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Philosophical methodology and leadership ethics

Jessica Flanigan
Jepson School of Leadership Studies, University of Richmond, USA

Abstract
Many leadership researchers aim to advise organizations about how to select and develop ethical leaders, to tell business educators how to teach people to be ethical, or to describe ethical leadership. Yet for these tasks, empirical approaches that address questions about ethics with surveys, experiments, and case studies are insufficient on their own in answering the question, "what should a leader do?" I first argue that descriptive approaches to leadership ethics, such as conceptual analysis, case studies, survey research, and lab experiments, cannot on their own tell us what a leader ought to do when he or she faces a morally difficult circumstance. I then show that the question "what should a leader do?" can be addressed through philosophical analysis. Though philosophers disagree about the nature of morality, most agree that there are truths about morality and that we can make progress in learning about how to live and lead ethically. To close, I consider and respond to the objection that philosophical approaches to leadership ethics are intolerant or authoritarian. I conclude that philosophical approaches to leadership ethics are essential to our evolving understanding of what a leader ought to do.

Keywords
Leadership, philosophical methodology, survey research, leadership studies, disagreement

Leaders face distinctive ethical challenges because they occupy positions of authority, so their decisions have broader ramifications than most people's everyday choices. The primary task of leadership ethics is to inform what a leader should do in morally fraught situations. In cases where a leader must weigh the moral force of individual rights against the interests of her group, or balance considerations of conscience against professional duties, or consider sacrificing security for freedom, how should the leader proceed?

Some approaches, which I will describe in the next section, focus on descriptive features of leaders or leadership. For example, one might ask about the traits of especially ethical or unethical leaders. Or, one might explore which definition of the word "leader" precludes

Corresponding author:
Jessica Flanigan, Jepson School of Leadership Studies, University of Richmond, 28 Westhampton Way, Richmond, VA 23173, USA.
Email: jessica.flanigan@gmail.com

unethical conduct, and make recommendations to leaders on the basis of that definition. Or, one might research the history of effective leaders who supported good causes, megalomaniacal tyrants who used coercion and threats to commit atrocities, and bumbling inefficient CEOs who abused their power out of weakness of will, in order to understand the full range of ethical failure and success. Another approach is to investigate the conditions that make people more likely to lie or cheat or coerce someone, or the way that implicit biases, such as racism and sexism, inform people's perceptions of leaders. Finally, one may conduct surveys of employees and managers about perceptions of a leader's personality and ethical behavior.

These descriptive approaches all have tremendous value as ways of answering questions such as, ''how have people handled difficult challenges in the past?'' or ''what conditions are likely to make a leader lie or cheat?'' or ''does sexism explain the absence of female leaders?'' or ''are charismatic leaders more likely to be perceived as ethical?'' However, these approaches do not tell us what a leader should do. Descriptive considerations alone cannot establish normative conclusions. Moral reasoning is necessary to answer the question ''what should a leader do?'' It is striking, then, that moral philosophy remains at the periphery of research that addresses ethics of leadership.

My thesis is that a philosophical approach is essential for understanding what a leader ought to do. Insofar as empirical researchers explicitly aim to advise organizations about how to select and develop ethical leaders, or to tell business educators how to teach people to be ethical, their approach is insufficient when they address these problems with surveys, experiments, and case studies but neglect to engage with the moral foundations of ethical leadership. Too often, the answers to the most fundamental question of leadership ethics—what should a leader do—are assumed but unanswered because scholars do not develop ethical arguments to justify their assertions about ethical leadership.[1]

Instead, leadership scholars overwhelmingly discuss descriptive considerations, which tell us how the world is, in order to establish ethical conclusions about how the world ought to be. The same can be said of leadership development and education. In advocating for a philosophical approach to learn what a leader ought to do, I am advocating for the practice of giving arguments and moral reasons in favor of claims about what a person morally ought to do. I use the terms ''ethics'' and ''moral'' interchangeably, and I adopt an inclusive conception of philosophical ethics that recognizes that historical, Anglo-American, European, and non-western approaches to ethical problems are all philosophical approaches to leadership ethics when proponents of these approaches cite moral considerations in favor of conclusions about what a person ought to do. I also take an inclusive approach to the definition of leadership, recognizing that leadership remains a contested term and that most models of leadership can meaningfully contribute to our understanding of the general concept (Ciulla, 1995). And I am also mindful that leadership studies is not limited to the study of leaders, and that followership is a morally salient facet of leadership as well (Baker, 2007; Hollander, 1992; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). My aim is not to develop a new theoretical framework, but rather to encourage leadership scholars and educators to further engage with ethical reasons and arguments when making prescriptive claims about leadership.

I suspect there are several explanations for the dearth of philosophical argument in research on the ethics of leadership. Social scientists, business scholars, historians and biographers have led the field, and moral philosophy requires a methodological approach that is very different from the tools they use. Yet when social scientists make claims about what a leader morally ought to do, or when historians characterize a leader's conduct as unethical,

they are using the tools of moral philosophy without engaging with relevant theoretical considerations or holding their arguments to standards of philosophical rigor and validity. Scholars who write as if moral philosophy is avoidable ultimately find themselves doing moral philosophy with their eyes closed. They implicitly defend normative positions, but they do not explicitly state those positions or subject them to reflective scrutiny.

Social scientists in leadership studies may be skeptical that moral philosophy amounts to much more than opinion. It is true that an ethicist's conclusion is an opinion. But it is an opinion backed by reasons and a rigorous argument that is held to standards of soundness (the empirical and normative assumptions are plausibly true) and validity (if the premises of the argument are true, the conclusion is true). An ethicist's considered judgment is not invalid simply because it is an opinion. A medical recommendation is in some sense only the physician's opinion, but sick patients nevertheless ought to defer to their physicians if they want to improve their health. Similarly, an ethical judgment is in this sense a philosopher's opinion, but leaders and leadership scholars ought to take philosophical arguments seriously, as I will argue, because no other method is better suited to answer moral questions.

Others may be skeptical about whether moral truths exist for philosophers to uncover. Yet such skepticism would strike with equal or greater force against other approaches to leadership ethics. Perhaps then the reason for the scarcity of philosophy in leadership ethics is that moral philosophers, including business ethicists, have not made their case to leadership scholars that a philosophical approach is necessary to settle ethical questions. If so, then the arguments I advance may be considered as an attempt to remedy this oversight.

My goal is twofold. First, I aim to make the case that rival approaches to leadership ethics, such as conceptual analysis, case studies, survey research, and lab experiments, cannot tell us what a leader ought to do when he or she faces a morally difficult circumstance. Second, I hope to show that the question "what should a leader do" can be answered. Though philosophers disagree about the nature of morality, there are truths about morality and we can make progress in learning about how to live and lead ethically.

