

LEADERSHIP CYNOSURISM AND KANT'S IMPERATIVE

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ABSTRACT

This paper with the title, "Leadership Cynosurism and Kant's Imperative," is saddled with the problem of educing an ethical foundation for leadership from Kant's Metaphysics of moral. In Kant's Metaphysics of moral, he holds that an action is qualified as moral if it is borne out of the apriori, non contingent and unconditional sense of duty and obligation. Actions that possess these qualities are classified as good because they are borne out of the goodwill which is the absolute foundation from which every act derives its moral worth of goodness. He also opined that all deontological actions must be guided by the categorical imperative of moral action. In this work, we reason that since taking action in the form of policy and decision making constitute the defining characteristic as well the focal point of leadership, then by extrapolation from Kant, every leadership action and decision should be deontological in nature and be guided by the maxims of the categorical imperative to be qualified as moral. This work concludes that the operationalisation of these ideas of Kant will enhance objectivism, altruism and humanism and exterminate instrumentalism, self aggrandizement and injustice in leadership and thus serve as the cynosure for leadership.

Key words: Cynosure, Deontology, Goodwill, Categorical imperative

Introduction

Kant's leadership philosophy as educed from his *Metaphysics of Moral* is concerned with enunciating the principles of leadership that possess a universal appeal and validity i.e. binding on all humanity without exception. He was convinced that though a sociological survey of the actual behavior of people would grant us fantastic and scintillating information about how people

do behave, it would not offer us knowledge of how they *ought* to behave or conduct their affairs. This observation re-emphasizes the priority of the *ought* philosophical inquiry to the *how* and the *what* inquiries. Judgments as to the rightness or wrongness of our behavior constitute the domain of morality or practical reasons. All moral concepts do not depend on sense perception or any theology, physics or hyper-physics (empiricism) for their validity. Kant opted for an isolated metaphysics of morals whose origin and foundation is totally *a priori*. Kant observes that just as scientific knowledge is possible because of the *a priori* categories the mind brings to experience, “the basis of human obligation must not be sought in human nature or in the circumstances of the world in which (humanity) is placed, but *a priori* simply in the concepts of reason”. The concept from which practical actions of moral conduct (leadership) derives their worth is the concept of duty or obligation. The foundation of this rational morality is the unconditional or unqualifiable goodwill. The goodwill in its unconditional nature gives rise to some categorical imperatives. These imperatives or commands which Kant couched in three maxims constitute the litmus test of all moral actions, i.e. actions that arise from obligation, duty or goodwill. Our task here is to educe a metaphysics (foundation) of leadership from Kant’s metaphysics of morals. This eduction is possible because leadership philosophy falls within the domain of the science of rightness or wrongness of human conduct – morality.

Metaphysics (Building Blocks) of Moral Leadership

Etymologically, the term “lead” is derived from the old English “Laeden” which relates it with the act and art of guiding, conducting, taking decisions etc. Literally, leadership could be viewed as the act or art of decision making in conducting affairs whether personal or impersonal. Leadership thus falls within the realm of practical reason or morality which according to Kant deals with the *oughtness* of human behavior.

Kant in his *Metaphysics of Moral* sets out to distinguish a moral action/decision or conduct from a non-moral one. He observes that the criterion for judging an action as moral or non-moral is determined by the motive which occasions the act. Some actions are borne out of and premised on the conditionalities of utility, consequence, inclination or incentive. These actions admit of conditional necessity (“Do x if...” or “Do x in order that...”) and are therefore relative, particular

and empirical. Against this category of action which possesses empirical orientation, Kant retorts:

Is it not the utmost necessity to construct a pure moral philosophy which is completely freed from everything which may be only empirical...? Everyone must admit that a law, if it is to hold morally i.e. as a ground of obligation must imply absolute necessity, ... the ground of obligation here must not be sought in the nature of man or in the circumstances in which he is placed, but sought a priori solely in the concepts of pure reason...But a completely isolated metaphysics of morals mixed with no anthropology, no physics or hyperphysics... is not only an indispensable substrate of all... it is also a desideratum of the highest importance for the actual fulfillment of its precepts. From what has been said it is clear that all moral concepts have their seat and origin entirely *a priori* in reason. It is obvious that they cannot be abstracted from any empirical and hence merely contingent cognitions. In the purity of their origin lies their worthiness to serve us as supreme practical principles and to the extent that something empirical is added to them just this much is subtracted from their genuine influence and from the unqualified worth of actions. (*Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* 5, 27 – 28).

