MORALIZED LEADERSHIP: THE
CONSTRUCTION AND CONSEQUENCES OF
ETHICAL LEADER PERCEPTIONS

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In this article we examine the construction and consequences of ethical leader perceptions. First, we introduce moralization as the primary process through which followers come to view their leaders as ethical. Second, we use moral foundations theory to illustrate the types of leader behavior that followers are most likely to moralize. Third, we identify motivations to maintain moral self-regard and a moral reputation as two distinct pathways through which moralization influences follower behavior. Finally, we show how the values that underlie leaders’ moralized behavior (e.g., compassion, loyalty) determine the specific types of follower behavior that emerge (e.g., prosocial behavior, pro-organizational behavior).

History is replete with examples of leaders who are renowned for their positions of moral authority—for their status as paragons of virtue and goodness and for their ability to motivate their followers to do good deeds. Martin Luther King, Jr., worked for equal rights and inspired his followers to fight for justice, while Mahatma Gandhi emphasized compassion for the less fortunate. Winston Churchill is widely renowned for demonstrating and inspiring loyalty to the British Crown, while Mother Theresa is particularly well-known for her emphasis on the sanctity of body and spirit (Frimer, Biesanz, Walker, & MacKinlay, 2013). Many CEOs, such as James Burke of Johnson & Johnson, are admired for their care and compassion, while others, such as Whole Foods CEO John Mackey, are admired for their focus on purity. Regardless of the actions for which these leaders are most renowned (e.g., actions that reflect justice, compassion, loyalty, or purity), all of them have demonstrated an ability to leverage morality as a means of garnering commitment to a cause, tapping into their followers’ moral beliefs and conveying what it takes to be moral in a given place and at a given point in time.

In contrast to these canonical yet divergent examples of ethical leaders, the organizational sciences paint a comparatively narrow view of what it means to be an ethical leader. Scholars have cultivated a notion of ethical leaders as the embodiment of justice and compassion, facilitating prosocial behavior and fair treatment by showing their followers that this behavior is expected and rewarded (Bass, 2008; Brown & Treviño, 2006; Eisenbeiss, 2012). At the same time, ethical leadership researchers have downplayed the role of other, less studied components of morality, such as purity (Chapman & Anderson, 2013) and loyalty (van Vugt & Hart, 2004), and have remained relatively silent about the processes through which leaders’ actions are given moral weight (Rozin, 1999). A focus on only a narrow slice of the moral domain provides an unstable foundation on which to build a comprehensive theory of ethical leadership. Scholars risk overlooking issues that are of prime moral importance to many individuals.

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1 For the purposes of this article, we treat the terms moral and ethical as synonyms.
throughout the world, developing an oversimplified view of what it means to be an ethical leader, and only acknowledging a subset of the behaviors that ethical leadership might encourage (Haidt, 2012; Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010).

In this article we develop a model of ethical leadership built on a more expansive view of the moral domain. We begin with a follower-centric definition of ethical leadership focused on the moralization of a leader’s actions—that is, a follower’s perception of a leader’s actions as morally right (Bligh, Kohles, & Pillai, 2011; Epitropaki, Sy, Martin, Tram-Quon, & Topakas, 2013; Rozin, 1999). To specify when followers moralize their leaders’ actions, we draw from moral foundations theory (MFT), a theory that distinguishes six discrete domains of human morality, including care/harm, fairness/cheating, loyalty/betrayal, sanctity/degradation, authority/subversion, and liberty/oppression (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; Graham et al., 2011; Iyer, Koleva, Graham, Ditto, & Haidt, 2012). Here we argue that followers are most likely to moralize their leaders’ actions when those actions are aligned with (a) the follower’s moral foundations or (b) the moral foundations of the organizational culture.

After establishing when followers moralize their leaders’ actions, we turn to the question of how moralization influences followers’ motivations and behavior. First, we argue that moralization produces two distinct motivations: (1) a motivation to maintain moral self-regard and (2) a motivation to maintain a moral reputation. We then argue that these motivations cause followers to act in value-consistent ways—in ways that reflect the values underlying their leaders’ moralized actions. For instance, leaders’ compassionate actions motivate followers to act prosocially, whereas leaders’ loyal actions motivate followers to act pro-organizationally.

We begin with a brief overview of the current literature on ethical leadership in the organizational sciences, followed by a delineation of the components of our new ethical leadership model. In the Discussion section we consider the implications of our model for future research, emphasizing the importance of a revised theoretical conceptualization of ethical leadership and new approaches to the empirical assessment of ethical leadership and its effects.

**ETHICAL LEADERSHIP: HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS**

Leaders are often expected to be beacons of morality (Bass, 2008). Philosophers have recognized the importance of this responsibility since antiquity. Plato envisioned his ideal republic as a city-state led by an ethical philosopher-king (Plato, 2009). Aristotle likewise argued that leaders must be virtuous and demonstrate strong moral character (Aristotle, 2011; Solomon, 1992). In the organizational sciences a wide array of prominent leadership theories have incorporated ethical components. Researchers have argued that transformational leaders raise the moral consciousness of their followers (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Zhu, Avolio, Riggio, & Sosik, 2011). Treviño, Hartman, and Brown (2000) contend that ethical leaders are both transformational and transactional, inspiring their followers to behave ethically and enacting reward and punishment systems that reinforce ethical conduct. Liden, Wayne, Zhao, and Henderson (2008) include “behaving ethically” as a core component of servant leadership, echoing Greenleaf’s (1977) theorizing three decades earlier. Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber (2009) define authentic leadership as a “pattern of transparent and ethical” behavior and emphasize authentic leaders’ abilities both to act ethically and to serve as ethical role models. Paternalistic leadership “remoralizes the workplace,” with morality representing a core component of paternalistic leadership theory (Cheng, Chou, Wu, Huang, & Farh, 2004; Erben & Günes¸er, 2008). Spiritual leadership similarly requires moral character and facilitates ethical climates (Fry, 2003; Reave, 2005).

In recent years scholars have shifted from a focus on ethical behavior as a component of broader leadership styles toward a more targeted focus on ethical leadership as a distinct leadership style in and of itself. Building on the qualitative findings of earlier ethical leadership research (Treviño, Brown, & Hartman, 2003), Brown, Treviño, and Harrison defined ethical leadership as “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making” (2005: 120). Recent empirical studies have linked ethical leadership to fol-
lower prosocial behavior, whistle-blowing, and other desirable outcomes (for reviews see Brown & Mitchell, 2010, and Brown & Treviño, 2006).

Although ethical leadership scholars have made significant strides in recent years, most of their work has focused on the consequences of ethical leadership at the employee and organizational levels, rather than on what ethical leadership itself entails. With regard to the latter, ethical leadership research is built on a narrow set of features. Brown and Treviño (2006: 597) offer a general outline of characteristics and traits typically associated with ethical leadership, noting that they are “honest and trustworthy,” “fair and principled decision-makers” with “altruistic” motivations. However, it is unclear why these particular factors define what it means to be an ethical leader, or why other factors (e.g., purity, loyalty to one’s ingroup) do not.

The notion that ethical leadership is solely founded on the demonstration and promotion of a narrow set of universally desirable behaviors (e.g., honesty and trustworthiness) stands in contrast to research demonstrating that leadership is a social construction, with different individuals possessing different ideas about the characteristics most indicative of a leader (Epitropaki et al., 2013). Due in part to their own personalities (Keller, 1999), upbringings (Ayman-Nolley & Ayman, 2005), and cultural environments (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004), followers possess divergent conceptions of what leadership entails (Epitropaki & Martin, 2004) and the traits they prefer to see in their leaders (Fiedler, 1967). For instance, whereas paternalistic leadership is central to the functioning of Japanese firms, it is often rejected by followers in Western firms (Uhl-Bien, Tierney, Graen, & Wakabayashi, 1990).

In general, followers appear to prefer leaders who are similar to themselves (Keller, 1999) and prototypical of the group (van Knippenberg, 2011). In tandem with research documenting divergent constructions of morality across cultural backgrounds (Schwartz et al., 2012), political orientations (Iyer et al., 2012), personalities (Lewis & Bates, 2011), and socioeconomic backgrounds (Haidt, Koller, & Dias, 1993), these findings point to a need to take a broader perspective on ethical leadership that clarifies its mechanisms, allows for variation in the types of behaviors that followers perceive to be morally relevant, and aligns these perceptions with follower behavior. To develop such a perspective, we turn to the concept of moralization.