How can we know what a leader should do?

Imagine that you face an ethical dilemma, where it is unclear what you morally ought to do or what the relevant moral reasons are (McConnell, 2014). How would you approach such a problem? You would probably think about the moral considerations in favor of and against each option. You might apply your most closely held ethical commitments to the dilemma by asking what your religion or cultural belief system requires. You might reflect on your most deeply held commitments and ask what your community's values can tell you about the question you face. You might talk to friends, clergy, colleagues, or family about your choice. And then, after introspection and reflection, you would choose what to do. You might be wrong. Your decision may harm someone or violate another's rights. You might later regret your decision. On reflection, you might identify factors you wished you had considered, or look back on your choice with knowledge you could not have had while making it.

What you probably would *not* do is take a survey. You wouldn't design an experiment to see how people would act if they were in your shoes. You probably wouldn't look at your job description in the hope that it will give you some insight about what to do. Surveys, experiments, and definitional analyses are not generally fruitful paths to moral knowledge. We do not teach our children that the right thing to do can be learned by an empirical study of managers in Fortune 500 companies. We do not condemn criminals and cads on the grounds

that the best description of their jobs would have required that they acted differently. Why, then, do we so often approach questions about ethical leadership in these ways?

To get a sense of the trends I am identifying, a representative example drawn from the leadership studies literature may be helpful. Survey research methods, which are deployed in many social-scientific analyses of leadership, are extremely influential in the field of leadership studies. Leadership scholars Michael Brown and Linda Trevino write,

> Philosophers have answered the question "what is ethical leadership" from a normative perspective, specifying how leaders "ought" to behave (Ciulla, 2004). By contrast, our social scientific approach to the topic is focused more on describing ethical leadership as well as identifying its antecedents and consequents. (Brown and Treviño, 2006)

Social-scientific approaches to ethical leadership prevail in leadership studies while there is a noteworthy lack of philosophical approaches (Price, forthcoming). The social-scientific approach defines "ethical leadership" as a construct that is intended to measure whether a person demonstrates "normatively appropriate conduct" in his or her actions and relationships, and whether he or she encourages other people to demonstrate normatively appropriate conduct as well, through his or her communication and management style (Brown et al., 2005). Or, proponents of this approach ask whether people think their managers are ethical, a line of questioning that is more likely to reveal whether a manager is admired or people identify with her (Brown and Treviño, 2013), than to reveal whether she is ethical.

To these ends, leadership scholars develop instruments and scales that identify traits that are potentially related to ethical leadership. They then write questionnaires to measure these traits, and interpret the survey results to determine whether people perceive a leader as ethical, and whether having a leader that is perceived as ethical changes how people perceive themselves (Neubert et al., 2009). Or, scholars seek to identify whether leaders with certain personality traits are perceived as more ethical and they find, unsurprisingly, that agreeable and conscientious people score higher on ethical leadership constructs, while neurotic, self-aggrandizing people do not (Bono and Judge, 2004; Rubin et al., 2005). Other surveys study how people's decision making changes in response to a leadership or subordinate role, or other situational factors (Stenmark and Mumford, 2011).

Often, the survey-based approach is justified on the grounds that "organizations want to know how to select, develop, and retain ethical leaders," and "business schools want to know how best to teach their students to become ethical leaders" (Brown and Treviño, 2006). These scholars argue that the constructs and measures they developed can make some progress toward that end. They write, "From a moral standpoint academic researchers have the opportunity to conduct research that can improve the ethical performance of leaders" (Brown and Treviño, 2006).

Yet seeming ethical is not the same as being ethical. Survey-based approaches to ethics are seriously misguided insofar as they aim to promote ethical leadership or answer questions about what a leader morally ought to do. Nevertheless, those who advocate for survey-based approaches suggest that their constructs can promote ethical leadership and do answer these questions. Much of the literature on ethical leadership takes this form, including the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ), the Leadership Virtues Questionnaire (Riggio et al., 2010), the Ethical Leadership Scale (ELS) (Brown and Treviño, 2006), The Ethical Leadership at Work Questionnaire (ELW) (Kalshoven et al., 2011), the Perceived Leader Integrity Scale (PLIS) (Craig and Gustafson, 1998) and the Managerial Moral Judgment Test (Loviscky et al., 2007). In addition to these survey instruments, some researchers assess

leaders' traits by using more general survey questions such as those in the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (Bass and Avolio, 1995) to report whether measured traits such as charismatic, considerate, or inspirational leadership correlates with the presence of formal ethics programs and an institutional commitment to diversity (Hood, 2003) or to show that certain leadership styles as measured by the MLQ correlate with perceptions of integrity, as measured by the another scale, such as the PLIS (Parry and Proctor-Thomson, 2002). Another area of research focuses not on perceptions of leaders directly, but asks respondents to evaluate leader's choices in specific scenarios in order to measure people's ethical reasoning abilities, to conduct ethical audits, and to better understand how perceptions of ethics vary across cultures (Reidenbach and Robin, 1990).

In other words, to the extent that a survey-based approach limits our inquiry into leadership ethics to a descriptive question, such an approach cannot establish normative conclusions. Consider for example researchers' claims in favor of the ALQ as an evaluative tool to assess leadership and ethics. Avolio and Gardner advocate for the ALQ partly on the grounds that it includes an assessment of whether a leader has a internalized a positive moral perspective (Avolio and Gardner, 2005). Elsewhere they write that authentic leaders are by definition of high moral character because leaders who are deemed authentic according to their construct will necessarily have reached a higher level of moral development (Gardner et al., 2005a, 396–397). Like many other scholars who aim to empirically measure ethical leadership (Brown and Treviño, 2006; Jurkiewicz and Massey Jr., 1998), proponents of the ALQ (Gardner et al., 2005a; Walumbwa et al., 2008) also justify these moral claims on the grounds that their measure is conceptually inconsistent with low levels of levels on a scale of moral development according (Kohlberg, 1984) or Rest's Defining Issues Test (Rest et al., 1999).[2] Yet these measures of moral development do not evaluate whether a person holds a plausible moral theory, they only evaluate complexity of his or her moral reasoning. The ALQ cannot measure whether leaders have internalized a positive moral perspective or reached higher levels of moral development because it does not specify what ethics requires. For example, it does not provide a theory of rights or the necessary conditions for wrongful harm, which would require a more thorough philosophical foundation (e.g. Bradley, 2012; Thomson, 1992). The ALQ evaluates leaders based on whether respondents agree with statements like, ''my supervisor makes difficult decisions based on high standards of ethical conduct,'' (Peus et al., 2011) but the questionnaire relies on respondents to use their own ethical judgments when responding to these statements. Therefore the ALQ cannot evaluate leaders' behavior according to ethical standards that particular respondents reject, even if those ethical principles are justified.

