

Transformative Ethics

A New Perspective of Ethical Stewardship

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Abstract

In their quest to obtain the trust and followership of others, leaders acknowledge their need to be worthy of that trust but often fail to understand the ethical expectations that others perceive are due to them. In this paper we introduce a new model of Transformative Ethics (TE), a leadership ethic that integrates the moral and ethical expectations of twelve other well-recognized ethical perspectives and that enables leaders to bridge the gap in earning the trust, commitment, and followership of others that is often so elusive. We briefly describe each of those ethical perspectives and their relationship to TE and offer eight testable propositions about ethics and leadership factors. We suggest that individuals can redefine and transform themselves, exponentially increase the quality of their relationships, and more effectively lead others by applying the principles of TE in becoming ethical stewards.

Introduction

Wise leaders understand that the modern organization must achieve previously unachieved levels of employee ownership, commitment, and extra-mile behavior to compete in a marketplace fraught with constant change and aggressive competition (Beer, 2009; Christensen, 2016). Bennis and Nanus (2007, 2) have suggested that leaders face a “chronic crisis in governance” in which there is a “pervasive incapacity of organizations to cope with the expectations of their constituents.” The failure of leaders to understand those high expectations and to earn the trust of others is well documented, and a growing list of scholars have called for leaders to be increasingly moral (Paine, 2002; Coles, 2010), virtuous (Cameron, 2011), and trustworthy (Kouzes & Posner, 2011 & 2012). Commentators about leadership decry the failure of those who lead to earn the trust of followers and to be perceived as virtuous and honorable (Covey, 2004, Ch. 1).

In response to the compelling need of leaders to be perceived as ethical, we present in this paper a new ethical perspective which we call Transformative Ethics (TE). This new ethical perspective integrates morally virtuous qualities of twelve other well-recognized ethical perspectives and encourages leaders to be integrative ethical stewards by adopting the moral standards inherent in each of those ethical models. We begin this paper by identifying the need for a new ethical perspective. We then define TE and explaining how its focus compares with the twelve other ethical perspectives. Incorporating the insights of other scholars, we suggest eight propositions about TE and its application for leaders in modern organizations. We identify six significant contributions of this paper to the ethics literature and conclude with suggestions for scholars and practitioners.

The Rationale for a New Ethical Perspective

The need for a new ethical perspective and for a higher standard of moral behavior is demonstrated by the decline in trust in which leaders in virtually every type of organization are held (Maritz, 2010; Green, 2013; Gallup, 2016). According to a 2013 survey of 30,000 people around the world, only 18% believe that a business leader will tell them the truth – and only 13% believe that government leaders will be honest with them (Edelman, 2013). Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus (2007, 3) have called for a new “transformative” perspective of leadership that is ethically based and other scholars have advocated a virtuous approach to ethical leadership that exponentially raises the bar of moral leadership (Cameron, 2011; Caldwell, 2012; Caldwell, Hasan, & Smith, 2015).

Whether it is called a crisis of leadership, a crisis in trust, or a crisis in ethics, society at all levels has seen moral and ethical standards decline (cf. Callahan, 2004) to the point where confidence in leaders, in institutions, and in the future has reached crisis proportions. The 2016 US presidential election pitting Clinton versus Trump is not only evidence of the tragic condition of confidence in leaders but is a source of embarrassment to millions of Americans that has made the United States a laughing stock throughout the world (LSE, 2016). At the heart of this crisis in confidence is a failure in the ethical framework of leaders who largely fail to understand the reality that they must demonstrate that they are trustworthy, credible, and beyond reproach in their dealings with others (Kouzes & Posner, 2011). Ethical leadership demands that leaders understand the high standards to which others will hold them (Bennis & Nanus, 2007) and that they honor their “covenantal” duties (Pava, 2003) to treat others with a commitment to their welfare (Slote, 2007), a clear understanding of the vital issues of their organizations (Christensen, 2016), and unflagging integrity (Cameron, 2011).

Defining Transformative Ethics

Leadership and ethics are directly related constructs (Burns, 2010; Solomon, 1993) and TE is essentially a leadership ethic. It focuses on the importance of leaders transforming the standard of their behavior to a level that merits the trust, commitment, and followership that is so essential in leading organizations (cf. Hayes, *et al.*, 2015). TE focuses on the leader’s role in helping individuals and organizations to change, adapt to an ever evolving world, and to optimize their ability to succeed in a profoundly complex context. The underlying assumption behind TE are the beliefs that the inner transformation of individuals and organizations requires them to constantly redefine and improve themselves, to discover the greatness that lies within, and to muster the character and strength of will to make their potential a reality by honoring a broad range of moral principles (cf. Covey, 2004, 98).

As a personal leadership ethic focused on the pursuit of transforming excellence, TE can perhaps be best understood by the examination of the experience of Saul of Tarsus. Saul experienced profound transformative change on the road to Damascus two thousand years ago and personally redefined himself from an opponent of the new Christian faith to one of its strongest advocates – and along the way he sought to constantly live a life that personified personal virtue, respect for others, and compliance with the highest ethical principles. That transformation enabled him to contribute to the building of the new Christian church (Stalker, 2016). Those who have embraced TE as a normative and instrumental philosophy experience a profound change in their own lives, and exponentially expand their ability to serve others, and empower organizations to achieve their mission and purpose. It is this integrated set of ideas

about the standards of excellence required of leaders that is the underlying philosophical foundation of TE (cf. Solomon, 1992; Hosmer, 2010).

