



As we observe the organizational lifeworld, how do we know if what we observe is in fact leadership? The three terms—leaders, leading and leadership—are frequently described as having a mutually dependent relationship. However, defining leadership is problematic. We can consult any dictionary and read a leadership definition along the lines of ‘that which is done by a leader’, which directs us to “leader—one who leads” and ends with “lead—to be in charge of”. Leader-centric¹ definitions too often assume that there is a single best solution to the question what a leader is or what she does; and, as a result, many definitions are reduced to descriptions of the traits or behaviors of good leaders leading to the assumption that leadership is the end result of these behaviors. In our struggles to discover the philosophers stone that turns base humans into high functioning authentic leaders, history has bound leadership to the singular efforts of a leader. Efforts to create a more precise body of knowledge and best practices from which we can create great leaders has caused us to lose sight of both the

change speaks in a large part to the distinction between management and leadership. Although the need to change is an issue that both management and leadership must deal with, it is the nature of the change that distinguishes the two.

2016; Bolden et al. 2003; Day and Antonakis 2012; Yammarino 2013; Antonakis and Day 2018) and philosophers of many ages have realized that a full understanding of what makes a good or great ruler is in the best interest of all.

The rise of the industrial revolution, the migration from rural agriculture to urban industry

much about our leaders, we know far too little about leadership. We fail to grasp the essence of leadership that is relevant to the modern age and hence we cannot agree even on the standards by which to measure, recruit, and reject it” (1978, 1). Similarly, an issue for Rost is the prevalence of books or articles that address the subject of leadership without first providing a clear understanding or definition of the “nature” of leadership (Rost 1993). One of Rost’s arguments against periphery and content syndrome is that there is little progress made toward the philosophical grounding of leadership. For Rost this grounding begins with a definition. Rost is writing at a time in which the “new leadership”³ theories are in the ascendancy. Various forms of charismatic leadership leading to transformational leadership theories, framed leaders as inspirational visionaries who were both intellectual and pragmatic (Burns 1978, 2003; Bass and Bass 2008). Even though Rost recognized a paradigmatic shift beginning with Burns’ (1993, 90) notion of transformational leadership, in which he defines leadership as “leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations—the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations—of both leaders and followers”, he finds no

and others include the role of leader as a necessary condition of leadership and are examples of a “

However, there is a significant difference in the agent-agency perspective of leadership. While leader-centric approaches define a procedural relationship of leader-follower or leader-collaborators (Simpson 2016; Kempster 2009), Kan and Parry position leadership as emerging through an evolving process of group context and interaction, in other words leadership does not have a material or concrete presence but rather exists in *potentiâ* awaiting a call to manifest itself. This call is not a demand for specific action but rather an appeal for attention with multiple possibilities for understanding (Heidegger 1962). The evolving process of group context and interactions is one that resists a part-whole reductionism in which leadership is

our ability to acquire and apply relevant knowledge. L-A-P and other post-heroic theories require an epistemology that is responsive to socially emergent phenomena.

The epistemology of much of early leadership theory was grounded in social-scientific positivism which generally viewed the underlying reality of human behavior as being reducible to quantifiably objective units of measurement (Case et al.

relationship between self and multiple others. Because leadership only exists through others, it always already has responsibility to the other. Jen Jones suggests a close tie between the social nature of leadership and French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, stating “When ethics is first philosophy, ethics cannot be separated from leadership and leaders’ responsibility to Others” (Jones 2014, 52). Levinas’ use of the expression “first philosophy” is an interesting one. Using a construction (as in building a house) metaphor, Micheal Dahnke describes Levinas’ first philosophy not as a foundation but rather the values that lead to choosing materials that build the house, foundation and all (Dahnke 2001). For Levinas our values (ethics) are always present and as such always influence our engagement with others and the world around us. This means that the leadership phenomenon will never be non-ethical or “

Ethics Aristotle describes three ways in which we acquire knowledge: intellectual accomplishment (*sophia*), technical expertise (*technē*) and wisdom (*phronēsis*) (Aristotle 2002; Broadie 2002). Intellectual accomplishment in turn is achieved through systematic knowledge (*epistēmē*), which Aristotle (1998) refers to as incontrovertible truth that can be acquired empirically or deductively and intelligence (*nous*), which is the ability to reason inductively and reach beyond observable facts. Aristotle's presentation of knowledge is relevant to post-heroic theories of leadership for two reasons. First, Aristotle is most concerned with the application of knowledge as a means of achieving good results. The guiding question in *Nicomachean Ethics* is how do we conduct our lives in ways that lead to happiness (*eudaimonia*)? In this way Aristotle's epistemology focuses on knowledge as a means to an end. This is reflected in the emphasis that Aristotle places on wisdom (*phronesis*) which can be broadly described as the ability to understand what is practical and to apply the theoretical knowledge of intellectual accomplishment along with technical expertise to achieve a desired outcome.⁶ Second, Aristotle defines knowledge and its multiple dimensions (theoretical, applied and practical) as emerging from an interrelated process that interactively engages both the subjectivity of lived experience and the objectivity of formal reasoning (Kodish 2006).

Engaging Aristotle in the conversation on leadership as an emergent phenomenon is important for two reasons. First, Aristotle describes knowledge as an ongoing emergent phenomenon that—

cross-town bus but my dash is scoop up a child who has wandered away from their parent, the same behavior would be an act of courage.

Moral virtue theories of ethical leadership have been on the rise since the latter twentieth

likewise shifts from an elite position of authority to an accountability for helping to ensure that the necessary conditions for leadership to occur exist.

Defining leadership as an emergent social phenomenon led to a reassessment of its philosophical underpinnings. This article suggests that ontologically, leadership begins with a call based on the perceived need for real change that can only be realized through effective social engagement that leads to the collectively desired real change before leading to ontological emergence. Similarly, epistemological emergence is the result of a hermeneutic of acquiring new experiences and reassessing prior understanding. Ethically, as a social phenomenon, leadership is not only grounded but reliant upon a responsibility to the diverse others and cannot be separated from ethics. The notion of emergence has a profound impact on how we philosophically engage leadership. Future research is needed on the ethical and epistemological implications of leadership as a socially emergent phenomenon and might be found by

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