More generally, surveys and instruments that measure whether a leader is perceived as ethical can advance our understanding of leaders' and followers' psychology, but they cannot not tell us how a leader can be more ethical. People may perceive a leader as ethical when he or she is not, or mistakenly perceive an ethical leader as unethical. Yet surveys and social scientific constructs assume that respondents are accurate judges of whether a leader to acts ethically. Other constructs assume that it is good for a leader to make people act with ethics in mind, without ever specifying which ends are the right ones (Neubert et al., 2013; Toor and Ofori, 2009).

Since a survey cannot tell us whether a leader who is perceived as ethical is in fact on the right track, survey approaches potentially fall short of their stated aims, such as the goal of avoiding corporate scandals or corruption. Though it is practically a cliché for empirical researchers to frame their findings by noting that ''increasingly society and

communities are touting the importance of ethical leaders in business,'' (Neubert et al., 2013) or ''recent fraud scandals have put ethical leader behavior high on the priority list of organizations'' (Kalshoven et al., 2011), when people in society, communities, or organizations are concerned that leaders may be unethical they are not primarily worried that their leaders may be seen as unethical by subordinates. Rather, people who raise concerns about leadership ethics are primarily worried that their leaders are doing something that is in fact immoral.

On the other hand, it is often useful to survey people's perceptions of ethical leadership, and more generally to use a range descriptive methods to better understand the contexts under which leaders make decisions (Jepson, 2009). And while by necessity these methods can only tell half the story, it is as important for ethicists to understand the circumstances they are evaluating as it is for empirical leadership scholars to engage with the normative reasons that ought to inform a leader's conduct. Without a rigorous understanding of right and wrong, researchers cannot address people's fundamental concerns about unethical leadership. Without a rigorous understanding of leader's circumstances, researchers may not be able to know whether a leader's decision was the best choice that was morally available or whether her choice was an ethical failure.

For example, in order to know whether a soldier may rightly kill during wartime one must first know which conditions give a person the authority to kill, the conditions that make combatants and bystanders liable to be killed, and whether institutional rules that permit or prohibit killing affect the permissibility of killing. If soldiers were never authorized to kill during wartime, then empirical considerations about necessity and the likelihood of success would not be ethically relevant. But if pacifism were a false moral principle, then there would be further ethical questions about the ethics of killing in war for which empirical considerations may be relevant, though not decisive. Or, consider an example drawn from business ethics. In order to know whether it is wrong for a manager to require employees to work without overtime pay one must first know whether implicit labor agreements ought to be respected and whether people in positions of power have special duties of care to their subordinates. Descriptive approaches such as surveys cannot answer these questions on their own.

A similar critique applies to other empirical approaches, such as experimental research that considers ethical behavior. For example, the famous Stanford prison experiment found that people are more likely to commit acts of cruelty and violence if they are assigned a leadership role or position of power (Haney and Zimbardo, 1998). Another famous experiment found that people are more likely to inflict pain on others if an authority figure tells them to (Milgram, 1963). In that tradition, leadership scholars have further confirmed that confronting leaders or assuming a leadership role changes how people behave, and may make people behave less ethically (Harvey and Sims, 1979). Other experiments find that certain kinds of leadership training might promote a more collectivist orientation among followers, but do not cause followers' internalization of an organization's moral values (Dvir et al., 2002).

Computer simulations also highlight the challenges that leaders can face in certain institutional climates and the way that institutions can potentially encourage a cycle of unethical behavior (Chen, 2010). This research is useful for understanding the role of institutions in cultivating virtue, but it cannot tell us whether obedience is generally a virtue or a vice, or whether people who are faced with authoritarian commands are responsible for what they do (Solomon, 2003).

Another trend in leadership studies is to simply define leadership in a normative way. These leadership scholars seem to think that if we only could define leadership in the right way, we would know how a leader should act. For example, James MacGregor Burns contrasts leadership with "naked power wielding" and asserts that true leaders will act within some intuitively ethical constraints (Burns, 1998). Similarly, Robert Greenleaf suggests that we can glean normative guidance by learning how to emulate his description of a servant leader (Greenleaf, 2002). Other scholars debate the merits of these definitions on normative terms (Stone et al., 2004). Yet as Joanne Ciulla points out, even if we developed a perfect definition of leadership, that definition wouldn't tell someone in a position of power what he or she should do (Ciulla, 1995).

Leadership scholars from other disciplines address normative questions as well. Some endeavor simply to describe historical examples and case studies of ethical and unethical leaders. This is a worthwhile project, because there are surely important lessons from history about the challenges that people faced when they tried to do the right thing. And many of the ethical challenges that leaders faced in the past or in different circumstances are surely relevant to today's leaders. Yet, in some cases, leadership scholars invite readers to infer further that we should look to history's great men and women for the answers about what a leader should do (Gardner et al., 2011; Wills, 1995). Or, some leadership scholars infer best practices from case studies of unethical leaders, without explaining first why those leaders were unethical (Kellerman, 2004; Lipman-Blumen, 2006).

Finally, some scholars in the humanities may look to literature and the history of ideas for insight about leadership ethics (Wren, 1995). For example, Frank Shushok and Scott Moore suggest looking to great texts, such as Macbeth, because through those texts students will learn to answer questions such as "How hard should one try to get the top job?" and can learn practical guidance about the ethics of deception, virtue, and the common good (Frank and Moore, 2010). Historiography and literary analysis might demonstrate how authors and public intellectuals thought about leadership and ethics throughout history. This kind of criticism can also give us a sense of which ethical principles are possible, and, if accompanied by further argument, can demonstrate the possibility of moral progress over time (Huemer, 2015). But like the survey analyses just described, these approaches explicate perceptions of ethics; they do not settle the question of what leaders ought to do.

My claim is not that these approaches do not have merit for understanding important aspects of ethical leadership. Empirical studies can show us how people perceive leaders and how leaders understand themselves. Understanding how institutions or personalities affect perceptions of ethical behavior can explain ethical failures in leadership, and hopefully contribute to our understanding of how to make leaders more ethical. It is also important to think about the definition of leadership, if only because so many people attribute normative significance to that term. Similarly, historical investigations into leadership give us a sense of what is possible, and can alert us to the challenges that leaders might face whether they are ethical or unethical. The history of ideas is also important because it illustrates how people thought about leadership ethics in the past, and can helpfully frame normative debates today.

However, despite their merits, these approaches will fall short insofar as they attempt to explain what a leader (morally) ought to do. The following taxonomy illustrates the way each approach can inform our understanding of ethical leadership, while recognizing that there are may be several ways to approach many of these questions.