**MORALIZATION**

For the purposes of this research, we define ethical leadership as the demonstration and promotion of behavior that is positively moralized. Moralization, in turn, refers to the process through which an observer confers a leader’s actions with moral relevance (Rozin, 1999; Rozin, Markwith, & Stoess, 1997). Although anyone could moralize a leader’s actions, our focus is on the follower. When a follower moralizes a leader’s behavior, the behavior becomes a matter of right and wrong. Positive moralization involves perceiving a leader’s behavior as morally right. Negative moralization involves perceiving a leader’s behavior as morally wrong.

The downstream implications of moralization are significant. Moralization legitimizes and motivates subsequent action in support of what is morally right (Effron & Miller, 2012). Individuals experience feelings of shame and guilt when they fail to support these morally right actions (Cohen, Wolf, Panter, & Insko, 2011) and reject those who vocalize morals that contradict their own (Haidt, Rosenberg, & Hom, 2003). Thus, the moralization of a leader’s actions holds important implications for how a follower might subsequently behave.

Critically, differences in the moralization of specific behaviors are common. What is morally relevant to one individual at a given place and point in time often varies drastically from what is morally relevant to another individual in another place at another point in time. For example, whereas divorce traditionally was viewed as a moral issue in the United States, the majority of Americans now view it as a preference (Rozin, 1999). Similarly, whereas cigarette smoking traditionally was viewed as a moral issue in the United States, many Americans now view it as immoral (Helweg-Larsen, Tobias, & Cerban, 2010; Rozin & Singh, 1999). Eating meat is a behavior with moral implications for some cultures and individuals, but a matter of preference.

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2 Moralization also holds relevance for unethical leadership. A comprehensive discussion of unethical leadership is beyond the scope of this article. Nonetheless, we encourage future work to consider this issue in depth.
for others (Rozin et al., 1997). The business community has seen entire industries shift into the moral realm. For instance, coffee production historically evaded moral concern, but recent years have witnessed a dramatic increase in its moralization. New governance mechanisms have arisen to manage these moral concerns, culminating in greater attention to the coffee supply chain through comprehensive sustainability initiatives (Andorfer & Liebe, 2012).

As noted by Skitka, Bauman, and Lytle, “Basic questions remain about what qualifies as moral,” and, furthermore, “there are likely to be gaps between what any two individuals perceive to be moral” (2009: 568). Individuals’ notions of morality can vary drastically, leading to deep disagreement about the content of the moral domain (Rai & Fiske, 2011). To provide an account of when followers will moralize their leaders’ actions, some order is needed. For this we turn to MFT, a framework that delineates the range of humans’ moral concerns and identifies systematic trends in their variation (Graham et al., 2009, 2011; Haidt, 2012; Weaver & Brown, 2012; Weaver, Reynolds, & Brown, 2014).

MORAL FOUNDATIONS AND THE CONTENT OF MORALIZED BEHAVIOR

Lawrence Kohlberg argued that the entirety of the moral domain is unified by a single element and that “the name of this ideal form is justice” (1971: 232; see also Graham et al., 2013). John Rawls similarly declared that “justice is the first virtue of social institutions” (1971: 6). For Kohlberg and Rawls, justice was the cornerstone of morality—its defining and only feature. A decade later Gilligan (1982) argued that an “ethic of care” also deserved a position within the moral domain (Rai & Fiske, 2011). To provide an account of when followers will moralize their leaders’ actions, some order is needed. For this we turn to MFT, a framework that delineates the range of humans’ moral concerns and identifies systematic trends in their variation (Graham et al., 2009, 2011; Haidt, 2012; Weaver & Brown, 2012; Weaver, Reynolds, & Brown, 2014).

In the years following the proliferation of morality research based on care and justice, Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, and Park (1997) contended that care and justice represent only a subset of the moral domain, skewed toward a notion of morality that is emphasized in Western societies. Drawing from extensive field work in India, Shweder et al. delineated morality across three distinct domains: (1) an ethic of autonomy (with a focus on care, justice, and the welfare of autonomous individuals), (2) an ethic of community (with a focus on duty, respect, loyalty, and the maintenance of social order), and (3) an ethic of divinity (with a focus on purity, sanctity, and protection against degradation through hedonistic, impure behavior). Building on this research and additional insights on morality provided by evolutionary psychology (De Waal, 1996), value pluralism (Ross, 1930), and anthropology (Fiske, 1992; Rai & Fiske, 2011), Haidt and colleagues (Haidt, 2012; Haidt et al., 1993) developed a modular theory of morality, MFT, which characterizes human morality according to a set of discrete moral domains or foundations (Graham et al., 2009; Graham et al., 2011; Haidt, 2012; Haidt & Joseph, 2004; Iyer et al., 2012). Each moral foundation encompasses an array of interrelated components, including constellations of values (i.e., abstract, transsituational notions of what is good, right, and desirable; Graham et al., 2009; Knafo, Roccas, & Sagiv, 2011), intuitions (Weaver et al., 2014), and social practices (Graham et al., 2013).

Six moral foundations have been identified to date (Haidt, 2012). These foundations include (1) care/harm, which entails a concern with suffering and its alleviation; (2) fairness/cheating, which entails a concern with the utilization of established equity, equality, and need norms to distribute resources; (3) loyalty/betrayal, which entails a concern with group-oriented devotion and sacrifice; (4) sanctity/degradation, which entails a concern with keeping oneself spiritually and physically clean and free of contaminants; (5) authority/subversion, which entails a concern with using status hierarchies to maintain social order; and (6) liberty/oppression, which entails a concern with individuals’ auton-
omy and control over their own affairs. MFT demonstrates that although these six broad domains form the foundation of morality, individuals differ in their endorsement of each foundation (Graham et al., 2013).

As a theory of human morality, MFT has particularly important implications for ethical leadership (Weaver et al., 2014). A leader’s fair treatment might be moralized by a follower who endorses the fairness/cheating moral domain, but not by a follower whose moral code is less defined by fairness. Similarly, a leader’s demonstration of loyalty to the firm might be moralized by a follower who endorses the loyalty/betrayal moral domain, but not by a follower whose moral code is less defined by loyalty. For example, interviewees in one examination of ethical leadership varied greatly in their perceptions of the Clinton-Lewinski scandal (Treviño et al., 2003). Whereas some observers moralized the scandal, others (presumably those whose moral code was less defined by the sanctity/degradation moral foundation) did not, thus severing the link between the behavior and perceptions of the leader’s ethicality. These findings support Moore’s (1903) concept of the naturalistic fallacy, which states that concepts such as care and fairness cannot be used to reductively define morality but, rather, are manifestations of morality rooted in a particular place and time (Ross, 1930).

Sources of Moral Foundations in the Workplace

For a follower to moralize his or her leader’s behavior, the leader’s actions must align with moral foundations that are relevant to the follower. Within organizations, we propose that these moral foundations can originate from two distinct sources: (1) followers themselves and (2) their organizations’ cultures. Individuals’ moral foundations are associated with an array of factors, including their political orientations (Graham et al., 2009), socioeconomic status (Haidt et al., 1993), and psychophysiology (Lewis, Kanai, Bates, & Rees, 2012). As a result, differences in followers’ moral foundations should be expected, even when they work in the same organization or on the same team. Whereas some followers might prioritize the care/harm and fairness/cheating moral foundations, others might prioritize the liberty/oppression and sanctity/degradation moral foundations. These differences in followers’ moral foundations imply differences in the types of leader actions individual followers will moralize. For example, followers who prioritize the care/harm foundation should be more likely to moralize leaders’ compassionate behavior than followers who do not prioritize that foundation.