TE requires that individuals who seek to be trusted recognize their personal responsibility to own and incorporate qualities from many ethical perspectives and to raise their interactions with others to the standard of a virtuous ethical steward (Hosmer, 1995; Caldwell, Hayes, & Long, 2010). Hernandez (2012, 172) explained that stewardship theory involves leader behaviors “in which organizational actors see greater long-term utility in other-focused prosocial behavior than in self-serving, short-term opportunistic behavior.” Block (2013) described stewardship as the choosing of service to others and the good of the organization over self-interested behavior. Stewards act for the well-being of future generations (Hernandez, 2008, 121-122), acknowledging that they are both “caretakers” and “role models” who build trust by the morality of their behaviors. Leadership rises to the level of ethical stewardship when leaders establish “integrated organizational systems that demonstrate the leader’s commitment” to the best interests of others (Caldwell, et al., 2008, 157).

Ethical stewards do not seek solutions that “satisfice” the needs of stakeholders (Simon, 1997, 118-120) by compromising, “dividing the pie into equal shares,” or seeking a solution that meets minimum acceptable requirements. Instead, ethical stewards strive to optimize long-term wealth creation within organizations – thereby honoring the obligation to society to maximize the efficiency of resources and honoring duties owed to stakeholders – or “increasing the size of the pie” so that all may benefit (cf. Covey, 2011). The assumption of the ethical steward echoes the mantra of Jim Collins (2001, 1) that “(g)ood is the enemy of great” and is simply never good enough.

Pava (2016) noted, however, that stakeholder commitment is often best achieved when short-term accommodations are made which build trust for the long term – just as maintaining an expensive automobile may require a tune-up that may increase operating costs in the short term but keeps the car running at its best over an extended time period. For that reason, the ethical steward’s commitment to the creation of wealth and value is based upon a long-term evaluation of benefits – rather than a potentially-distorted short-term assessment of benefits achieved.

TE adopts the philosophy of the ethical steward and seeks the highest standard of ethical and moral performance in conformance with what Caldwell and colleagues (2015) defined as the Virtuous moral position on a Virtuous Continuum. This Virtuous Continuum is an explanation of moral behaviors derived from the insights of highly regarded scholars (Carroll & Buchholz, 2014; Cameron, 2003) to differentiate the relative benefits achieved by moral choices. Diagram 1 presents the four general categories which make up the Virtuous Continuum.

----- Insert Diagram 1 about Here-----

As noted in this continuum, the Immoral position is clearly self-serving and does not hold individuals or the organization responsible for honoring duties owed or even obeying the law – unless obeying the law happens to be in an actor’s self-interest. The Amoral position acknowledges the need to comply with the law but is otherwise content with achieving self-interests and may fail to honor duties owed to others. The Moral position creates value, serves stakeholders, and strives to do what is right. These three positions are derived from a moral

continuum suggested by Carroll and Buchholz in their several editions of their outstanding book on business ethics.

Cameron (2003) replaced the Moral position with what he labeled the Virtuous position, and noted that the virtuous obligation was to optimize wealth creation and honor duties owed to all stakeholders. Caldwell and colleagues (2015) later integrated these two ideas into a moral continuum with four categories, shown as Diagram 1. TE advocates the Virtuous position on the Virtuous Continuum and seeks to optimize benefits for all stakeholders – an outcome labeled “The Third Alternative” by Covey (2011) in his book by that title. Covey’s third alternative approach (2011) calls for leaders to honor their moral obligation to pursue the most productive, efficient, and beneficial long-term outcome possible in collaborative efforts with others.

Comparing Ethical Perspectives

In this section we examine twelve frequently cited ethical perspectives and compare them with TE – clarifying how TE integrates key concepts from all twelve perspectives.

Ethic of Self-Interest

The Ethic of Self-Interest advocates that each person should pursue his/her own self-interests, but without infringing upon the rights of others (cf. Hosmer, 1995, 396). Enlightened self-interest recognizes that doing that which is in the interest of others may also benefit the self, and advocates of servant leadership (DePree, 2011, Ch. 1) and transformational leadership (Turner, *et al.*, 2002) both emphasize the moral duty and organizational wisdom of treating others well. A critical factor in understanding this ethical perspective is in recognizing the impact of choices in both the long-term and the short-term. Rather than sacrificing to achieve a reasonable outcome, the ethically virtuous position of TE and the Ethic of Self-Interest is to recognize which choice of behaviors will benefit an individual most in the long-term, rather than to simply pursue a short-term result. TE adopts the Ethic of Self-Interest’s ethical perspective, ***“Pursue outcomes which have the greatest positive benefit for oneself and one’s organization without infringing upon the rights of others.”*** Its virtuous contribution to TE is Balanced Self-Interest.