Question	Method (Examples)
How do ethical commitments affect an organization's effectiveness?	An analysis of whether corporate social responsibility hurts profits (Burke and Logsdon, 1996).
What factors influence ***perceptions*** of ethical leadership?	A **survey** of how people perceive leaders with different personality traits (Brown and Treviño, 2006; Gardner et al., 2005a).
What considerations influence the likelihood of ethical conduct?	An experiment that assesses how context affects prosocial behavior (Hannah et al., 2011, 2014).
Do our judgments and behavior reflect our ethical commitments?	A resume study that tests whether people think that men are more qualified for a position (Moss-Racusin et al., 2012).
Do definitions of the word "leader" rely on normative assessments?	A conceptual analysis of the word "leader" or definitions of leadership (Rost, 1993, 1995).
How have leaders handled ethical challenges in the past?	An historical case study of how a leader handled an ethical challenge (e.g. Carson, 2015).
How did historical context inform an author's understanding of ethical leadership (or not)?	A historically informed analysis of a fictional depiction of leadership (Kaufman, 2013).
What did people used to think about the ethics of leadership?	An analysis of how a philosopher in the past talked about the ethics of leadership (Viroli, 2002).
When is it permissible for a leader to exempt himself from more general moral requirements? Do leaders have especially strong duties to avoid moral ignorance? What should a leader do?	A philosophical analysis of what a leader should do (Price, 2006).

If academic leadership scholars aim to conduct research that helps leaders act more ethically, the first thing they must know is what a leader ought to do. Yet the philosophical analysis that is required to answer this question is generally absent from discussions of ethical leadership.

Perhaps this is because it is assumed that moral principles are straightforward, as when people assert that leaders should be compassionate, honest, and humble. Or some leadership scholars may suspect that moral principles are unknowable, and thus casually conflate *perceptions* of ethics with ethics, as if all we can know about morality is what psychology undergraduates, business students, and middle managers think about morality. Both beliefs are seriously mistaken. Ironically, these scholars often characterize unethical leadership as an indifference to ethics or a reluctance to genuinely deliberate about morality. Yet empirical scholars who assume particular ethical principles without argument demonstrate the very same indifference to morality and lack of reflection that they warn leaders against.

An argument against empirical approaches

So far I have only pointed out that the methods that have heretofore dominated studies of ethical leadership do not answer the question of what a leader should do. One may attempt to defend purely descriptive and empirical approaches on the grounds that morality *just is*

what people perceive it to be. This view faces several serious objections. First, equivocation between perceptions of ethics and the truth about what one should do entrenches our own moral biases. More generally, if moral reasons were the kinds of things that could be uncovered by a survey or a computer simulation, it would imply that moral reasons are very different than the principles of justice, fairness, equality or rightness that are generally understood as ethical considerations. For example, to say that moral reasons are the sorts of things that a questionnaire could uncover is to imply that the phrase "It was wrong for you to steal from your neighbors" is equivalent to the phrase "Stealing from your neighbors polls badly in the groups we surveyed." This would call into question whether moral reasons should have any authority at all.

This is not to say that moral reasons have no basis in our psychology or our attitudes. Many philosophers will agree that moral reasons depend on attitudes or the nature of human psychology (Korsgaard, 1993; Smith, 1994; Sobel, 1997; Street, 2009). However, not all views about what is moral have equal merit. A survey that measures how members of an organization perceive their leaders, for example, is an especially poor guide to knowing what a leader ought to do, even if we accept that moral reasons depend on attitudes in some way. Relatedly, morality is not conceptually equivalent to widespread agreement or majority opinion. After all, majorities sometimes vote in favor of immoral policies. And it is often unpopular for leaders to do the right thing. But that something is unpopular does not mean that it is not the right thing for a leader to do. Though leaders ought to consider their follower's perspective, for moral and instrumental reasons, followers are not always authorities on justice or ethics. For these reasons, studies that emphasize perceptions of leaders potentially grant followers' perceptions undue authority over ethical questions. Like leaders, followers can be systematically misguided or immoral, and often are.

Consider the ELS (Brown and Treviño, 2006; Brown et al., 2005) as an illustration of why empirical studies of perceptions of ethics are a poor method for finding moral insight or assessing the ethics of a leader. Brown and Trevinio's ELS is a construct based on survey data where they ask questions to answer questions about whether a leader takes communication seriously, "cares a lot," "[sets] an example of what is the correct way to treat others," treats people fairly and equitably, values honesty, and listens to employees (Brown et al., 2005). They base the ELS partly on an earlier theoretical framework which states that in order to develop a reputation for ethical leadership one must be seen as moral person who is honest and fair and also as moral manager who communicates about ethics and rewards ethical behavior (Trevino et al., 2000).

The authors claim that these survey items are "designed to tap the full domain of ethical leadership," and able to develop and predict ethical leadership (Brown et al., 2005). Yet this construct cannot tap the domain of what ethical leadership actually requires or develop and predict ethical leadership because like the ALQ, the ELS is based on survey data that does not assess the ethics of what leaders or respondents are doing. Where the ELS does evaluate leaders' conduct with reference to an ethical standard, it asks respondents whether their leaders are perceived to use ethical means to achieve their goals. It asks people whether a leader "conducts his/her life in an ethical manner" or asks "what is the right thing to do?" when making a decision (Brown et al., 2005), but the ELS does not question whether a leader's goals are ethical or whether people's perceptions of ethical leadership are justified.

It is misleading that surveys like these purport to gauge ethical leadership. To see why, imagine a totalitarian society that is founded on a racist and genocidal ideology, such as

Nazi Germany. In such a society, people who are included in organizations are likely to subscribe to the dominant ideology of racism and genocide. Members of organizations may also affirm principles like honesty, integrity, and fidelity that are measured by the ELS. If researchers distributed surveys to measure ethical leadership in such a society, they may find that a leader who is genuinely committed to racism and genocide is deemed a moral person because he is an honest friend and faithful husband. And such a person might be regarded as a moral manager because he proactively emphasizes a genocidal ideology and inspires others to commit to racism and genocide as well.

This thought experiment illustrates that a survey like the ELS cannot measure whether a person demonstrates normatively appropriate conduct and encourages others to do the same, as Brown and Treviño suggest, because it does not take a stand on what is normatively appropriate. While we would all agree that genocidal racism is not normatively appropriate, in an organization where everyone is committed to genocidal racism the ELS cannot find fault with leaders who promote genocide. Paradoxically, a leader who fails to fully encourage racism and genocide may score lower on their ELS in a society where their action deviated from their organization's moral commitments.

