Leadership Emerging


Leadership is not a person or a position. It is a complex moral relationship between people, based on trust, obligation, commitment, emotion, and a shared vision of the good. [xv] At the heart of this relationship lies ethics, including:

1. The ethics of the means,
2. The ethics of person,
3. The ethics of the ends.

Ciulla argues that “a greater understanding of ethics will improve our understanding of leadership,” because debates about defining leadership are about what is good leadership. Frankly, I find this to be a narrow assumption in that debates are also about what is and what is not included in notions related to leadership and about distinctions among leading, leader and leadership. Nevertheless, she agrees with some other scholars that ethical leaders are the only ones that can be “authentic transformational leaders,” a phrase that suggests at worst a tautology and at best a recursive definition. The assumption I am making is that those who are behaving from an authentic place are necessarily ethical (although I guess we could argue that from a number of different perspectives.

Furthermore, in her review of the literature she indicates that those in the various orientations of leadership theory have failed to develop the normative
implications related to their theories. The approach that she aligns with as holding the more promise is transformational leadership.

Al Gini takes us through the notion that business ethics and moral leadership are academic oxymorons. For him, these terms do have meaning and are intertwined. And the role of (formal) leaders is fundamental to ethics in organizations:

“I am convinced that without the continuous commitment, enforcement, and modeling of leadership, standards of business ethics cannot and will not be achieved in any organization...Leaders help to set the tone, develop the vision, and shape the behavior of all those involved in organizational life.”

Leadership is about a relationship between self and others, thus ethics in business involves all stakeholders. Gini builds on the work of the late Joseph Rost (see interview, ILR, http://www.integralleadershipreview.com/archives/2005-07/2005-07-fresh.php) in this discussion of leadership and followership. He then extends his argument to conflate leading and managing when he echoes Tom Peters and Bob Waterman, “The real role of leadership is to manage the values of an organization.” As a result he fails to make a distinction between leadership and dictatorship. This leads him to note that both are values laden and “all leadership, whether good or bad, is moral leadership at the descriptive if not the normative level. Ultimately, he argues for attention to the level of commitment at the top of organizations to set the tone on ethics.

Edwin P. Hollander, in his chapter “Ethical Challenges in the Leader-Follower Relationship,” continues a similar perspective offered by Gini, one that continues to re-enforce the notion of leader as hero (flawed or not) and ultimately responsible for the quality of ethics in business relationships, particularly in the use of authority and power. Ciulla offers a chapter on “Leadership and the Problem of Bogus Empowerment.” She notes that leading occurs throughout organizations. She states, “I argue that authentic empowerment entails a distinct set of moral understandings and commitments between leaders and followers, all
based on honesty.” There is a tension among values that is played out, among individualism freedom and instrumental value and/or economic efficiency. Thus leaders have to use more powerful means of control through empowerment. “Bogus empowerment attempts to give employees or followers power without changing the moral relationship between leaders and followers...Without honesty, sincerity, and authenticity, empowerment is bogus and makes a mockery of one of America’s most cherished values, the freedom to choose.”

Robert Solomon discusses ethical leadership in relation to emotions and trust, beyond charisma. He concludes that trust is the more important element in leadership relationships. Bruce Avolio and Edwin Locke exchange views on selfishness and altruism in leadership. Terry Price explores ethical failures of leadership. Michel Keeley explores transformational leadership, particularly in relation to presidents of universities. He discusses three myths:

1. Presidents need to create a vision for their organizations that transcends individual interests. No, visions need to reflect the diverse interests of stakeholders.
2. Presidents should be transformational leaders. No. good leaders are transactional.
3. Charisma is an important aspect of leadership. Rarely.

Bernard Bass and Paul Steidlmeier give us the final chapter of this survey, “Ethics, Character and Authentic Transformational Leadership Behavior.” They distinguish between moral leaders (Mandela and Mother Theresa) from others (Pol Pot and Saddam Hussein) on the basis of ethical themes of modern Western societies: liberty, utility, and (distributive) justice. They argue,

“The ethics of leadership rests upon three pillars: (a) the moral character of the leader; (b) the ethical legitimacy of the values embedded in the leader’s vision, articulation, and program which followers either embrace of reject; and (c) the morality of the processes of social ethical choice and action that leaders and
followers engage in and collectively pursue.”

These are pillars of transformational leadership, although some critics believe that transformational leadership is unethical and manipulative. They disagree, indicating that “true transformational leaders identify the core values and unifying purposes of the organization and its members, liberate their human potential, and foster pluralistic leadership and effective, satisfied followers.”

Grounded in traditional leadership theory, this book raises questions about the nature of ethics related to leader roles and leadership dynamics. Nowhere, unfortunately, is the bias of modernism transcended with any more complex understanding of adult development in relation to values and worldviews and their implications for issues of ethics. These scholars are wonderfully informed and competent to pick up the mantle and move to a new level of sophistication in exploring issues of ethics. Let’s hope that one day they will.

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Beginning with an heroic view of leadership in her introduction, Ciulla presents an essay on the responsibility of leaders in their use of power, their “special moral relationship” with followers, responsibility for the big picture, and “making” others care about something beyond themselves. She provides an overview of the material in this volume.

“Our focus is on the complex ethical relationships that are the core of leadership. The quest for moral leadership is both a personal quest that takes place in the hearts and minds of leaders as well as a quest by individuals, groups, organization, communities, and societies for leaders who are both ethical and effective.”
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