Virtue Ethics

The moral position of Virtue Ethics is that each person has the duty to be fair, open, and honest in dealing with others and responsible for pursuing personal virtues of mind and character (Russell, 2013). Virtues are normative in establishing standards of conduct but are also instrumental by enabling individuals and organizations to flourish and achieve a better quality of life and superior outcomes (Cameron, 2011). Aristotle, often considered “The Father of Virtue Ethics,” observed that we are what we repeatedly do and that the pursuit of excellence should be not an action but a habit (Waller, 2005, 98). As leaders and organizations pursue excellence, they honor their responsibility to stakeholders and help to create a better world (cf. Pfeffer, 1998). TE includes the Virtue Ethics ethical perspective, ***“Constantly pursue excellence, make that pursuit a habit, and treat others with integrity.”*** The virtuous contribution of Virtue Ethics to TE is Commitment to Excellence.

Ethic of Religious Injunction

The Ethic of Religious Injunction advocates that each individual is important and deserves to be respected and treated with kindness, empathy, and compassion (cf. Buber &

Smith, 2011). Leaders who treat others with kindness inspire the heart, encourage the soul, and empower others to become better people and more effective employees (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Reciprocity and treating others as one would want to be treated is a belief of virtually every formal religion (Hosmer, 1995, 396). However, the moral position of the Golden Rule is superseded by the Platinum Rule, “Do unto others as they would have you do unto them.” Covey (2013, 247-260) explained that our moral obligation in treating others well requires that we first understand what they value and how they wish to be treated. TE adopts this commitment to treat others as they wish to be treated and in a manner that meets their needs. TE honors the Ethic of Religious Injunction’s mantra, **“Always treat others with dignity, respect, and kindness – as valued ‘Yous’ and never as anonymous ‘Its.’”** The virtue that the Ethic of Religious Injunction contributes to TE is Empathetic Understanding.

The Ethic of Government Regulations

The Ethic of Government Requirements adopts a formal and legalistic standard of behavior in an effort to protect human rights and establish order in society. Laws are enforced and regulations are created to protect the interests of the larger community and to establish a range of minimum standards – standards theoretically intended to protect a society’s best interests and to preserve the public welfare. Carroll and Buchholz (2014) explained that compliance with the rule of law rises only to an Amoral level of moral conduct and acknowledged the need for moral behavior to comply with a higher moral standard. Scholars and practitioners throughout the world have noted that leaders and organizations that seek the trust of others must comply not only with the letter of the law but also with the spirit or intent of the law as well (Caldwell & Clapham, 2003; Xu, *et al.*, 2016). TE embraces this ethic’s counsel, **“Live by both the letter and the spirit of the law in honoring duties owed to others, but remember that the law by itself is a minimal moral standard.”** The virtue contributed by this perspective to TE is Sincere Commitment.

Ethic of Utilitarian Benefits

The Ethic of Utilitarian Benefits suggests that a law or principle is “correct” and moral if its consequences create greater social benefits than social harms (Driver, 2014). John Stuart Mill (1861) explained that benefits accrued should be measured both in terms of their amount and their quality. Garner and Rosen (1967, 70) modified the traditional view of utilitarianism, suggesting 1) that utilitarian should be rule-based in its moral responsibility, and 2) that an action is right only to the degree that it conforms to a rule that leads to the greatest good, or that “the rightness or wrongness of a particular action is a function of the correctness of the rule” upon which the action was based. TE endorses the Ethic of Utilitarian Benefits’ belief that **“No actions should be engaged in which do not result in the greatest good for that community of which you are a part”**(*cf. Hosmer, 1995, 396*). The virtue contributed to TE from this perspective is Value Optimization.

The Ethic of Universal Rules

The Ethic of Universal Rules is a principle-centered set of rules for moral conduct that applies to all members of society and that have general widespread acceptance (Lewis & Norris, 2015). Kant (2013) explained that people must always be treated as ends, rather than as the means to others’ ends. He advocated that the law of universalizability, or the examination of one’s behaviors to determine whether it is one that everyone should practice (Kant, 1998, 53). Burns (Ciulla, 2014, xi) noted that the process of developing these rules has occurred “slowly,

gropingly, tortuously” – but it has ultimately occurred. The message of the Ethic of Universal Rules that applies to TE is **“Act according to universal principles and rules which you would have others apply if they were in your similar situation and your positions were reversed** (cf. Hosmer, 1995, 397).” The virtue contributed to TE from the Ethic of Universal Rules is Just Action.

Ethic of Universal Rights

The Ethic of Universal Rights declares that all persons should be protected against arbitrary actions of government and be guaranteed a set of agreed-upon rights that preserve each individual’s self-interest and security (Lauren, 2011). Rousseau argued that a legitimate political authority exists only when a social contract is agreed upon by all its citizens and when that contract is administered for their mutual preservation (Rousseau & Gourevitch, 1997). No individual should feel that his or her basic rights are at risk in a society and should have a means to redress the violation of those rights. Those rights protect freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, the right to privacy, and the right to own property without threat of improper seizure. TE adopts the Ethic of Universal Rights’ belief that **“No one, including governments, may take action that infringes upon the legitimate rights of any other individual.”** The virtue contributed to TE by the Ethic of Universal Rules is Guaranteed Rights.