At several points, Brown and Treviñio do explicitly clarify that their work measures perceptions of ethics rather than ethical conduct (Jordan et al., 2013; Trevino et al., 2000, 2003, 2008). Yet they invite conflation between ethics and perceptions of ethics when they use the term "ethical leadership" to refer to "perceived ethical leadership." Sometimes they even suggest that perceived ethical leadership is what really matters, or that perceptions of ethical leadership and ethical leadership are coextensive. For example, Treviñio and Brown review scientific studies of business ethics to develop recommendations for executives who are interested in developing more ethical employees and managers, yet they never specify which behaviors are unethical (Trevino and Brown, 2004). Instead, they summarize research about perceptions of ethics to support each claim. So in order to defend the claim that "most people are less ethical than they used to be" they cite a 2002 poll released by PR Newswire that finds that, "sixty-eight per cent of those surveyed believe that senior corporate executives are less honest and trustworthy today than they were a decade ago." Yet this kind of evidence says nothing about whether people are less ethical than they used to be. And clearly, the fact that people no longer racially segregate their employees, that there is less discrimination against women worldwide, that there are greater legal protections for people of color and marginalized groups, that fewer LGBT*Q populations face violations of their human rights, that violence has drastically declined, and that people no longer legally enslave a proportion of their workers, would all suggest that in fact, people are far more ethical than they used to be (Huemer, 2015). These examples illustrate the hazards of focusing on perceptions of ethics to make inferences about ethics.

Elsewhere Treviño, Hartman and Brown implicitly suggest that perceptions of ethics may matter more than ethical conduct when they write,

> Plato asked, which extreme would you rather be: "an unethical person with a good reputation or an ethical person with a reputation for injustice?" . . . Plato knew that reputation was important. We now understand that reputation and others' perceptions of you are key to executive ethical leadership. (Trevino et al., 2000)

Yet Plato's arguments about the distinction between an ethical reputation and ethical conduct demonstrate the dangers of empirical approaches to leadership ethics, not the virtues of such an approach. In *The Republic*, Plato introduces the choice between being ethical and

being perceived as ethical through the story of the Ring of Gyges, a ring that makes the person wearing it invisible and therefore enables him to act unjustly without being caught. This allegory is presented as an example of the widely held but mistaken view that perceptions of ethics matter more than ethics—a view that Plato spends the rest of The Republic arguing against (Plato and Bloom, 1991: 36). Elsewhere in the Republic, Plato explicitly cautions against relying on perceptions of ethics, as when he describes the dangers of selecting leaders democratically because they may become tyrants (Plato and Bloom, 1991: 241). Plato also compares popular perceptions of justice to mere shadows on the wall, in the famous allegory of the cave, to make the point that ethical theories that are widely held may not withstand further scrutiny and those who unreflectively adopt the popular opinion about ethics are at greater risk of committing serious injustices.

Another salient hazard of basing ethical judgments on people's unreflective views about ethics is that people's views are influenced by potentially unjustified cognitive biases and prejudice. For example, people tend to express a preference for the current state of affairs and perceive deviations from the status quo as more *morally* risky than maintaining the status quo. Evidence of status quo bias is robust, including research that finds that even when the consequences of two proposals are identical, survey respondents oppose policies that are framed in terms of lives lost rather than lived saved (Bostrom and Ord, 2006). Survey respondents and participants in psychology experiments are also racially biased, which can further compromise their ability to make moral judgments about others (Smith and Levinson, 2011). Participants in research are also more inclined to extend moral consideration to attractive people, or to members of their ethnic group or nation (Bloom, 2014). People are also biased to accept the legitimacy of authority figures—which is especially troubling for researchers who are interested in leadership ethics because the very fact that a person is a leader may systematically distort perceptions of whether the leader is ethical (Huemer, 2012). And people's perceptions of ethics are also correlated with perceptions of leadership and inversely correlated with leaders' salary progression, which may or may not be an unjustified bias (Morgan, 1993).

The presence of confirmation bias is especially problematic for empirical studies of leadership ethics that limit their sample to a single organization. Confirmation bias refers to people's tendency to adopt beliefs that justify their other beliefs or behaviors (Nickerson, 1998). In light of the substantial body of evidence that confirmation bias influences people's perceptions, we should expect that members of an organization are strongly susceptible to the psychological pressure to justify the conduct of their co-workers and organization. Even if measuring perceptions of ethics had some value for knowing what leaders should do, focusing exclusively on how members of an organization perceive their leaders entrenches a set of biases that systematically obscures people's capacity to critically reason about the ethics of their group.

These considerations illustrate that people's perceptions of ethics are not a reliable guide to what is ethical, and that solely empirical approaches to leadership ethics are therefore a poor guide to knowing how a leader should act. As an analogy, say a researcher is interested in evolution. To many survey respondents, evolution is very counterintuitive—in 2013, 33% of Americans believes that humans existed on earth since the beginning of time (Pew Research Center, 2013). Yet this frightening statistic has nothing to do with whether the theory of evolution is true. It is surely worthwhile for researchers to know what people think about evolution, but these survey results do not undermine the claim that humans are an evolved species that has not existed on earth since the beginning of time.

Proponents of empirical approaches to ethics may reject this analogy by arguing that evolution is a matter of science whereas moral reasons depend on our attitudes, so empirical investigations into people's attitudes are the best way to better understand morality. Yet even if moral reasons depend on our attitudes, that would not imply that surveys and other empirical approaches will advance our understanding of leadership ethics. The assertion that moral reasons are expressions of people's attitudes or beliefs is a metaethical claim about the nature of moral reasons. Metaethics is the study of the nature of moral judgments. Philosophers who study metaethics ask questions such as, "are moral reasons beliefs about natural facts?" and "do moral reasons express beliefs?" Some metaethicists think that moral reasons express beliefs about attitudes, and that moral requirements depend on facts about people's psychologies (Railton, 1986; Velleman, 2013). Yet even the claim that moral principles are reducible to psychological facts does not imply that we should conduct a survey to discover what we morally ought to do. Otherwise, such a moral theory would not be able to explain why morality is instructive at all in telling us what to do. If moral reasons were just whatever a survey respondent said they were, then we could not explain how people can act wrongly when they believe their actions are ethical.

Perhaps proponents of empirical approaches to leadership ethics who study organizations do not think that each person's *individual* perceptions of ethics are authoritative, but rather that a *group's* perceptions are morally authoritative. But such a moral theory would be unable to explain why we think of the abolition of institutionalized slavery and the political enfranchisement of women as moral progress. Even though a survey in the 18th-century would have revealed that many people thought owning people was permissible, slavery was nevertheless wrong in the 18th-century just as it is today.[3] Organizations researchers may also suspect that empirical evidence challenges moral philosophy—for example, when they point out that most people think that it is sometimes permissible to lie or that people reliably miscalculate the consequences of their actions (Greenberg and Bies, 1992). Yet as one of the leading proponents of the ELS acknowledges, empirical evidence does not undermine a moral theory any more than normative argument undermines the validity of an empirical study (Weaver and Trevino, 1994). The two different methods are addressing two different questions.