In this excerpt, Kant holds, contrary to actions of conditional necessity; which are contingent in nature, that the motive of all acts which can be qualified as moral, is the sense of duty or obligation from which such acts arise. To this end, leadership styles or decision theories could be adjudged either as moral if they are borne out of the *a priori* unconditional, non contingent sense of duty or obligation or immoral if they are contingent on or borne out of the *a posteriori* sense of utility, inclination, incentive, inducement or consequence. An obligation or duty is that which a man ought to do despite his inclinations or predilection to do otherwise.

Goodwill as the Foundation of Good Leadership

Since leadership entails abidance to proper rules of behavior in order to be able to conduct both personal and public affairs therefore leadership is an integral aspect of morality and ipso facto an aspect of rationality. This deduction is borne out of Kant's reasoning that morality is an aspect of rationality and is concerned with our consciousness of rules or laws of behavior which are considered both universal and necessary. The marks or qualities of universality and necessity are marks and qualities of *a priori* judgment. This confirms Kant's perspective that the principles of behavior are derived by the practical reason a priori. Kant's focus was therefore on the rational *a priori* motive of leadership instead of focusing on the practical incentives that accrue as consequences of occupying a leadership authority or playing a leadership role.

Morality and rationality are intricately connected just like leadership is closely linked to the former two. Our faculty of rationality prompts us to ask questions such as "what should I do? how should I do it?" why should I do it?" As a leader, such rational reflections bring to the fore your consciousness of being under an obligation to act in a particular or distinct way. The inquiries implore one therefore to know what one ought to do. The *ought* of behavior or action is determined within the precinct of morality.

Since the *ought* is independent of all contingencies, it possesses the qualities of necessity and universality. Therefore, the actions that a leader ought to take must not be limited to a particular leader alone, but should be a necessary and universal action for all leaders, since every leader encounters the rational inquiries of the how? what? and the why? In making such inquiries, every leader is rationally conscious of a subsisting obligation to act in a distinct way. Therefore, the litmus test of a morally good act (of leadership) is whether its principles are capable of being applied to all rational beings without exception. That is, whether its principles have the marks of necessity, universality and unconditionality.

Kant reasons that actions that are borne out of the sense of duty and obligation are qualifiable as good because they could be traceable to the absolute foundation from which every act derives its moral worth of goodness. This is the Goodwill. Describing goodwill, he says "Nothing can

possibly be conceived in the world, or even out of it, which can be called good without qualification, except a Goodwill.” To buttress this concept further, Kant explains that:

The goodwill is not good because of what it effects or accomplishes or because of its adequacy to achieve some proposed end, it is good because of its willing, i.e., it is good of itself. And regarded for itself, it is to be esteemed incomparably higher than anything which could be brought about by it in favour of any inclination.... Even if it should happen that, owing to special disfavor of fortune, or niggardly provision of a step-motherly nature, this will should wholly lack the power to accomplish its purpose, if with its greatest effort it should yet achieve nothing, and there should remain only the good will Then, like a jewel, it would still shine by its own light, as a thing which has its whole value in itself. Its usefulness or fruitlessness can neither diminish nor augment this worth (*Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 10).

Acting out of goodwill is synonymic with acting from duty and obligation. Actions that arise from duty whose motive is the unconditional goodwill are classified as deontological – (*deon* – Greek word for duty) as opposed to teleological actions (*teleos* – Greek word for end) which are motivated by the consideration of end achievement. It is therefore ad rem with Kant’s leadership philosophy that a good leader is one whose actions are motivated by the unconditional and non-self-servient goodwill.