Beyond the individual, moral foundations can also be linked to an organization’s culture. Schein (2010) conceptualizes organizational culture as a pattern of shared assumptions learned by members of an organization through socialization and communication. This includes shared assumptions about the moral domain, with different organizations possessing different notions of what it means to act morally. Hospitals are often renowned for emphasizing the moral importance of care and compassion (i.e., the care/harm moral foundation), whereas the military is renowned for emphasizing the moral importance of loyalty and authority (i.e., the loyalty/betrayal and authority/subversion moral foundations; Hannah et al., 2013; Lilius et al., 2011). These notions of morality translate into morally laden organizational practices (Gehman, Treviño, & Garud, 2013), organizational climates (Ostroff, Kinicki, & Tamkins, 2003), and norms that describe how members of the organization “should approach their work and interact with one another” (Hammer, Saksvik, Nytrø, Torvatn, & Bayazit, 2004: 84). Employees may disagree with their organizations’ notions of the moral domain but nonetheless understand what it means to be moral in a given organization at a given point in time. For example, a soldier in the U.S. Army might not personally endorse the loyalty/betrayal foundation but understand that behavior associated with this foundation has moral significance within the organization. The soldier can, in turn, be expected to moralize leaders’ loyalty and self-sacrifice, recognizing the moral relevance of these actions to the organizational culture re-

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3 MFT only claims that these domains represent “the most obvious and least debatable foundations” (Graham et al., 2013: 107) and that the list is not final or closed to debate. Nonetheless, these foundations represent an important step toward a more complete understanding of human morality. A detailed discussion of the criteria used to define a moral foundation is beyond the scope of this article but can be found in Graham et al. (2013).
gardless of his or her own moral beliefs. Although our focus is on the organization as a whole, subcultures can also be expected to develop within organizations. A culture built on care and compassion might develop within the intensive care unit of a hospital but play a less central role in the radiology unit.

Key Assumptions

Before proceeding with our formal propositions, it is important to be explicit about two key assumptions. First, we assume that followers’ and organizations’ moral foundations do not need to be aligned for followers to moralize their leaders’ behavior. Instead, we assume that either is sufficient. Later in this article we consider how alignment between organizations’ and followers’ moral foundations might influence followers’ actions. However, for now we simply note that alignment between followers’ and organizations’ moral foundations is not a prerequisite for moralization.

Our second assumption concerns the direct impact of leadership on followers’ and organizations’ moral foundations. Leadership involves influence (Bass, 2008), and leaders can have an impact on their followers’ (Conger & Kanungo, 1998) and organizations’ (Schein, 2010) morals. Leaders can encourage their followers to adopt new moral foundations, and they can shape the moral foundations of their organizations’ cultures. At the same time, research suggests that individuals’ notions of morality are fairly stable over time (Schwartz, 1992) and less amenable to socialization and external influence than attitudes (Verplanken & Holland, 2002). Likewise, organizational culture is relatively stable, suggesting that organizations’ notions of morality tend not to change dramatically (Zucker, 1991).

In the Discussion section we consider several factors that might facilitate leaders’ abilities to shape their followers’ and organizations’ moral foundations. However, for now we make the assumption that followers’ and organizations’ moral foundations will tend to persist over time.

In the sections that follow we delineate the six moral foundations suggested by MFT and develop a set of formal propositions summarizing the types of leader behaviors and styles that followers might moralize. Although we recognize the conceptual and empirical overlap associated with many leadership styles and subdimensions (van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013), our analyses drill down to the dimensional level, with the goal of highlighting potential distinctions among behaviors associated with different moral foundations. We do not attempt to exhaust all possibilities or directly address ongoing debates regarding the distinctiveness of specific constructs but, rather, to illustrate how MFT links to prototypical behavior associated with popular leadership styles. Table 1 presents an overview of leadership styles associated with each moral foundation, links between the moral foundations and existing ethical leadership measures, and behaviors associated with each moral foundation.

SIX FOUNDATIONS OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP

Ethical Leadership Foundation #1: Support Follower Well-Being

The care/harm foundation traces its origins to the adaptive challenge of protecting vulnerable offspring from predators and other threats (Goodall, 1986). Today, the care/harm foundation is characterized by a general desire to alleviate suffering and foster well-being. In the context of organizations, leaders have the capacity to foster the physical and psychological well-being of their followers in many ways. Behaviors that are consistent with the care/harm moral foundation include helping followers develop their skills, showing compassion for followers’ personal problems, volunteering in the local community, and setting up work tasks to reduce follower stress and fatigue. Examples of behaviors that oppose the care/harm moral foundation include compromising followers’ welfare for personal gain, taking advantage of vulnerable followers, and demonstrating indifference to followers’ personal problems.

Given the ubiquity of the care/harm foundation, it is perhaps no surprise to find themes of care embedded in many leadership styles. The individualized consideration subfactor of transformational leadership, which focuses on paying attention to followers’ needs, is a prime example of a leader behavior that is consistent with the care/harm foundation (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Judge, Piccolo, & Ilies, 2004). The idealized influence subfactor of transformational leadership, whereby leaders place followers’ needs above their own, is likewise indicative of the care/harm foundation,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moral Foundations</th>
<th>Representative Leadership Styles</th>
<th>Links to Ethical Leadership Measures</th>
<th>Representative Leader Behaviors</th>
<th>Opposing Leader Behaviors</th>
<th>Representative Values</th>
<th>Value-Consistent Behaviors</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Care/harm</td>
<td>• C—Sensitivity to members' needs</td>
<td>• ELS</td>
<td>• Assist followers in developing their skills</td>
<td>• Sacrifice followers' well-being for personal gain</td>
<td>• Caring</td>
<td>• Prosocial behavior</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• TL—Idealized influence</td>
<td>• Show compassion for followers' personal problems</td>
<td>• Show indifference to followers' personal problems</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• TL—Individualized consideration</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Servant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fairness/cheating</td>
<td>• AL—Balanced processing</td>
<td>• ELS</td>
<td>• Provide followers with equal opportunities</td>
<td>• Promote followers based on personal preferences</td>
<td>• Fairness</td>
<td>• Prosocial behavior</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• TR—Contingent reward</td>
<td>• ELW—Fairness</td>
<td>• Publicly recognize high performers</td>
<td>• Take credit for followers' work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loyalty/betrayal</td>
<td>• C—Strategic vision and articulation</td>
<td>• No clear link</td>
<td>• Instill followers with pride in the organization</td>
<td>• Exploit organization for personal gain</td>
<td>• Loyalty</td>
<td>• Pro-organizational behavior</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Self-sacrificial</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Sacrifice one's own well-being for the well-being of the group</td>
<td>• Frequently change organizations or units within the organization</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• TL—Inspiration motivation</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Conduct personal life in a pure manner</td>
<td>• Accept &quot;dirty work&quot;</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Maintain spiritual and physical cleanliness</td>
<td>• Conduct personal life in an impure manner</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sanctity/degradation</td>
<td>• Spiritual</td>
<td>• No clear link</td>
<td>• Assign group members to specific tasks/roles</td>
<td>• Protect followers from threats</td>
<td>• Cleanliness</td>
<td>• Pro-organizational behavior</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Establish clear performance goals</td>
<td>• Allow followers to craft their own schedules</td>
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<tr>
<td>Authority/subversion</td>
<td>• Directive</td>
<td>• ELW—Ethical guidance</td>
<td>• Protect followers from threats</td>
<td>• Provide followers with little direction</td>
<td>• Obedience</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• PL—Authoritarian</td>
<td>• ELW—Role clarification</td>
<td>• Allow followers to craft their own schedules</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Establish how they complete assignments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liberty/oppression</td>
<td>• Coaching</td>
<td>• ELW—Power sharing</td>
<td>• Force followers to work under rigid schedules</td>
<td>• Autonomy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Empowering</td>
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<td>• Provide rigid guidelines for task procedures</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• TL—Intellectual stimulation</td>
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</table>

Note: AL = authentic leadership; C = charismatic leadership; PL = paternalistic leadership; TL = transformational leadership; TR = transactional leadership; ELS = Ethical Leadership Scale (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005); ELW = Ethical Leadership at Work Questionnaire (Kalshoven, Den Hartog, & De Hoogh, 2011).
and research has shown that transformational leadership is more strongly linked to care than justice (Simola, Barling, & Turner, 2010). Care and compassion are also reflected in the “sensitivity to members’ needs” subfactor of charismatic leadership (Conger & Kanungo, 1998; Rowold & Heinritz, 2007) and in the construct of servant leadership. As noted by Greenleaf, servant leaders “first make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served” (1970: 4; see also Mayer, Bardes, & Piccolo, 2008). Recent research on ethical leadership as a distinct construct also incorporates behaviors associated with care and harm. Brown et al.’s (2005: 127, Study 6) Ethical Leadership Scale asks if the leader “has the best interests of followers in mind,” and the scale itself is correlated with idealized influence at \( r = .71 \). Kalshoven, Den Hartog, and De Hoogh’s (2011) Ethical Leadership at Work Questionnaire includes a people orientation subfactor focused on care and support for one’s followers (see Table 1).