Philosophical methodology

Proponents of a philosophical approach to leadership ethics rely on intuitions to answer moral questions. Some people call this kind of reasoning "from the armchair" because one can use introspection and arguments to answer moral questions without data collection. Reasoning from the armchair is a better way to answer the question "what should a leader do?" than descriptive and experimental methods.

Before I continue, an example of this type of reasoning may be helpful. We may be interested in the question, "Should business leaders use company funds to contribute to philanthropic causes?" To answer this question, one might consider a famous case posed by Peter Singer

> *Drowning Child:* You are waking past a shallow pond and you see a child drowning. You could easily save the child but doing so would ruin your expensive clothes (Singer, 1972).

Singer argues that you ought to save the drowning child because if you can prevent something bad from happening without sacrificing something of comparable moral importance then you should (Singer, 1972). He then argues that if you agree with him that you morally ought to save the child in this case then you ought to also think you should sacrifice some of your income to save children who are dying of famine in other countries, because it is not morally relevant if a desperately needy child is in front of us or far away. We can state his argument like this (where P1 and P2 are premises and C is the conclusion):

> P1: You ought to save a drowning child if doing so does not compromise anything of comparable moral importance.
> P2: It is morally irrelevant if a needy child is close or far away.
> C: You ought to assist needy children who are far away (e.g. donating to famine relief) if doing so does not compromise anything of comparable moral importance.

Those who are interested in ethical leadership in business may then read this argument as a justification for corporate philanthropy, on the grounds that businesses are bound by the same moral principles as the rest of us.[4] This case also raises interesting questions about the ethics of leadership such as, ''Is it true that distance is morally irrelevant?'' ''Should leaders be partial to needy people in their communities'' and ''Do the global poor have a claim to the resources in rich countries?''

For our purposes, it is important to note that Singer's argument in favor of giving to famine relief does not rely on any research about what people think about famine relief or experiments about the conditions that make people inclined to give. Empirical approaches that look to perceptions of ethics for guidance about what a leader should do seemingly affirm the mistaken view that moral principles, such as the principle that one ought to give money to famine relief, *depend* on whether people agree with the principles. But if people should give to famine relief it is not because survey respondents agree with the claim ''people should give to famine relief,'' it is because the principle that one ought to give is supported by moral reasons (e.g. it is wrong to allow people to suffer if their suffering can easily be prevented, people have duties to assist those in need). And if the principle is supported by moral reasons, one is still justified in believing it even if others disagree.

These normative arguments have potentially revisionary implications for our understanding of ethical leadership. To continue with Singer's example, his argument will only succeed if each premise is true, and he argues for each premise by appealing to our intuitions about the moral irrelevance of distance and the drowning child case. It also relies on intuitions about validity, the intuition that if his premises are true then the conclusion must be true as well. Singer's argument is a classic example of how philosophers rely on intuitions when making ethical arguments.[5] Even if you do not accept Singer's conclusion, the argument can contribute to your understanding of ethical leadership by prompting you to identify which premise you reject, or the reasons you think his argument is valid. And if you accept that Singer's argument is valid, even if you reject one or both premises, you may still be interested in what those premises would entail. Singer's argument advances our understanding of ethical leadership even if it fails to convince because we can still debate whether his conclusion *would be* true *if* the premises were true (Harman, 2014).

Philosophers call the process of weighing moral judgments in particular cases against our beliefs about other similar cases and our broader moral theories the process of seeking *reflective equilibrium*. Reflective equilibrium is achieved when our moral judgments cohere,

or at least when none of them conflict with independently justified foundational beliefs (McMahan, 2000). For example, if you find Singer's premises plausible but do not accept his conclusion, then you might be prompted to rethink your belief that his premises are true in order to maintain your belief that his conclusion is false. You may then deny that distance is morally irrelevant to a person's duty to provide assistance. Or you may reject the argument on the grounds that the conclusion does not follow from the premises so the argument is invalid. In its particulars, reflective equilibrium is controversial because some philosophers worry that it is unjustifiably biased against revisionary beliefs or that it cannot reliably make moral progress without starting from rationally defensible premises (Kelly and McGrath, 2010). Another challenge to this method comes from experimental philosophers, who point out that people's moral intuitions vary widely, even among philosophers, and are seemingly influenced by arbitrary or irrelevant considerations (Prinz, 2008). Still, some intuitions are better than others, and the lesson from experimental philosophy is not that armchair intuitions should be roundly discarded but rather that philosophers should take the factors that potentially distort their moral intuitions seriously (Levy, 2013).

Despite these challenges, the Socratic process of evaluating moral judgments in light of their implications for other moral intuitions is crucial when asking, "What should a leader do?" if only because the alternative approaches are inadequate on their own. Prescriptive conclusions about leadership all rely on prescriptive presuppositions, and it is worthwhile to interrogate those presupposed assumptions when evaluating the ethics of leadership. Though scholars have questioned the effectiveness of ethics education (e.g. business ethics education, (McDonald and Donleavy, 1995)), the preceding arguments tell in favor of further engagement compared to the relatively scarcity of philosophical approaches within leadership studies today.

Specifically, I propose the following strategies for leadership educators scholars to further draw on philosophical discussions of leadership ethics in addition to empirical research. First, leadership educators ought to productively engage with philosophical approaches to leadership ethics (e.g. Price, 2006), and scholarship from business ethics, medical ethics, and political philosophy that addresses the specific questions that leaders face. For example, philosophers who research business ethics have long debated whether leaders may justifiably pay their workers sweatshop wages if the workers consent (e.g. Arnold and Bowie, 2007; Zwolinski, 2007). Or, just war theorists disagree about whether and when killing in war is permissible (Lazar, 2010; McMahan, 2011). On its own, however, mere engagement is insufficient because philosophers disagree in these cases about what a leader ought to do. In addition, leaders ought to be capable of critically evaluating arguments and assessing their validity, and so leadership educators who aim to promote leaders' ethical reasoning abilities should consider emphasizing critical thinking to a greater extent.[6]

Educators, development professionals, and leaders who make ethics a priority should also be mindful of the aforementioned hazards of status quo bias in applied ethics (Bostrom and Ord, 2006), and the countervailing moral imperative to avoid moral risks. In some cases, prescriptive judgments may depart from a leader's moral judgments. For example, a leader may recognize her own potential moral ignorance and fallibility and act more conscientiously than she thinks is warranted (Guerrero, 2007; Moller, 2011). But even when a leader has decisive moral reason to do refrain from doing what she thinks is morally justified, it is because she also judges that people with great responsibility are morally obligated to act more cautiously. In other words, however, a leader conceives of her moral obligations, those

obligations will be based on moral considerations, such as a leader's duty to avoid harm, remain honest, or be conscientious in light of her own moral uncertainty.