Kant’s Categorical Imperative for Good Leadership

Kant contrived the phrase “the categorical imperative”, to clinch his thoughts on morality. An imperative is a command that is preemptory and imperatives are either hypothetical or categorical. Hypothetical imperatives command in a conditional and contingent form. For example: “Do X if you want y”. Categorical imperatives command in an absolute, non conditional, unqualifiable and obligatory manner without reference to consequences or personal interest. A categorical imperative commands you to do x in as much as x is intrinsically right, i.e. in spite of y. Kant distinguishes between the two thus:

All imperatives command either hypothetically or categorically. The former present the practical necessity of a possible action as a means to achieving something else which one desires (or which

one may possibly desire). The categorical imperative would be one which presented in action as itself objectively necessary, without regard to any other end (*Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 31).

Kant's categorical imperative "directly commands a certain conduct without making condition some purpose to be reached by it It concerns not the material of the action and its intended result but the form and the principle from which it results. What is essentially good in it consists in 'the; intention the result being what it may. This imperative may be called the imperative of morality (*Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 33).

The categorical imperative being an imperative of moral action also constitutes the imperative for actions that could be qualified as good. On this note, a leadership that could be qualified as good must necessarily be one that abides with the principle of the categorical imperative. The basic principle of the categorical imperative is the principle of universalisation of action. They are different versions of the expression of the principle of the categorical imperative derivable from Kant (*Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 39 - 52) thus;

1. Act only according to that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.
2. I am never to act otherwise than so that my maxim should become a universal law.
3. Act only so that the will through its maxim could regard itself at the same time as making universal laws.
4. Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never simply as a means.
5. Act so that your will regards itself as making universal law through its maxims.
6. Act as if you were always through your maxims a law-making member in a universal kingdom of ends.

Kant's leadership philosophy, what we call philosophy of categorical imperativism opines that the ultimate motivation for leadership ought to be the unconditional goodwill which must serve as a moral foundation which occasions every leadership obligation and duty. The goodwill obliges categorically not contingently or conditionally. The commands of the goodwill are therefore categorical imperatives. The singular principle or maxim underlying the categorical imperative of the goodwill is the maxim or principle of universalisation of action.

Kant's leadership philosophy promotes objectivism, altruism, humanism, etc, in leadership. Operationalizing Kant's leadership philosophy in praxis, every leader should prelude an action with following inquiries:

1. Can I will that the maxim of any action become a universal principle of action?

2. Will my action promote rather than debase humanity in me and in others

If the answer to this inquiry is in the affirmative (an obligation) then such an action is morally permissible and hence a good leadership action. If the answer is in the negative, then the accruing action is morally reprehensible and hence a hypothetical or conditional /bad leadership action.

Martin Luther King Jnr in his civil rights struggles did observe, concerning the expression of the categorical imperative that commands treating humans as ends thus:

There must be a recognition of the sacredness of human personality. Deeply rooted in our political and religious heritage is the conviction that every man is an heir to a legacy of dignity and worth....Segregation stands diametrically opposed to the principle of sacredness of human personality. It debases personality. ("The Ethical Demands of Integration", 118)

Conclusion

Craig E. Johnson in his *Meeting the Ethical Challenges of Leadership: Casting Light or Shadow* (141 -142) observes that for Kant, what is a right decision is justified on the basis that it could serve as a template for others in making the same decision. The categorical imperativism leadership philosophy of Kant prohibits the prevailing wave of instrumentalism fanned by excessive and inordinate pursuit of self-aggrandizement at the expense of others, where every other person is perceived as a mere instrument (means) or tool and stupendous material profit accumulation and ego satisfaction become the sole end. Against this, Kant urges in his categorical imperative that all humanity should be treated as an end.

To the extent that Kant's leadership philosophy promotes positive behaviours both in the leader and the follower, it could be adjudged as an authentic leadership philosophy. This evaluation is based on the definition of authentic leadership as a process which enhances positive behaviours greater self-awareness and fosters positive self-development on the part of the leaders and associates (Bruce Avolio et al, *Leadership: Current Theories, Research, and Future Directions*. <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/managementfacpub137>)

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