Although the care/harm moral foundation is widely endorsed (Haidt, 2012), the strength of its emphasis varies across individuals, cultures, and organizations. Some cultures, such as the Buddhists, have historically placed a great deal of emphasis on care/harm, whereas others, such as classical Sparta and Nazi Germany, have not (Koonz, 2003). Cross-cultural research suggests that the perceived desirability of a care orientation among leaders varies significantly across cultures (House et al., 2004). At the organizational level, research suggests that the care/harm moral foundation plays a central role in the health care industry (Lilius et al., 2011), exemplified by Barsade and O’Neill’s (in press) work on cultures of compassionate love in long-term care facilities. At the individual level, meta-analytic data suggest that women favor the care/harm moral foundation more than men (\( d = 0.28 \); Jaffee & Hyde, 2000). Here we propose that the link between leader behavior associated with care/harm and the moralization of this behavior requires the care/harm moral foundation to also be endorsed by the follower or organization.

**Proposition 1:** Followers will moralize leader behavior that is consistent with the care/harm moral foundation when the foundation is also endorsed by

(a) the follower or (b) the organizational culture.

**Ethical Leadership Foundation #2: Treat Followers Fairly**

Like care/harm, fairness/cheating is often characterized as a universal moral foundation, which Kohlberg (1971) and Rawls (1971) argued to be the defining domain of morality. The fairness/cheating moral foundation traces its origins to the adaptive challenge of punishing acts of cheating and rewarding acts of cooperation with direct interaction partners (Trivers, 1971). Today, the fairness/cheating foundation is also extended to third parties, even in the absence of direct interaction (Cropanzano, Goldman, & Folger, 2003). To followers who emphasize the fairness/cheating moral foundation, ethical leaders should embody values including trustworthiness, fairness, and a justice orientation. Behaviors consistent with the fairness/cheating moral foundation include providing followers with equal opportunities, rewarding followers who perform well, and withholding rewards from followers who perform poorly. Conversely, behaviors that oppose the fairness/cheating moral foundation include taking credit for followers’ work, distributing rewards to followers based on obtuse personal preferences, and doling out unjust punishments.

Scholars have often noted the importance of fairness in leadership (van Knippenberg, 2011). Leaders are responsible for the allocation of such resources as promotions, salary, job assignments, and bonuses. Leadership research, in turn, has drawn from justice theory (Colquitt, 2001) to suggest that fair treatment is a necessary component of effective leadership (van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & van Knippenberg, 2007). Janson, Levy, Sitkin, and Lind (2008), for example, documented a direct impact of fairness heuristics on positive leader perceptions. The contingent reward factor of transactional leadership is also representative of the fairness/cheating moral foundation (Podsakoff, Todor, & Skov, 1982). Among leaders who emphasize contingent reward, followers’ inputs are directly associated with their outputs. Rewarding leadership, whereby leaders reward their followers for exemplary performance, is likewise closely aligned with the underpinnings of the fairness/cheating moral foundation (De Cremer, van
The balanced processing factor of authentic leadership places a similar emphasis on fairness (Avolio et al., 2009). According to Avolio and colleagues (2009), authentic leaders must consider all of the relevant information before coming to a decision. Consistent with the notion that fairness and ethics are often discussed in tandem, fairness is embedded in the Brown et al. (2005) Ethical Leadership Scale, with items such as “makes fair and balanced decisions,” and it occupies an entire factor of the Ethical Leadership at Work Questionnaire (Kalshoven et al., 2011).

As with the care/harm foundation, although fairness/cheating is a near-universal moral foundation, its importance varies across individuals, groups, and cultures (Graham et al., 2009: 2011). Past research has demonstrated that some organizations possess stronger justice climates than others (Ambrose, Schminke, & Mayer, 2013; Whitman, Caleo, Carpenter, Horner, & Bernerth, 2012) and that individuals vary in their sensitivity to the moral implications of fairness (Beugré, 2012). Thus, we propose that leader behavior aligned with the fairness/cheating foundation will only be moralized when a follower or organizational culture also endorses the fairness/cheating moral foundation.

**Proposition 2:** Followers will moralize leader behavior that is consistent with the fairness/cheating moral foundation when the foundation is also endorsed by (a) the follower or (b) the organizational culture.

### Ethical Leadership Foundation #3: Demonstrate Loyalty to the Collective

The loyalty/betrayal moral foundation is grounded in a need for individuals to form cohesive coalitions that can compete against other coalitions. This foundation can be traced to the importance of coalition building for group survival and is found in humans and close relatives such as chimpanzees (Goodall, 1986). Today, the loyalty/betrayal moral foundation is evidenced in humans’ readiness to form coalitions for sports teams, nations, and other groups, exemplified by the classic Robbers Cave study, wherein two Boy Scout troops moralized loyalty to their quickly formed groups, placing a strong moral emphasis on allegiance to the collective (Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961). To followers who emphasize the loyalty/betrayal moral foundation, ethical leaders should represent values that include self-sacrifice, loyalty, and patriotism. Behaviors that are consistent with the loyalty/betrayal moral foundation include emphasizing pride in the organization, demonstrating a willingness to sacrifice one’s own well-being for the well-being of the group, and speaking highly of the group to outsiders. Behaviors that oppose the loyalty/betrayal moral foundation include expressing a willingness to leave the organization, attempting to exploit the group for personal gain, and denigrating the group when speaking with outsiders.

Several leadership styles are consistent with the loyalty/betrayal moral foundation. The inspirational motivation subfactor of transformational leadership involves articulating and emphasizing the organization’s vision—a rallying cry for the organization and its mission (Burns, 1978). The strategic vision and articulation subfactor of charismatic leadership similarly focuses on motivating followers around a collective goal, drawing attention to the group’s legitimacy and importance (Rowold & Heinitz, 2007). Self-sacrificial leadership emphasizes “foregoing self-interest for the good of the group . . . [and] securing the group’s welfare” (De Cremer, Mayer, van Dijke, Schouten, & Bardes, 2009: 887). Although many cultures consider leaders who display loyalty and a collective orientation to be ethical (Resick et al., 2011), popular measures of ethical leadership do not take loyalty to the collective directly into account.

As with the care/harm and fairness/cheating moral foundations, we propose that leader behavior aligned with the loyalty/betrayal foundation will only be moralized when a follower or organizational culture also endorses the loyalty/betrayal moral foundation. One example of an organizational culture that reflects the loyalty/betrayal moral foundation is the U.S. Army. Of the Army’s seven core values, the first two are loyalty and duty (Department of the Army, 2006), and most Army Cadets strongly identify with these values (Hannah et al., 2013):

**Proposition 3:** Followers will moralize leader behavior that is consistent with the loyalty/betrayal moral foundation.
when the foundation is also endorsed by (a) the follower or (b) the organizational culture.

Ethical Leadership Foundation #4: Sustain Physical and Spiritual Purity

The fourth foundation of ethical leadership, and one of the least studied to date, is sanctity/degradation. Its evolutionary origins can be traced to a desire to avoid contact with pathogens—a “behavioral immune system” that enabled individuals to avoid dangerous, disease-inducing objects in increasingly dense living environments (Schaller & Park, 2011; Tybur, Lieberman, Kurzban, & DeScioli, 2013). Over time, this avoidance of physical contaminants extended into the moral realm. In addition to avoiding toxins, parasites, and bacteria, individuals also sought to avoid moral impurities. For example, in one study by Rozin, Markwith, and McCauley (1994), participants refused to wear clothing previously worn by individuals with communicable diseases (demonstrating a concern with bodily purity) or clothing previously worn by criminals (demonstrating a concern with purity of the soul). Sanctity/degradation is closely associated with feelings of disgust, which emerge whenever physical, sexual, or moral impurity is witnessed (Rozin, Lowery, Imada, & Haidt, 1999), and reflects an ethic of divinity (Shweder, Mahapatra, & Miller, 1987). To followers who emphasize the sanctity/degradation foundation, leaders should embody values that include purity, temperance, and cleanliness. They should conduct their personal and professional lives in a pure manner and control their baser instincts. They should never degrade themselves or engage in “dirty work” that involves managing dirty objects (e.g., working with animal waste) or engaging in certain sexual practices (e.g., prostitution) or other tainted behavior (e.g., selling used cars; Ashforth, Kreiner, Clark, & Fugate, 2007).