Ethic of Economic Efficiency

The Ethic of Economic Efficiency is based upon the economic assumptions of Adam Smith about the nature of man, man’s integration of sympathy and self-interest, and the nature of an economic market guided by an “invisible hand” that balances the economic interests of society (Phillipson, 2012). Smith (2016) proposed that economic efficiency was achieved when marginal revenues equaled marginal costs – at which point it is impossible to make one person better off without making another person worse off. He argued that the invisible hand of collective action would enable a free market to reach equilibrium – a “Pareto Optimal” condition which he considered to be morally superior economically. TE endorses the message of the Ethic of Economic Efficiency that **“Achieving an efficient use of resources to create value for society is a virtuous goal.”** The virtue contributed to TE by this ethical perspective is Efficient Utilization.

Ethic of Distributive Justice

The Ethic of Distributive Justice addresses the moral responsibility to meet the needs of the poor, the uneducated, and the unemployed in the distribution of goods and services (Rawls, 1999). Rawls (1999) defined social justice as viewed through an impartial “veil of ignorance,” behind which judgments were to be made about individual rights, liberty, and equality without identifying which position in society any one individual holds. Society’s social contract, Rawls (1993, Lect. VIII) suggested, requires that the needs of all parties are considered in decision-making based upon three assumptions: 1) each person is to have as much liberty as possible, 2) each person is to be granted the same liberties, and 3) society’s rules and principles must avail to everyone the opportunity to have access to social and economic advantage. TE adopts the Ethic of Distributive Justice perspective, **“Act only in ways that acknowledge the rights, liberty, and equality of all and take no actions that harm the least among us”** (cf. Hosmer, 1995, 397). The virtue contributed to TE by this perspective is Honor Everyone.

Ethic of Contributing Liberty

The Ethic of Contributing Liberty declares that individuals have natural rights which supersede the collective public welfare and which must be guaranteed (Mack, 2015). The underlying assumption of this ethical ideal is that the right to grow and to improve is a universal right which ultimately benefits both the individual and society (Nozick, 1974). Thus, any action must preserve the right of self-development and self-fulfillment for all, within the constraints of the law and the marketplace (cf. Hosmer, 1995, 397). TE embraces the moral perspective of the Ethic of Contributing Liberty, ***“Take no actions which impede the self-development or self-fulfillment of others.”*** The Ethic of Contributing Liberty adds to TE the virtue Encourage Self-Fulfillment.

Ethic of Self-Actualization

The Ethic of Self-Actualization is a goal-focused or teleological ethical perspective which addresses the moral duty of each individual to fulfill his or her highest potential (Brady, 1999). This quest to achieve one’s personal greatness empowers people to examine themselves objectively and then pursue a persistent and passionate commitment of self-discovery and fulfillment (cf. Duckworth, 2016; Neck & Manz, 2012). The moral focus of this ethical perspective acknowledges the unique qualities in each person and assumes that as each person fulfills his/her innate potential, society will ultimately benefit – but that the moral responsibility of each individual is to become his or her best (Brady, 1999, 314-315). TE incorporates the Ethic of Self-Actualization’s ideal, ***“Seek to discover your innate greatness and fulfill that potential to create a better world.”*** The virtue that the Ethic of Self-Actualization contributes to TE is Discover Greatness.

Ethic of Care

The Ethic of Care emphasizes the importance of relationships and the responsibility to care about the welfare and wholeness of others (Gilligan, 1982). Its moral focus is on acknowledging one’s interdependence with others and the obligation to do that which 1) promotes the best interests of each person on their own terms, and 2) protects others’ vulnerabilities within the context in which they are found (Slote, 2007). This ethical perspective is compassionate and empathetic and values people and their welfare above conformance with any formal set of rules (Held, 2005). Gilligan (1982, 73) explained that the focus of the Ethic of Care is “a problem of care and responsibility in relationships rather than as one of rights and rules.” The mandate of the Ethic of Care which is shared by TE is to ***“Respect others as valued individuals, share concern for their welfare, and honor the responsibility to treat each person with empathy and compassion.”*** The virtue contributed to TE by the Ethic of Care is Responsible Caring.

Each of these twelve perspectives adds an important moral duty and contributing moral virtue to TE and to the ethical and moral obligations of the leader; each emphasizes a subtly different ethical “voice” (Brady, 1999); and each demands a commitment to moral excellence in building relationships and in earning the respect and trust of others (Hosmer, 1995; Solomon, 1992).

As TE integrates all twelve of these ethical perspectives, it engages its advocates in a quest for personal integrity and consistency in honoring what some would describe as a daunting

moral standard. Table 1 summarizes the moral duties and moral virtues of TE which are similarly reflected in Diagram 2.

---- Insert Table 1 and Diagram 2 about Here ----

Propositions and Observations

Although TE may not be an easy moral path to follow, it nonetheless offers its adherents many benefits. We present those benefits as eight related propositions and offer additional observations about the value of TE as a moral model.