In the above discussion of philosophical methodology, I focused on philosophers' arguments, but it is worth noting that anyone can engage in ethical reasoning with the tools of philosophical methodology. My only claim is that prescriptive judgments about what a leader ought to do should be subjected to further scrutiny in light of other moral reasons, but of course moral reasoning is not limited to philosophers or any particular group of people. On the contrary, people with diverse roles and backgrounds should be encouraged to participate in the practice of developing valid arguments that challenge our moral beliefs. Tolerance for differences and moral disagreement is especially important in philosophical discussions leadership ethics given that the field is in its infancy. More generally, it is beneficial for any moral community to consider a diversity of perspectives when making ethical judgments (Riley, 2005). After all, as JS Mill wrote, "he who knows only his own side of the case knows little of that" (Mill, 2008: 42).

Leadership and moral authority

One may object to the approach to moral problems that I am recommending for leadership scholars on the grounds that it is wrong for leaders to impose controversial moral views on people who disagree. If so, then there would be special reason for leaders in particular to refrain from imposing their views on followers, and survey research would be especially relevant to leadership ethics because information about followers' perceptions of ethics would help leaders craft policies that were more tolerant of moral disagreement and the deeply held commitments of their subordinates. According to such a view, even if a leader had the right moral theory, it might still be wrong for him to impose it on people. Critics of my approach may accuse me of advocating for philosopher kings who impose their views of ethics on followers who have no reasons of their own to endorse their leader's views. Some philosophers, following John Rawls, have developed the idea that leaders should lead based on rules that are mutually acceptable by shareholders or stakeholders, rather than leading based on their own opinions (Gaus, 2012; Quong, 2011; Rawls, 2005). This objection does not rely on the claim that morality is difficult to discern and that leaders are likely to be wrong. After all, even if leaders are likely to be wrong, so are the masses. The terrible history of man-made atrocities and world war is testament to the idea that leaders and followers alike can reflectively hold abhorrent and immoral views. Rather, the objection is that *leaders* are uniquely morally obligated to act in ways that their followers can reasonably accept.

If this objection were successful then it would be necessary to know which principles followers could reasonably endorse in order to evaluate the ethics of a leader's choice. If so, then empirical studies of followers' perceptions of leaders would be directly relevant to the question, "What should a leader do?" because such studies would reveal which ethical principles followers endorse. In this vein, empirical leadership scholars sometimes suggest that an advantage of their approach is that it can measure perceptions of ethics within the context of generally accepted moral norms, without questioning the norms themselves (Treviño et al., 2006). And authentic leadership scholars encourage scholars to consider how measures of authentic leadership will vary as perceptions of ethics vary between cultures, and note that this makes their approach more adaptable (Walumbwa et al., 2008). Similarly, Reidenbach and Robin argue that their ethics scales, which are

constructed by combining key principles from five major ethical theories in order to learn about people's perceptions of ethical conduct in business, are especially useful for helping managers know whether their actions will be perceived as ethical in a foreign cultural context (Reidenbach and Robin, 1990).

Presumably these features of descriptive approaches are presented as an advantage because people think that leaders should be evaluated within the context of accepted norms and not held to potentially controversial moral standards that some cultures reject. Knowledge of how perceptions of ethics vary across contexts and cultures would be valuable from a moral perspective if leaders were morally required to lead on the basis of values that are accepted by the their followers or people affected by their choices. This information would also be strategically useful for leaders who wish to be perceived as ethical in different cultures. But it would require further argument to establish that leaders' moral obligations varied depending on perceptions of leadership in a particular cultural context.

Yet I am skeptical that leaders' moral obligations do depend on people's perceptions of leadership in a particular cultural context, insofar as it this claim is grounded in the idea that leaders should lead based on rules that are mutually acceptable by those who are affected. Proponents of this view may suggest that it would be intolerant for a leader to require that people act in accordance with moral principles. But in making this claim, they assert that leaders ought to respect the value of toleration. The claim that toleration is a virtue is itself a moral claim that some people may reject. In other words, the claim that leaders should not lead on the basis of controversial moral principles relies on a controversial moral principle. Therefore, the seeming justification for taking a survey in order to know whether followers perceive their leaders as ethical, which appealed to the value of tolerance or respect for disagreement, is a justification that relies on a normative claim that people may reasonably reject. And as long as we are holding leaders to independent ethical standards, we might as well use philosophical reasoning to determine whether the leader is acting ethically rather than surveying followers to determine whether the leader is perceived as ethical by his followers.

Relatedly, some followers hold views that are clearly immoral and which any plausibly ethical leader should obviously disregard. For example, leaders in the American South are under no obligation to rule on the basis of the views of the KKK, even if many of their constituents are Klansmen. To say otherwise would be to say that leaders should at least consider using their position to further unjust policies merely because some of their followers are mistaken about what justice requires. We wouldn't accept this reasoning in other domains, however. That some people do not believe in climate change is not a reason for a leader to ignore global warming. Similarly, for moral reasoning, even if people do not believe that racism is wrong, racism is wrong because it expresses dehumanizing attitudes that are unjustified and harmful and it reliably causes people to oppress or disrespect people who deserve to be treated as equals. So it is appropriate to set some limits on which moral views merit consideration by leaders. Leaders should not unthinkingly defer to the political community without consideration of whether the community's values are justified, because the community may be racist or hold other clearly mistaken moral beliefs. Yet once we exclude views that are patently unreasonably and immoral, the same reasons in favor of excluding those positions also justify a leader's decision to disregard followers' other moral mistakes. Leaders must then judge which positions on

particular issues are morally justified. In other words, leaders must use moral philosophy to decide what to do.

One may reply that there is no reason to believe a moral philosopher about what a leader ought to do because even moral philosophers disagree about ethical questions. For some topics, it may even appear that moral philosophers disagree about ethics more than most people, which may undermine their credibility as moral experts. I am not arguing that leadership scholars should view philosophers as moral experts. Instead, I am arguing that leadership scholars should approach ethical questions the way that philosophers do, by relying on intuitions, considering thought experiments and historical examples, and making arguments on behalf of a considered judgment. The fact that people will disagree in their judgments about what one ought to do is no threat to this methodological claim. A person's belief about what to do should be justified on the basis of moral reasons. If other people have different beliefs, this doesn't undermine the legitimacy of philosophical methodology as a way of approaching moral questions. If anything, disagreement illustrates the value of a normative approach because when people disagree about ethics they are then prompted to consider new arguments and reconsider whether their own views are justified.