Sanctity/degradation has received comparatively little attention in the leadership literature, and extant ethical leadership measures do not capture behaviors relevant to this foundation. However, some research does hint at the notion that purity may play an important role in ethical leader perceptions. Spiritual leadership seems to be particularly closely aligned with the sanctity/degradation domain, whereby a leader creates a sense of fusion among the body, mind, heart, and spirit (Fry, 2003) and maintains moral and physical purity both within and outside of the organization. Eisenbeiss’s (2012) focus on moderation as a virtue associated with ethical leadership similarly speaks to the purity moral domain. It is worthwhile to note that perceptions of leaders’ ethicality are often influenced by perceptions of their purity in their personal lives, such as President Bill Clinton’s relationship with an intern, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi’s extramarital relationships, and U.S. Congressman Anthony Weiner’s distribution of sexual images via social media (Treviño et al., 2003). Here we propose that leader behavior associated with the sanctity/degradation moral foundation will only be moralized when a follower or organizational culture also endorses the sanctity/degradation moral foundation. For example, research suggests that purity concerns are strongly associated with religiosity (Koleva, Graham, Iyer, Ditto, & Haidt, 2012), suggesting that the sanctity/degradation domain is particularly relevant to religious organizations.

Proposition 4: Followers will moralize leader behavior that is consistent with the sanctity/degradation moral foundation when the foundation is also endorsed by (a) the follower or (b) the organizational culture.

Ethical Leadership Foundation #5: Maintain Order and Direction

The authority/subversion moral foundation focuses on the importance of managing and maintaining effective status hierarchies. This foundation’s origins can be traced to the adaptive challenge of forging beneficial hierarchical relationships, whereby high- and low-power individuals agree that the high-power individual’s position is legitimate and that the low-power individual will, in turn, benefit from a stable social structure (De Waal, 1982; Fiske, 1991). Today, the authority/subversion foundation partly explains the legitimacy granted to high-power individuals and social institutions (e.g., CEOs, courts of law, and police officers). The authority/subversion foundation is not simply about power. Leaders with authority carry a responsibility to maintain order—to “fulfill the duties associated with their position on the social lad-
der” (Koleva et al., 2012: 185). In this sense authority is akin to a parent-child relationship. As noted by Fiske, “Authority ranking relationships are based on perceptions of legitimate asymmetries, not coercive power; they are not inherently exploitative” (1992: 700). To followers who endorse the authority/subversion moral foundation, ethical leaders should embody values that include obedience, deference, and respect. Behaviors consistent with the authority/subversion moral foundation include establishing clear performance goals, protecting followers against threats to the organization, and providing guidance for completing tasks. Conversely, behaviors that oppose the authority/subversion moral foundation include leaving followers to fend for themselves, disregarding signs of respect by insisting that followers call leaders by their first name, and asking followers to make executive decisions that are normally the purview of the leader.

Several leadership styles are consistent with the authority/subversion moral foundation, most notably paternalistic and directive leadership. Cheng et al. (2004) include an “authoritarian” subscale in their paternalistic leadership measure, incorporating such items as “My supervisor asks me to obey his/her instructions completely.” Interestingly, this subscale of paternalistic leadership demonstrated positive effects on follower perceptions of the leader in a study of workers in China, including “identification and imitation” (e.g., “I very much admire my supervisor’s manner and behavior”), “compliance without dissent” (e.g., “I completely obey my supervisor’s instructions”), and “gratitude and repayment” (e.g., “I would sacrifice my own benefits to maintain my supervisor’s benefits”). Directive leadership, where leaders provide their followers with clear direction (House, 1971, 1996), also appears to have a positive effect on follower outcomes. The role clarification and ethical guidance subfactors of Kalshoven et al.’s (2011) Ethical Leadership at Work Questionnaire, which include items such as “explains what is expected of each group member,” attest to its ethical relevance. We propose that when a follower or organizational culture endorses the authority/subversion moral foundation, leader behavior aligned with this foundation will be moralized. For instance, research on paternalistic leadership suggests that the authority/subversion moral foundation is much more important to some cultures (e.g., Japan; Uhl-Bien et al., 1990) than it is to others.

**Proposition 5:** Followers will moralize leader behavior that is consistent with the authority/subversion moral foundation when the foundation is also endorsed by (a) the follower or (b) the organizational culture.

**Ethical Leadership Foundation #6: Cultivate Follower Autonomy**

Beyond concerns of care, fairness, loyalty, purity, and authority, many individuals display an orientation toward the moral foundation of liberty/oppression (Haidt, 2012). The liberty/oppression moral foundation’s origins can be traced to the adaptive challenge of protecting oneself against alpha males who would otherwise seek to manipulate the group for personal gain (Boehm, 2012). The liberty/oppression foundation gained popularity among Enlightenment thinkers (Locke, 1988/1690) and today is applied to any situation where individuals’ rights and autonomy are infringed upon. This includes both negative liberty, which entails freedom from external interference, and positive liberty, which entails the availability of systems (e.g., education, health care) that enable individuals to pursue their goals (Berlin, 1969). To followers who endorse the liberty/oppression moral foundation, ethical leaders should embody the values of autonomy, empowerment, and independence. Behaviors that support the liberty/oppression moral foundation include providing followers with opportunities to complete their assignments as they see fit, allowing followers to craft their own schedules, and providing opportunities for followers to grow as individuals. Behaviors that contradict the liberty/oppression moral foundation include providing followers with rigid, strictly enforced procedures for completing their work and denying them resources enabling them to accomplish their self-appointed goals.

Several leadership styles are consistent with the liberty/oppression moral foundation. Research on empowering leadership emphasizes the importance of respecting follower autonomy. According to De Cremer et al., “Empowerment refers to specific leadership behaviors that activate a process in which a leader creates conditions for the followers to develop and promote
Coaching leadership has also been described in this way. According to DeRue, Barnes, and Morgeson, coaching leadership “involves encouraging the team to manage its own affairs and developing the team’s capacity to function effectively without direct intervention from the team leader” (2010: 622). Themes of empowerment can likewise be found in the intellectual stimulation subfactor of transformational leadership, whereby followers are encouraged to question assumptions and reframe problems (Bass & Avolio, 2000; Rowold & Heinitz, 2007).

It is important to note that the liberty/oppression moral foundation does not imply a preference for an absence of leadership altogether, and it is not consistent with a laissez-faire leadership style (Hinkin & Schriesheim, 2008). To adhere to the liberty/oppression foundation, leaders must both allow their followers to take ownership of their own lives (i.e., negative liberty) and provide followers with the resources they need to pursue their goals (i.e., positive liberty). In a study of leadership across the world, Resick et al. (2011) identified empowerment as an important component of ethical leadership. Kalshoven et al.’s (2011) measure of ethical leadership also includes a power-sharing factor that is closely related to the liberty/oppression moral foundation. Example items include “Allows subordinates to influence critical decisions” and “Permits me to play a key role in setting my own performance goals.” As with the other moral foundations, we propose that behavioral alignment with the liberty/oppression moral foundation will only be moralized when a follower or organizational culture also reflects the liberty/oppression moral foundation. Individuals with a libertarian political orientation, for example, rank the importance of the liberty/oppression moral foundation above all others (Iyer et al., 2012).

Proposition 6: Followers will moralize leader behavior that is consistent with the liberty/oppression moral foundation when the foundation is also endorsed by (a) the follower or (b) the organizational culture.

MORALIZATION AND VALUE-CONSISTENT BEHAVIOR

MFT clarifies when followers will moralize their leaders’ actions. To this point, however, scholars have not considered the impact of moralization on follower behavior. To examine how moralization might impact follower behavior, we turn to the literature on values. As previously defined, values are abstract, transsituational notions of what is good, right, and desirable, and each moral foundation partly comprises an interrelated set of values (Graham et al., 2013; see Table 1). Decades of research indicate that values guide attention and action, encouraging some behaviors and discouraging others (Schwartz, 1992; Verplanken & Holland, 2002). Here we propose that moralization motivates followers to engage in value-consistent behavior—behavior that reflects a particular set of values (Maio, Pakizeh, Cheung, & Rees, 2009).

When followers moralize leaders’ compassionate actions, they become motivated to act compassionately, but not fairly. Similarly, when followers moralize leaders’ loyal actions, they become motivated to act loyally, but not purely. Thus, the impact of leaders’ moralized actions on follower behavior depends on the values that the leaders’ actions reflect.

In the sections below we link moralization to followers’ value-consistent behavior through two paths (see Figure 1). First is a self-focused path. Here we argue that leaders’ moralized actions activate followers’ values, motivating followers’ value-consistent behavior as a means of maintaining positive moral self-regard. Second is an other-focused path. Here we argue that leaders’ moralized actions facilitate a social learning process, motivating followers’ value-consistent behavior as a means of maintaining positive moral reputations. We then consider the interactive effects of these two pathways and subsequently examine the specific actions that moralization might encourage.