Transformative Ethics and Self-Awareness

Although self-awareness may not always be considered to be a high glamor leadership quality, a study of leaders' personal traits by the Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations concluded that "a high self-awareness score was the strongest predictor of overall success"(Lipman, 2013). Self-awareness is widely regarded as one's capacity for introspection, and requires "a deep understanding of one's emotions, as well as one's strengths and limitations and one's values and motives" (Goleman, *et al.*, 2002, p. 40).

Self-awareness is a critical skill of emotional and social intelligence (Albrecht, 2009) and affects the degree to which an individual can work effectively with others (Goleman, 2006). The very nature of TE's sensitivity to the requirements of other ethical perspectives requires that those who formally adopt TE as their ethical perspective or who naturally comply with its strict standards leads to our first two propositions about TE.

P₁: Individuals who adopt or naturally comply with TE's moral standards are perceived as more self-aware than others who do not meet TE's moral standards.

P₂: Individuals who adopt or naturally comply with TE's moral standards are perceived by others as more emotionally intelligent than others who do not meet TE's moral standards.

Transformative Ethics and Self-Regard

In the process of the requirement of TE to engage in self-assessment, those who comply with its requirements or adopt it as their moral perspective must closely examine their values about others, their personal and professional goals, the nature of their priorities, and the qualities that are most salient in their lives. Each of these factors is implicitly necessary as an individual consciously or unconsciously makes the decision to seek personal fulfillment, care genuinely about and respect the rights of others, comply with universal truths, and strive to optimize personal and organizational outcomes. Each of these factors makes up the moral requirements of TE.

Erich Fromm (2006) explained that self-regard and self-examination leads to loving oneself and understanding who one truly is. Loving oneself means realistically knowing, respecting, caring about, and taking responsibility for oneself -- including being realistic and honest about one's strengths and weaknesses (Hayes & Caldwell, 2016). In that self-examination process, one who complies with all twelve mantras of TE will affirm to himself or herself that his/her personal conduct meets the high standards embraced by others in society. In that in-depth

examination they will also confirm a clearer understanding of their own integrity, character, and moral nature. That assessment, that increased self-knowledge, will be likely to provide them with a greater sense of their own value, but also a more correct understanding of who they are than most people enjoy (Fromm, 2006).

Consistent with the feedback that they will derive from self-assessment, we suggest two more propositions associate with those who comply with TE moral standards.

P₃: Individuals who adopt or naturally comply with TE's moral standards are perceived by others as having higher self-regard than others who do not meet TE's moral standards.

P₄: Individuals who adopt or naturally comply with TE's moral standards will assess themselves as happier individuals than others who do not meet TE's moral standards.

Transformative Ethics and Humility

Humility has been described in many ways, including the ability to accept responsibility when problems arise but to acknowledge the contributions of others when successes occur (Collins, 2005). As those who comply with TE engage with others, they experience a reflexive consciousness in their relationship to the world, in interpersonal relationships to others, and in experiencing the self through their own behaviors (cf. Baumeister, 1998). Thus, humility is also described as a correct understanding of oneself (Owens, et al., 2013). This experiencing of self enables individuals to understand how to best account for their own strengths and weaknesses and to transcend the self in the pursuit of higher and more significant objectives (Ou, *et al.*, 2014).

This self-examination enables an ironic integration of high self-knowledge but low self-focus in the pursuit of goal achievement. Ou and colleagues (2014, 98) described this quality in humble leaders, noting that “their life pursuits are less about themselves than about the larger community, the greater whole, moral principles, or ultimate universal truth.” The ability to identify one’s limitations also enables a leader to perform more effectively by partnering with others who possess the skills one lacks. Acknowledging one’s limitations and communicating that others have much to contribute in achieving an optimal result incorporates the skills and moral position of TE and demonstrates both self-knowledge and humility (cf. Dennis, Kinzler-Norheim, & Bocarnea, 2010).

Accurate self-knowledge recognizes one’s own values but also the importance of others’ values and priorities to create the strong partnerships necessary to achieve an optimal future. Thus, the self-evaluation process of TE facilitates the accurate self-assessment which Tangney (2000) identified as a key element of humility – the proper understanding of oneself. Consistent with the self-knowledge implicit in TE, we present a fifth proposition,

P₅: Individuals who adopt or naturally comply with TE's moral standards will be perceived by others as more humble than individuals who do not meet TE's moral standards.

Transformative Ethics and Leadership

The qualities of those who follow TE's commitment to caring about others, to the pursuit of excellence, and to honoring commitments matches closely the factors that describe trustworthy leaders (Caldwell & Hansen, 2010). Trust and trustworthiness are ethically-related constructs that are subjectively measured on a continuum and reflect the perceiver's assessment of the competence, beneficence, and integrity of the party being trusted (cf. Mayer, *et al.*, 1995). TE's commitment to the high moral standards of twelve distinctly different but commonly cited ethical perspectives enables the person who adheres to TE's values to be perceived as an honorable individual.

