadership. To avoid the trap of amoral leadership, please do the following:

Be yourself.

If authentic leaders “do not seek leadership positions to gratify a need for self-esteem, status, and power, but rather to express and enact their values and beliefs” (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2001, p. 94), leadership will be high-jacked by the relativity of values. In *extensio*, instead of looking for variables for morality, the value to be moral becomes the foundation of leadership. This dilemma leads to what morality and leadership are even if Dolecheck and Dolecheck argued that leadership is hard to define, and moral leadership is even harder (p. 14). As a matter of fact, Gini (2004) affirmed that “Leadership is always about self and others. Like ethics, labor and business leadership is a symbiotic, communal relationship. It's about leaders,

followers-constituencies, and all stakeholders involved. And, like ethics, labor and business leadership seems to be an intrinsic part of the human experience” (p. 5).

The problem with moral leadership or leadership *lato sensus* is that leadership is like an iceberg. What the leader does only represents one tenth (1/10) of what leadership is supposed to be: moral which is the nine-tenth (9/10) of leadership. In a word, who the leader is when there is nobody around is all leadership is about. Best, the *adequacio* between his sayings and doings is all leadership is about. At this level, moral leadership should not a prisoner of just “doing something,” rather “being” (Coram Deo = before God). Moral leadership is a life of responsibility and accountability before God and not simply assuming some leadership roles however successful they are. So, even if the concept of God in morality suffers a lot more of relativistic attacks, the simple solid conviction is that “everybody likes truth,” and truth is the name of Jesus Christ (Jn. 6:14). Hence, morality and God are inseparable.

Education.

One variable always neglected in moral leadership is how a leader is brought up. In one of several important methodological remarks, Aristotle made near the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that in order to profit from the sort of study he is undertaking, one must already have been brought up in good habits (1095b4–6). He described the way a leader is brought up and his ethical virtue as a “*hexis*” (“state,” “condition,” and “disposition”) - a tendency or disposition, induced by our habits, to have appropriate feelings (1105b25–6). Aristotle noted that defective states of character are *hexeis* (plural of *hexis*) as well, but they are tendencies to have inappropriate feelings.

The significance of Aristotle’s characterization of these states as *hexeis* is his decisive rejection of the thesis, found throughout Plato’s early dialogues, that virtue is nothing but a kind

of knowledge and vice nothing but a lack of knowledge. Although Aristotle frequently drew analogies between the crafts and the virtues (and similarly between physical health and *eudaimonia*), he insisted that the virtues differ from the crafts and all branches of knowledge in that the former involve appropriate emotional responses and are not purely intellectual conditions.⁴

Modernity Does Not Mean New Morality

Moral leadership should not waste time to modernize morality. Morality is *in-temporal*, meaning beyond times, seasons, geographical horizons. Morality is the voice of the Supra-nature (Bergson), God in human (Jean Jacques Rousseau). But modernity or *mundanity* is the only straw that is breaking the neck of the camel because modernity is a set of principles and values, a kind of vision of world and man, that is based in the ideas of Enlightenment, a cultural movement that was born in some European countries (France, Germany, United Kingdom) in the second part of the 18th century and that vindicates the separation between faith and reason, and the autonomy of human thought from other bonds (Barrajon, 2013).

As such, though religion was considered as the opium of the people (in the Marxist doctrine, following the severe critic that Feuerbach made in his book *The Essence of Christianity*) or as Feuerbach said “œthe vampire of humankind” as religions sucked the blood that the people needed to realize their own self-realization (Barrajon, 2013) becoming or aspiring to be the type of leaders Jesus portrayed seems to be the solution to all the leadership crisis evolving around the globe. D’Souza (2006) stated that leaders should be servants, shepherds, and stewards. As a servant, the leader has to listen, have empathy, heal, persuade, be committed to service and the growth of people, and know how to build a community.

⁴ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-ethics/>

As a shepherd, the moral leader has to know his sheep, here rights and wrongs, and the current and future generation. Moral leadership will narrow down to being present and available for the current generation, lead them by example, be courageous and daring, guide and direct them being the morally-written letter they can read or the moral icon for the society, show concern for the lost sheep, here, the degeneration prevailing in organizations and societies, have a spirit of self-sacrifice, a self-by passing to coach and mentor young people to see the beauty and benefits of morality. This requires a leader to be a steward, the leader is a man or woman of trust, responsible, accountable, gifted with honesty, integrity, transparency, and a man or woman of character (Barrajon, 2013).

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