The Self-Focused Path: Moral Self-Regard

The first path from moralization to value-consistent behavior is self-focused. We refer to this path as self-focused because it centers on followers’ own morals. Specifically, we propose that leaders’ moralized actions activate followers’ values, motivating followers’ value-consistent behavior as a means of maintaining positive moral self-regard— a sense of meeting one’s personal moral standards (Blasi, 1980;
Moral self-regard is related to but distinct from moral identity. Moral self-regard reflects a dynamic, state-based sense of meeting one's moral standards. Moral identity, in contrast, is a trait-based construct that reflects the general importance of morality to an individual (Schaumberg & Wiltermuth, 2014). For example, the moral importance of honesty can be activated by reminders of religious rules and honor codes (Mazar et al., 2008), and the moral importance of fairness can be activated by symbols of justice, such as the famous statue with balancing scales, Justitia (Karremans & Van Lange, 2005). Leaders occupy a particularly important role in followers’ work environments (Grojean, Resick, Dickson, & Smith, 2004) and, hence, can play a key role in activating their followers’ moral standards (Lord & Brown, 2004). Thus, value activation theory takes on unique power within the context of ethical leadership because leaders’ actions demonstrate how followers need to act to meet their own moral standards. For example, a follower who endorses the care/harm moral foundation might see a leader allow a coworker to leave work early to care for a sick child, and therefore be reminded that compassion is a central part of what it means to be a moral person.

Previous research supports the notion that value activation hinges on alignment between followers’ moral standards and leaders’ actions. For instance, in a recent study, Shao, Resick, and Hargis (2011) found that abusive supervision strengthens the negative effect of social dominance orientation (SDO) on interpersonal citizenship and argued that abusive supervisors activate high-SDO followers’ beliefs in status seeking and competitiveness. Thus, the first path guiding the impact of leaders’ moralized
actions on followers’ value-consistent behavior can be summarized as follows.

Proposition 7: Leaders’ moralized actions motivate followers to act in value-consistent ways to maintain positive moral self-regard.

The Other-Focused Path: Moral Reputation Management

The second path from moralization to value-consistent behavior is other focused. We refer to this path as other focused because it centers on the moral foundations of the organizational culture. Specifically, we propose that leaders’ moralized actions motivate followers to engage in value-consistent behavior to maintain a moral reputation—an outward-facing image as a moral person. Decades of research demonstrate that individuals are motivated to be seen positively by others, especially with regard to moral issues (Ellemers, Pagliaro, Barreto, & Leach, 2008). For instance, individuals are motivated to be perceived as unbiased toward racial minorities (Bergsieker, Shelton, & Richeson, 2010) and to engage in conciliatory behavior when their public images are threatened (Shnabel & Nadler, 2008). Organizational culture can, in turn, serve as an important source of information about the organization’s moral norms (Ostroff et al., 2003). As noted by Verplanken and Holland, a moral standard “might be perceived as important not only because it is a part of a person’s self-concept but also because of social norms or self-presentation motives” (2002: 435). For example, a follower whose organization endorses the care/harm moral foundation as part of its culture might seek to maintain a moral reputation at work by helping a suffering employee meet a difficult deadline, regardless of the moral foundations the individual personally endorses.

Social learning theory highlights the role that leaders can play in conveying the potential relevance of a given set of behaviors for followers’ moral reputations (Bandura, 1977, 1986; Brown & Treviño, 2006). According to the social learning perspective, followers learn by (a) observing how their leaders act and (b) observing the types of actions their leaders reward. When these leaders’ action are aligned with the organizational culture, the leader becomes an attractive, credible, and legitimate role model, in turn affecting followers’ motivations and behavior. For instance, when leaders model and reward compassionate behavior in organizations that endorse the care/harm moral foundation, followers become motivated to engage in compassionate behavior as well (Brown et al., 2005; Mayer, Aquino, Greenbaum, & Kuenzi, 2012). Thus, social learning takes on unique power within the context of ethical leadership because followers learn what it takes to maintain a moral reputation in the organization (Schaubroek et al., 2012). For example, a follower whose organization endorses the care/harm moral foundation might see a leader develop a new child care program at work, and thus be reminded that compassion is a central part of what it means to be a moral person within the organization.

Previous research supports the notion that social learning hinges on the alignment of organizations’ moral norms with leaders’ actions. For instance, Mayer, Nurmohamed, Treviño, Shapiro, and Schminke (2013) found that an organization’s norms in support of whistle-blowing are most likely to facilitate an individual employee’s willingness to take action when the leader also espouses moral standards in support of whistle-blowing (e.g., fairness over loyalty). Thus, the second path guiding the impact of leaders’ moralized actions on followers’ value-consistent behavior can be summarized as follows.

Proposition 8: Leaders’ moralized actions motivate followers to act in value-consistent ways to maintain positive moral reputations.

The Interactive Effects of the Self- and Other-Focused Pathways

In sum, two distinct processes underlie the motivational effects of leaders’ moralized actions on followers’ value-consistent behavior. Through the self-focused path, followers engage in value-consistent behavior to maintain moral self-regard. Through the other-focused path, followers engage in value-consistent behavior to maintain positive moral reputations. However, each of these distinct pathways has notable limitations. The self-focused pathway suggests that followers may only behave in value-consistent ways in the absence of organizational-level con-
straints. For instance, they may need to forgo compassion when the organization demands that they display loyalty. The other-focused pathway suggests that followers may only behave in value-consistent ways if the organization demands it. For instance, they may look past the organization’s emphasis on fairness when a manager is on vacation.

Self- and other-focused motivations for behavior are often pitted against each other, conceptualized as polar opposites. For example, social psychologists have devoted decades of research to the question of whether helping behavior is ultimately driven by egoistic or altruistic motives (Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin, & Schroeder, 2005). In contrast, recent research indicates that self- and other-focused concerns are independent. Grant and Mayer (2009) found that prosocial and reputational motives exhibit an interactive effect on prosocial behavior such that employees who have high levels of internally driven prosocial motives and externally driven reputational motives engage in the most prosocial behavior. These findings suggest that moralization is most likely to motivate followers to act in value-consistent ways when the moral foundations of the follower and organizational culture are aligned.

**Proposition 9:** Followers’ motivations to maintain moral self-regard and moral reputations exhibit an interactive effect on value-consistent behavior.

**THE DIVERGING IMPLICATIONS OF VALUE-CONSISTENT BEHAVIOR**

Propositions 7, 8, and 9 clarify how moralization is likely to encourage value-consistent behavior. An important implication of MFT, however, is that the specific behaviors moralization encourages will depend on the particular moral foundation or set of moral foundations underlying the moralized behavior. An employee who becomes motivated to align his or her behavior with the care/harm moral foundation is likely to act very differently than an employee who becomes motivated to align his or her behavior with the sanctity/degradation moral foundation. For example, Waytz, Dungan, and Young (2013) found that whistle-blowing is consistent with the fairness/cheating moral foundation but that deciding not to blow the whistle is consistent with the loyalty/betrayal moral foundation. In this section we propose that the behavioral consequences of moralization hinge on the particular moral foundations a leader emphasizes. Specifically, we suggest that (1) the care/harm and fairness/cheating foundations emphasize values that lead to prosocial behavior, (2) the loyalty/betrayal and sanctity/degradation foundations emphasize values that lead to pro-organizational behavior, (3) the authority/subversion foundation emphasizes values that lead to pro-leader behavior, and (4) the liberty/oppression foundation emphasizes values that lead to pro-individual behavior (see Table 1).

**Prosocial Behavior**

Prosocial behavior refers to voluntary action undertaken to benefit others, including donating, sharing, comforting, and helping (Penner et al., 2005). Oftentimes, prosocial behavior occurs within the walls of an organization, as when one employee helps another on a difficult project (Organ, Podsakoff, & MacKenzie, 2006). However, prosocial behavior can also extend beyond the walls of the organization, as when an employee volunteers for a charity in his or her community, donates money to a cause, or alleviates a stranger’s suffering (Winterich, Aquino, Mittal, & Swartz, 2013). Put differently, prosocial behavior entails helping anyone who might benefit from assistance within or beyond the walls of the organization.