The complex nature of leadership requires those who wish to lead to possess a range of qualities that inspire others' behavior in pursuit of a clear goal, model espoused values, encourage the heart, confront the need for change, and assist others to achieve shared goals (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). TE's standards, the mantras that guide it, and the associated accompanying qualities match those leadership requirements well and reflect the commitment of would-be leaders to an ethical standard that merits others' respect. Our sixth, seventh, and eighth propositions address the nature of TE and how TE correlates with the fundamental nature of leadership.

P₆: Individuals who adopt or naturally comply with TE's moral standards will be perceived by others as more trustworthy than individuals who do not meet TE's moral standards.

P₇: Individuals who adopt or naturally comply with TE's moral standards will be perceived by others as more effective leaders than individuals who do not meet TE's moral standards.

P₈: Individuals who adopt or naturally comply with TE's moral standards will be perceived by others as more ethical than individuals who do not meet TE's moral standards.

The twelve ethical commitments of TE are a high standard for individuals to attain and represent qualities that enable individuals to establish themselves as people of character, integrity, and virtuousness. These qualities, by themselves, are not sufficient for individual or organization success but when combined with competence and other essential leadership traits they can expand an organization's ability to achieve its potential and earn the trust and followership that is often so difficult for leaders to deserve.

We acknowledge that TE may be perceived by some persons as asking people to perfect their lives – even criticizing TE as “impossible to achieve.” Others may suggest that its requirements may generate resentment, envy, and even distrust from others (cf. Bergeron, 2007; Quinn, 1996). In commenting on the need to change, to become a virtuous leader, and to act with integrity, Michigan's Robert E. Quinn (1996, 158) wrote that those who would transform themselves and their organizations had a powerful choice to make – a choice not guaranteed and potentially fraught with risk.

When we do decide to initiate action, there are no written guarantees, no insurance policies that will save us if we fail. The possibility of failure is a constant companion who walks beside every real leader. Leaders cope with this presence

because they understand that whenever they sacrifice their principles for pressure, both they and the system take another step toward slow death. They are willing to accept the necessary risk because it is the right thing to do. They care enough to risk dying for the organization, which would kill them for caring.

But, as Quinn also notes, it is this willingness to honor the highest standards that individuals transform their organizations and benefit others – and literally transform themselves along the way. It is such a transformative transformation that Bennis and Nanus (2007) have called for in a world wherein confidence in leaders at all levels has dwindled.

Exemplars of Transformative Ethics

Despite the fact that the moral and ethical requirements of TE are extremely high, there are notable modern examples of highly respected individuals who possess those standards. The standards of TE are high, but they are achievable by many and those who meet the standards earn the admiration, trust, and respect of those who know them. Table 2 provides the example of an outstanding modern day example of an individual who has incorporated TE into his life, Clayton M. Christensen. For Dr. Christensen, a brilliant Harvard scholar, management consultant, and lay religious leader, we offer a brief summary of how his life emulates all twelve of the elements of TE.

---- **Insert Table 2 about Here** ----

Each individual who adopts TE standards recognizes and accepts the need to change, possesses the courage to conduct a candid self-assessment, the integrity to commit to a course of self-improvement, and the fierce resolve to transform themselves and to serve the individuals and organizations where they lead and serve.

Contributions of the Paper

In addressing the importance of transforming individual lives and in helping leaders to build employee commitment and trust, this paper makes six contributions to the business ethics literature.

- 1) **It presents a new “transformative” perspective of ethics that is profoundly challenging but optimistic about human nature and human potential.** This TE model is consistent with the evolving Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS) literature (Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003; Cameron & Spreitzer, 2013) and builds on that body of work to confirm the importance of virtuous behavior in individuals and organizations. TE is both consistent with POS and significant as a new model of business ethics worthy of study and thoughtful consideration by scholars and practitioners.
- 2) **It responds to the need for today’s leaders to redefine their leadership role and to understand more clearly the morally complex nature of the leader-follower relationship.** The problem of trust facing modern leaders is a major concern to highly regarded scholars and is profoundly important for leaders who struggle to understand why they are considered untrustworthy and ineffective (Paine, 2003; Cameron, 2013; Dutton & Spreitzer, 2014).
- 3) **It identifies the obligation of leaders to rise to the level of ethical stewards who choose service over self-interest.** The importance of the leaders as stewards has

achieved increased attention in the leadership literature (Hernandez, 2012; Block, 2013; Caldwell, et al., 2012) and reflects the need to hold leaders responsible for a new and expanded virtuous level of conduct (Cameron, 2011 & 2013).

- 4) **It identifies the relationship of TE to twelve frequently cited ethical perspectives and affirms that TE is morally aligned with each of those perspectives.** In defining TE as an integrative theory of ethical stewardship, this paper emphasizes the importance of each of those twelve perspectives and the correlation of TE with each.
- 5) **It proposes eight testable propositions for scholars and practitioners to ponder, discuss, and evaluate.** As a new ethical perspective, TE needs to be tested, discussed, and assessed for its practical benefits and theoretical validity – just as any new concept merits that same stringent examination.
- 6) **It affirms the importance of the Virtuous moral position on the Virtuous Continuum and differentiates that position from other positions on that moral continuum.** As leaders evaluate their own conduct and seek to be responsible and trustworthy contributors to the lives of individuals and the successes of their organization, their ability to add value and build commitment can be enhanced by adopting the TE perspective and interacting with others at the Virtuous level of moral conduct (Beer, 2009; Cameron, 2011 & 2013).