Another concern about disagreement is that it may seem to undermine our faith that there is an answer to the question, ''What should a leader do?'' If well-informed, clever philosophers disagree about the answers to moral questions then perhaps we should rethink whether answers exist at all, so the line of thinking goes. Yet as the example of climate science illustrated, the presence of disagreement should not undermine our belief that there is a right answer. Also, the claim that disagreement should undermine our belief in the objectivity of morality is itself a very controversial claim that is the subject of deep disagreement. If disagreement is grounds for skepticism about morality, then it is also a reason to be skeptical of the claim that disagreement is grounds for skepticism about morality (Shafer-Landau, 2014). Moreover, when people disagree about moral questions, or any question, they presuppose that there is a right answer—that is why they take such pains to convince others of their side. For this reason, the presence of disagreement should not undermine our faith in objectivity; rather disagreement about morality is evidence that many people are committed to a belief in moral objectivity.

In recent years, critical leadership scholars have increasingly questioned the authority of ''mainstream leadership studies'' on the grounds that many empirical investigations of leadership fail to sufficiently conceptualize the nature of power within leader–follower relations or the power of resistance. For example, David Collinson suggests that not only can the conceptual dichotomies that are often deployed by leadership researchers obscure important underlying relationships between people, they are also potentially ''an important means by power and control can be exercised in societies'' through the construction of division (Collinson, 2014). Broadening mainstream leadership studies to pay more attention to ethical considerations may go some way in addressing this critique, but critical leadership scholars may similarly question the underlying assumptions about power and authority within moral philosophy. This is a legitimate concern, as members of the discipline of academic philosophy strive to become more inclusive and culturally aware (Shepard, 2014). Yet the very concern that a philosophical approach embeds problematic assumptions about issues of power is premised on an ethical judgment about what people ought to do, namely, that all leaders leadership scholars ought to take care and consider their own privilege and standpoints when making prescriptive claims.

In other words, concerns about toleration and the authority of moral reasons do not undermine the case for a philosophical approach because they implicitly acknowledge that moral reasons ought to inform people's prescriptive judgments. And there are also moral reasons in favor of a philosophical approach, namely that empirical approaches to leadership ethics that equivocate between what people *think* a leader should do and what a leader *should* do are not more respectful to followers or morally neutral than the philosophical approach that I am proposing. Instead, they rely on the moral premise that a leader should lead in a way that is responsive the ethical beliefs to followers and observers. This is also a moral position that requires further argument in favor of it. Once we interrogate the idea that leaders ought to consult a survey to understand leadership ethics, the normative premise behind that idea does not survive further scrutiny for the reasons listed. A leader who falls short of doing the right thing is not justified in acting unethically, even if social scientific evidence suggests that her unethical conduct motivated others to do the same or that people in her organization approved of the unethical things she did. Those who suggest that it is somehow unfair or inappropriate for leadership scholars and leaders to support potentially controversial moral principles in the face of disagreement minimize the importance of moral inquiry (Enoch, 2013). Moral principles are intimate and important to people on both sides of any moral debate, and leaders should take people's views seriously and make their case, rather than appealing to surveys and experiments that obscure the normative dimensions of leadership and do not engage with or respond to anyone's deeply felt commitments.

Conclusion

I do not intend to discount the important work of leadership scholars who approach ethics in different ways. It is important to study perceptions of ethics as well as ethics. It is valuable to know what people think about the true nature of leadership, and how people thought about leadership in the past. But non-normative approaches cannot tell us how a leader should act when she faces a moral problem. This is not an objection to these approaches. Rather, I am simply arguing that a normative approach is an essential element of any project that aims to advise leaders about what to do.

Philosophical approaches are also limited. Philosophical methodology cannot tell us how leaders in the past thought about ethical challenges. Nor can it tell us how perceptions of ethics are influenced by a leader's personality or message. There are many ways to approach the topic of ethical leadership. Yet within leadership studies, scholars approach philosophical questions in non-philosophical ways. Meanwhile, political philosophers, business ethicists, and other applied ethicists have been using Socratic methods to question the conduct of leaders since, well, Socrates (Plato, 2003). Viewed in this historical context, the current trend of empirical approaches is the anomaly, not the norm. For leadership scholars to make progress in answering the question "what should a leader do?" they must not only consider how leaders are perceived and how they behave, leadership scholars must also develop arguments and test their intuitions against each other at some point in their investigations. The foregoing arguments not only identify the need for further development in the field of normative leadership ethics, they also provide a preliminary methodological foundation for leadership scholars and educators to speak to the ethics of leadership as well as perceptions of ethical leadership.

Joanne Ciulla's declaration that ethics is the heart of leadership (Ciulla, 2004) is a truism in leadership studies. But the empirical approaches that dominate the field cannot settle the most pressing questions of leadership ethics on their own. A philosophical approach is necessary. In other words, ethics is the heart of leadership and philosophy is the heart of leadership ethics.

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Notes

1. When I refer to the question "what should a leader do?" I am not committed to a particular distinction between what a leader does and what she allows. Rather, as some leadership scholars have suggested, leaders may engage in "decisive action" or "reflective inaction" (Simpson et al., 2002), and as ethicists note, both forms of leadership can be morally distinctive and leaders may in some circumstances be morally responsible for reflective inaction, or more generally, things that they allow (Quinn, 1989; Scheffler, 2004).
2. Of note, these effects are moderated by a leader's degree of Machiavellianism (Sendjaya et al., 2014).
3. It is possible that slaveholders, if not in the eighteenth century then at least in Ancient Egypt, were not blameworthy for owning slaves because they did not have access to the relevant moral knowledge that slavery was wrong (Rosen, 2004). This claim about blameworthiness is controversial (Harman, 2011). What is not controversial is the claim that slavery is wrong even if most people don't realize that it is wrong.
4. Relatedly, some may read this argument as relevant to stakeholder theory (Freeman, 2010; Gibson, 2000) since it holds that leaders should respect the claims of those who have a substantial interest in the firm or polity's behavior.
5. As I am using the term, intuitions are beliefs. When I refer to philosophical intuitions I am referring to beliefs that are subject to normative evaluation and reflection and scrutiny. In contrast, survey researchers do not further interrogate people's reported beliefs about ethics, ask whether those perceptions are coherent or justified, or hold them to standards of soundness and validity. I am calling these beliefs about ethics "perceptions." For more about the nature of intuitions see (Pust, 2016). For a further discussion of moral intuitions and their role in moral reasoning see (McMahan, 2000).
6. For an objection to this view, consider Michael Huemer's objections to critical thinking (Huemer, 2005).

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Author biography

Jessica Flanigan is an assistant professor of Leadership Studies and Philosophy, Politics, Economics, and Law in the Jepson School of Leadership Studies, University of Richmond.