Converging lines of research suggest that prosocial behavior is most consistent with the care/harm and fairness/cheating moral foundations and with values such as kindness, compassion, and justice. Graham et al. (2009, 2011) conceptualized the care/harm and fairness/cheating moral foundations as “individuating,” meaning they apply to all individuals, regardless of their membership in a given group. Consistent with this idea, Boer and Fischer (2013) linked the care/harm and fairness/cheating moral foundations to the “self-transcendent” values of benevolence and universalism in Schwartz’s (1992) value taxonomy, which are closely linked to prosocial behavior. Within organizations, it is interesting to note that the leadership styles most closely associated with the care/harm and fairness/cheating moral foun-
Proposition 10: When followers moralize leader behavior that is consistent with (a) the care/harm foundation or (b) the fairness/cheating foundation, they will be motivated to engage in prosocial behavior.

Pro-organizational Behavior

Proposition 10 reflects the majority of the ethical leadership literature. Leaders who act in a manner consistent with the care/harm and fairness/cheating foundations motivate prosocial behavior in followers that is consistent with values such as compassion and fairness. However, research from anthropology, evolutionary psychology, and other fields suggests that morality can encourage behaviors that are very different from this type of universal prosociality. For instance, a principal function of morality is to bind groups together, helping them to protect themselves against outside threats (DeScioli & Kurzban, 2013). To act in accordance with the moral foundations of loyalty/betrayal, sanctity/degradation, authority/subversion, and liberty/oppression, followers might be expected to engage in behavior that is not indiscriminately prosocial but, rather, targeted toward a narrower audience.

The first example of this narrower form of prosociality is pro-organizational behavior (Umphress, Bingham, & Mitchell, 2010; Waytz et al., 2013). At first glance, pro-organizational behavior might appear to reflect a universally prosocial orientation. However, existing research suggests that pro-organizational behavior can also entail direct harm to other individuals or groups. A principal example of this type of behavior is “unethical pro-organizational behavior” (Umphress et al., 2010). Umphress and colleagues (2010) demonstrated that employees sometimes act in ways that help the company but hurt other individuals. For example, they might lie for their organization or submit fraudulent documents, thus benefiting the organization but hurting other stakeholders in a way that contradicts the mandates of the care/harm and fairness/cheating moral foundations. We suggest that pro-organizational behavior is most likely to stem from the loyalty/betrayal and sanctity/degradation moral foundations.

The loyalty/betrayal moral foundation is defined by a dedication to the ingroup and reflects such values as patriotism, self-sacrifice, and allegiance. Loyalty enables individuals to favor their own cultures over other cultures (Miller & Bersoff, 1992), their own nations over other nations (Baron, Ritov, & Greene, 2013), and their own groups over other groups by limiting the scope of moral concern (Rai & Fiske, 2011). In the name of loyalty, individuals will sacrifice themselves to save their group members (Swann, Gömez, Dovidio, Hart, & Jetten, 2010) and will spend time and money to punish individuals who harm members of their group (Lieberman & Linke, 2007). When activated, the loyalty/betrayal moral foundation often implies engaging in otherwise unethical behavior in the name of the group, such as covering up for illegal activities. Waytz et al. (2013) demonstrated that individuals who adhere to the loyalty/betrayal moral foundation are unlikely to whistle-blow, and construe the decision as a moral imperative, where whistle-blowing would be an act of treachery against the organization.

The sanctity/degradation moral foundation is defined by a belief in the importance of avoiding biological, sexual, and moral contaminants and is represented by values such as purity and cleanliness. Several lines of research converge to suggest that this moral foundation is also most closely associated with pro-organizational behavior. Historically, the sanctity/degradation moral foundation has been enacted through the development of group standards of purity and cleanliness. These standards define what it means to be part of the group, and they serve as a means of protecting against outgroup members and ousting deviants from the ingroup. History is rife with examples of purity concerns driving the dehumanization of outgroup members, from the creation of leper colonies to the excommunication of impure church members. Recent empirical data indicate that disgust—the primary emotional indicator of violations of the sanctity/degradation moral foundation—leads to negative evaluations of outgroup members such as immigrants, foreign ethnic groups, and low-status outgroups (Hodson & Costello, 2007). In fact, groups that evoke feelings of disgust have also been shown to decrease individuals’ brain activation in areas associated with
person processing (Harris & Fiske, 2006), indicating that disgust leads individuals to dehumanize outgroup members (Harris & Fiske, 2007; Hodson & Costello, 2007). Finally, it is important to note that the sanctity/degradation moral foundation is closely linked to religiosity (Ellison, 1991; Graham et al., 2011; Sosis & Bulbulia, 2011). Although religious doctrines often emphasize prosociality, recent reviews and meta-analyses suggest that religiously motivated prosociality is best characterized as progroup behavior (Boer & Fischer, 2013; Galen, 2012; Henrich, Ensminger, et al., 2010; Norenzayan & Shariff, 2008).

Proposition 11: When followers moralize leader behavior that is consistent with (a) the loyalty/betrayal moral foundation or (b) the sanctity/degradation moral foundation, they will be motivated to engage in pro-organizational behavior.

Proleader Behavior

Prosocial behavior refers to actions designed to help other individuals, regardless of who they might be. Pro-organizational behavior narrows the circle of moral regard to the ingroup, defined for our purposes as the boundary of the organization. A still narrower realm of moral regard is directed solely at one’s leader—what we refer to here as proleader behavior. Just as pro-organizational behavior can involve prosocial behavior or a sacrifice of the general welfare in the name of the group, proleader behavior can involve pro-organizational behavior or a sacrifice of the organization’s welfare in the name of the leader. When engaging in proleader behavior, a follower might simply help the leader meet an impending deadline, but the follower might also sabotage another employee to improve a leader’s reputation.

Proleader behavior is most consistent with the authority/subversion moral foundation and values such as obedience, deference, and respect. In everyday situations, low-status individuals often act to protect high-status leaders, receiving needed resources and support in exchange (Fiske, 1991; Rai & Fiske, 2011). Sometimes these protective acts entail going against the group or organization within which the leader and follower are embedded, as with military coups, union walkouts, and employees who leave an organization to start a competing firm. In extreme circumstances, behavior driven by values such authority and deference can starkly diverge from behavior driven by values such as compassion and justice. In 1968 a company of U.S. soldiers murdered over 500 Vietnamese civilians, mostly women and children, in what the soldiers characterized as an act driven by respect for the authority of a trusted leader (Bilton & Sim, 1993).

Proposition 12: When followers moralize leader behavior that is consistent with the authority/subversion moral foundation, they will be motivated to engage in proleader behavior.

Proindividual Behavior

The final realm of behavior we consider is proindividual behavior. By this we do not mean prosel or selfish behavior (De Dreu & Nauta, 2009) but, rather, behavior that is aimed at enabling individuals to act autonomously. Whereas prosocial behavior often involves direct interventions that constrain autonomous action, such as finishing an overburdened employee’s project for him/her, proindividual behavior is focused on interventions that enable autonomous action, such as letting an employee decide when to come to work and when to telecommute. Proindividual behavior is most consistent with the liberty/oppression moral foundation and values such as autonomy and independence. Prototypical of the idea of proindividual behavior is empowerment, whereby individuals are provided with the resources they need to get a job done. Recent evidence suggests that empowerment is highly desirable (Maynard, Gilson, & Mathieu, 2012), especially among individuals with an autonomy orientation (Liu, Zhang, Wang, & Lee, 2011). Although empowerment is often characterized as something that leaders grant their followers, research suggests that followers can also empower each other and that organizations vary in their emphasis on empowerment as a feature of the way they do business (Wallace, Johnson, Mathe, & Paul, 2011). It is important to note that, as with prosocial, pro-organizational, and proleader behavior, when proindividual behavior is moralized, it becomes a matter of right and wrong. Although many individuals might prefer autonomy and empow-
erment, a narrower range of individuals are likely to view it as a moral imperative. The idea that autonomy and empowerment are moral mandates is exemplified by the philosophy of libertarianism, where values such as autonomy supersede all others, including compassion and fairness (Iyer et al., 2012).

**Proposition 13:** When followers moralize leader behavior that is consistent with the liberty/oppression moral foundation, they will be motivated to engage in proindividual behavior.

**DISCUSSION**

Ethics is frequently recognized as an important component of leadership. Although scholars have examined the behavior associated with ethical leadership for many years, their discussions tend to adopt a narrow approach to the ethical realm (Weaver et al., 2014). In this article we have sought to expand the notion of ethical leadership through a follower-centric model specifying when followers can be expected to moralize their leaders' actions, as well as the implications of moralization for follower behavior. Below we examine the theoretical and practical contributions of our model, highlight key areas for future research, and discuss several potential limitations of the model.