Conclusion

In writing about the transformative role of leaders in organizations, James McGregor Burns (2010) described leadership as a relationship wherein “leaders and followers morally elevate each other.” TE adopts that same moral objective and enables leaders to not only elevate others but transform themselves along the way. TE is a moral philosophy built upon hope, upon the unyielding human belief that self-improvement, personal development, and character development are eminently possible. In the same way that a caterpillar transforms itself into a butterfly, men and women have within themselves the inherent power to discover their greatness, redefine themselves, and become new creatures in both a personal and interpersonal sense. This paper provides scholars with the encouragement to develop improved ways to measure ethical virtuousness and provides an opportunity for practitioners to thoughtfully reassess the quality of their assumptions about ethical leadership.

Like Saul of Tarsus, each person has the capability to be transformed—reshaping their lives by adopting a higher moral sense, a greater integrity, and a more perfect character. TE is, therefore, the most challenging but also the most optimistic of all ethical perspectives and it believes uncompromisingly in the inherent greatness and unlimited potential that most people possess but few actually discover. As individuals raise their sights about the nature of their moral and ethical assumptions, and as they seek to apply what they learn in daily life, the TE perspective can empower them to redefine themselves and exponentially improve their relationships with others and their power to change the world.

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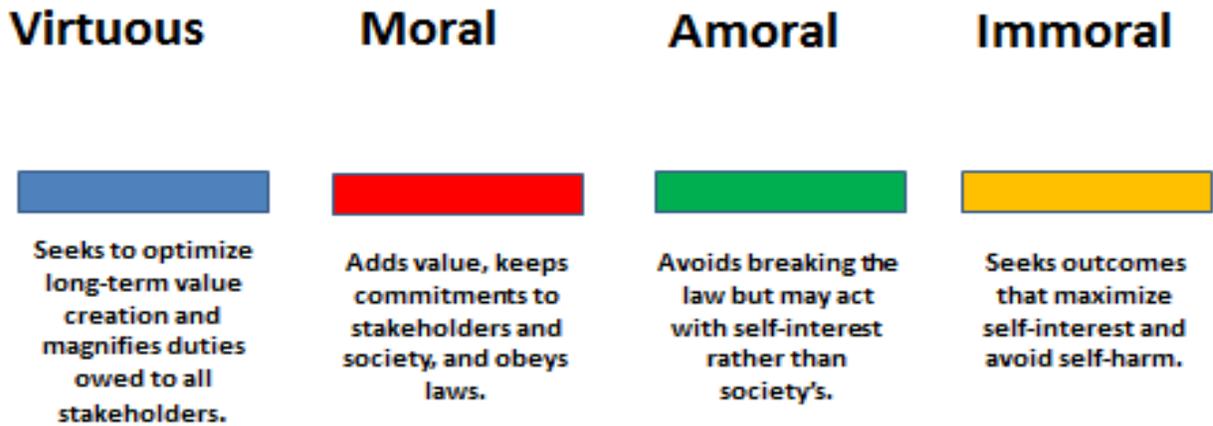
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Diagram 1: The Virtuous Continuum



Caldwell, Carter, & Floyd, 2015

Diagram 2: Transformative Ethics



Table 1: Twelve Contributing Ethical Perspectives to Transformative Ethics

Ethical Perspective	Contributing Ideal	Ethical Virtue	Value to Transformative Ethics
Ethic of Self-Interest	<i>"Pursue outcomes which have the greatest positive benefit for oneself and one's organization without infringing upon the rights of others."</i>	Balanced Self-Interest	Acknowledges that value creation is important and self-interest is beneficial, but that others have rights that must also be honored.
Virtue Ethics	<i>"Constantly pursue excellence, make that pursuit a habit, and treat others with integrity."</i>	Commitment to Excellence	Confirms that to be honorable and to develop habits of excellence are requisites as personal standards.
Ethic of Religious Injunction	<i>"Always treat others with dignity, respect, and kindness – as valued 'Yous' and never as anonymous 'Its.'"</i>	Authentic Understanding	Demands that others be treated with kindness, compassion, and empathy at all times.
Ethic of Government Regulation	<i>"Live by both the letter and the spirit of the law in honoring duties owed to others, but remember that the law by itself is a minimal moral standard."</i>	Genuine Compliance	Confirms that the purpose of rules must always be taken into account and that the intent of those rules is as critical as or more important than the letter.
Utilitarian Ethics	<i>"No actions should be engaged in which do not result in the greatest good for that community of which you are a part."</i>	Value Optimization	Affirms that this greatest good is both outcome-oriented and rights-oriented in creating value – with an obligation to minimize any possible harm.
Ethic of Universal Rules	<i>"Act according to universal principles and rules which you would have others apply if they were in your similar situation and your positions were reversed."</i>	Just Action	Treats others as they wish to be treated and complies with universally-understood principles that benefit mankind.
Ethic of Universal Rights	<i>"No one, including governments, may take action that infringes upon the legitimate rights of any other individual."</i>	Guaranteed Rights	Honors basic human rights and ensures that those rights may not be infringed upon – even under color of claim for a public benefit.
Ethic of Economic Efficiency	<i>"Achieving an efficient use of resources to create value for society is a virtuous goal."</i>	Efficient Use	Conserves and efficiently uses scarce resources and acknowledges that efficient and effective value creation benefits society.
Ethic of Distributive Justice	<i>"Act only in ways that acknowledge the rights, liberty, and equality of all and take no actions that harm the least among us."</i>	Honor Everyone	Recognizes that, though justice is a multi-faceted construct, no actions should be taken that harm those who are disadvantaged in society.
Ethic of Contributing Liberty	<i>"Take no actions which impede the self-development or self-fulfillment of others."</i>	Self-fulfillment	Promotes the liberty which allows all individuals to pursue self-development and self-fulfillment and acknowledges that society benefits thereby.
Ethic of Self-Actualization	<i>"Seek to discover your innate greatness and fulfill that potential to create a better world."</i>	Discovered Greatness	Emphasizes the innate talents, gifts, and highest potential of individuals and their responsibility to use those talents productively to make a better world.
Ethic of Care	<i>"Respect others as valued individuals, share concern for their welfare, and honor the responsibility to treat each</i>	Care Authentically	Affirms the responsibility to care for others' best interests and to treat them with love and with demonstrated concern for their welfare and wholeness.

	<i>person with empathy and compassion.”</i>		
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Table 2: Twelve Ethical Perspectives of Transformative Ethics and Clayton Christensen

Ethical Perspective	Contributing Ideal	Ethical Virtue	Christensen as an Example
Ethic of Self-Interest	<i>“Pursue outcomes which have the greatest positive benefit for oneself and one’s organization without infringing upon the rights of others.”</i>	Balanced Self-Interest	Honors obligations to clients, students, and colleagues while achieving notoriety as a world class scholar, a consultant to some of the world’s most important companies, and as a great teacher.
Virtue Ethics	<i>“Constantly pursue excellence, make that pursuit a habit, and treat others with integrity.”</i>	Commitment to Excellence	His personal virtuousness is widely recognized and articulated in Christensen, Alworth, & Dillon (2012) and reflect his personal integrity.
Ethic of Religious Injunction	<i>“Always treat others with dignity, respect, and kindness – as valued ‘Yous’ and never as anonymous ‘Its.’”</i>	Authentic Understanding	Christensen is widely recognized for his religious beliefs and he serves as a Regional Representative for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Boston.
Ethic of Government Regulation	<i>“Live by both the letter and the spirit of the law in honoring duties owed to others, but remember that the law by itself is a minimal moral standard.”</i>	Genuine Compliance	Treats others with dignity and respect and complies with both the letter and spirit of the law in all of his personal dealings with others. Known for his integrity.
Utilitarian Ethics	<i>“No actions should be engaged in which do not result in the greatest good for that community of which you are a part.”</i>	Value Optimization	Considered world-wide as an expert in value creation and disruptive innovation as both a scholar and a consultant. Ranked as the #2 management thinker in the world in 2015 (Thinkers 2015).
Ethic of Universal Rules	<i>“Act according to universal principles and rules which you would have others apply if they were in your similar situation and your positions were reversed.”</i>	Just Action	Highly respected scholar, teacher, and consultant. Invited by Harvard’s graduating MBA class to address them about their personal lives – rather than on an academic issue – because of his personal example.
Ethic of Universal Rights	<i>“No one, including governments, may take action that infringes upon the legitimate rights of any other individual.”</i>	Guaranteed Rights	Known for treating others with love and caring. Personal philosophy found at Christensen (No Date).
Ethic of Economic Efficiency	<i>“Achieving an efficient use of resources to create value for society is a virtuous goal.”</i>	Efficient Use	Considered the top expert in the world on innovation.
Ethic of Distributive Justice	<i>“Act only in ways that acknowledge the rights, liberty, and equality of all and take no actions that harm the least among us.”</i>	Honor Everyone	Values toward others reflected in personal philosophy and reputation.

Ethic of Contributing Liberty	<i>“Take no actions which impede the self-development or self-fulfillment of others.”</i>	Self-fulfillment	He has spent his life as a missionary and lay leader for more than fifty years, seeking to help others to become their best.
Ethic of Self-Actualization	<i>“Seek to discover your innate greatness and fulfill that potential to create a better world.”</i>	Discovered Greatness	As a scholar he has written more than 100 articles and nine books. His work is admired worldwide. His philosophy is set forth in his book on measuring one’s life.
Ethic of Care	<i>“Respect others as valued individuals, share concern for their welfare, and honor the responsibility to treat each person with empathy and compassion.”</i>	Care Authentically	Personal example and life of service demonstrate his concern for others and their welfare.