**Theoretical Contributions**

First and foremost, it is important to be explicit about how we believe the ideas presented in this article contribute to ethical leadership theory. As previously reviewed, researchers to date have primarily adopted a narrow conceptualization of ethical leadership, founded on specific assumptions about the content of the moral domain. By adopting a follower-centric approach to ethical leadership, we emphasize the critical role of moralization in the development of ethical leader perceptions. For leaders to be perceived as ethical, followers must confer moral relevance on their actions. This perspective, in turn, emphasizes the importance of looking to followers’ moral foundations and the moral foundations of the organizational culture when seeking to understand when moralization will occur and when it will not. MFT provides an organizing framework through which these moral foundations can be understood, emphasizing that followers are likely to moralize a diverse range of behaviors, from compassion and fair treatment to empowerment and self-sacrifice.

We contribute to ethical leadership theory by highlighting two paths through which moralization influences follower behavior once a leader’s actions are moralized. First, through a self-focused pathway, followers become motivated to maintain a sense of moral self-regard, which encourages them to act in value-consistent ways so they can view themselves as moral people. Second, through an other-focused pathway, followers become motivated to maintain a moral reputation, which encourages them to act in value-consistent ways so others view them as moral people. These two distinct pathways move beyond current research on the mechanisms of ethical leadership’s effects, clarifying when followers are most likely to be motivated through social learning and when they are most likely to be motivated through value activation.

Finally, we contribute to ethical leadership theory by offering more nuanced predictions surrounding ethical leadership’s effects. Previous research has primarily focused on ethical leadership’s effects on prosocial behavior, such as helping behavior and whistle-blowing (Mayer et al., 2013). By introducing the notion of value consistency, we propose a broader range of behaviors that ethical leadership is likely to encourage. Beyond prosocial behavior, ethical leadership might also motivate pro-organizational behavior, proleader behavior, and proindividual behavior. Thus, it is not immediately clear that ethical leadership always leads to universally desirable outcomes. In some circumstances ethical leadership might encourage followers to help their organizations at the expense of individuals outside the organization, or might encourage followers to help their leaders at the expense of the organization.

**Practical Considerations**

Beyond the theoretical contributions mentioned above, the current research highlights important practical considerations for ethical leadership research. Most notably, we emphasize the importance of a deeper consideration of ethical leadership measurement and the chal-
How should ethical leadership be measured?

To date, empirical studies of ethical leadership have primarily relied on the Ethical Leadership Scale (Brown et al., 2005), which is most consistent with the care/harm and fairness/cheating moral foundations (see Table 1). The care/harm and fairness/cheating moral foundations are important components of the moral domain, and people around the world appear to recognize the moral relevance of these foundations (Graham et al., 2009; Resick et al., 2011). However, a strict focus on these two foundations is limiting. Given that individuals’ moral foundations are determined by an array of intersecting factors, from culture and socioeconomic status to personality and political orientation (Graham et al., 2013), research that relies on only two moral foundations risks overlooking issues that are of prime moral importance to the employees being assessed.

A more promising option is to expand measures of ethical leadership to include a broader array of moral foundations. This would allow scholars to tailor their measures to the moral foundations most relevant to a particular context. For example, the real estate industry is a highly autonomous domain that places a high value on individual freedom and personal initiative (e.g., Crant, 1995). Thus, scholars might wish to include measures of empowerment that recognize the likely relevance of the liberty/oppression moral foundation to ethical leader perceptions in this domain. Similarly, scholars might wish to explicitly consider authority and loyalty when studying ethical leadership in military contexts, or purity in religious contexts. In sum, we recommend that scholars adopt a more contextualized approach to the measurement of ethical leadership, aligning their measures with the moral foundations theorized to apply to a particular group of employees, organization, or industry. Although this approach is not without its challenges, it presents many advantages. We view our discussion as a starting point and encourage future research to further develop this more comprehensive approach to ethical leadership research.

The challenge of multiple foundations. A central assumption of the ethical leadership literature is that leaders should be “moral managers” and build organizational policies that encourage moral behavior (Treviño et al., 2000). However, MFT suggests a complex set of practical challenges for leaders hoping to leverage morality in the pursuit of a more dedicated and inspired workforce. Leaders cannot easily rely on a set of best practices for ethical leadership. Instead, the benefits of being a moral manager may hinge on the alignment between a leader’s actions and the moral foundations of the leader’s followers and organization. Consider the example of Chik-fil-A CEO Dan Cathy’s public stance against same-sex marriage. In some parts of the country, his statement was met with praise by employees who interpreted his actions as consistent with the sanctity/degradation moral foundation. In other parts of the country, employees interpreted his statement as a violation of the care/harm and fairness/cheating moral foundations, leading to acts of deviance and sabotage.

The frequency with which the moral foundations of leaders, followers, and their organizations collide is an important empirical question. Attraction-selection-attrition theory suggests that organizations become more homogenous over time, increasing moral alignment as employees with diverging moral perspectives quit the organization and employees with aligned moral perspectives are hired (Schneider, Goldstein, & Smith, 1995). Moral alignment might be particularly common in small family firms, where employees share common backgrounds (Gomez-Mejia, Cruz, Berrone, & De Castro, 2011). Nonetheless, it is likely that organizations’ employees will frequently possess unaligned moral foundations, especially in large organizations with employees from different backgrounds (Haidt et al., 1993).

Leaders can address the challenge of multiple, potentially conflicting moral foundations by focusing on the moral foundations that are most central for a particular group of employees or organization. For instance, leaders in hospitals and other social welfare organizations can leverage the motivational power of morality by aligning their actions with the care/harm foundation, especially when the organization’s culture is strong (Schneider, Salvaggio, & Subirats, 2002). A focus on moral foundations can help leaders be more effective in other ways as well. For example, leaders might find that followers who endorse the authority/subversion moral foundation are more responsive to their actions than followers who place less emphasis on this
foundation, and they can adjust their behavior accordingly. Similarly, leaders might find that followers who endorse the loyalty/betrayal moral foundation are particularly responsive to group norms and behavior.

**Future Directions**

The active role of the leader. Future research should carefully consider when and how leaders might be able to shape the moral foundations of their followers and organizational cultures. Although individuals’ moral foundations are typically described as transsituational, they are also less stable than personality traits and are susceptible to gradual change over time (Haidt, 2012). Similarly, organizational culture is susceptible to gradual change, especially when the organization is private, small, and new (Tsui, Zhang, Wang, Xin, & Wu, 2006).

Some leaders are more successful than others at shaping their followers’ and organizations’ morals. Visionary and charismatic leaders are particularly adept at exerting moral influence (Schein, 2010). This impact could be exerted directly or indirectly. Schaubroeck et al. (2012) found that leaders indirectly influence their employees’ ethical cognitions and behavior through their organizations’ cultures, as well as by influencing the ethics of leaders beneath them in the organizational hierarchy. In addition to impacting followers’ and organizations’ moral foundations, leaders might attempt to frame their behaviors in morally relevant ways (Feinberg & Willer, 2013). In one study donations increased dramatically when nonprofits tailored messages to donors’ moral foundations (Winterich, Zhang, & Mittal, 2012).

Given that leaders, their followers, and the organizational culture all play important roles in the development and consequences of ethical leader perceptions, future research might benefit from an approach reminiscent of the leader-member exchange perspective, whereby leaders develop idiosyncratic relationships with their individual followers (Graen & Scandura, 1987). Presuming that leaders’ actions reflect their moral foundations, it is likely that leaders and followers with aligned moral foundations will quickly develop high-quality relationships. Leaders and followers with unaligned moral foundations might find that high-quality relationships develop very slowly over time. The potential role of the leader as an influencer of followers’ and organizations’ moral foundations highlights the importance of taking a temporal perspective on the moralization of leader behavior. Longitudinal designs can carefully pinpoint the amount of influence leaders have on the moral foundations of their organizations and followers and can allow researchers to unpack the causal pathways implied by our propositions.

In addition to considering how leaders might shape their followers’ moral foundations, future research should also consider how leaders can guide employee behavior. Our model assumes that followers understand what is required to uphold the moral code of the individual and/or his or her organization. However, this might not always be the case (Warren & Smith-Crowe, 2008). Even when leaders cannot shape their followers’ moral foundations, they can exert a meaningful impact by being explicit about how followers can align their actions with a given moral foundation. For example, a leader who emphasizes the care/harm moral foundation might illustrate how followers can show compassion by participating in volunteer initiatives.

Contingencies of moralization. Throughout this article we have provided only a few examples of individual and organizational factors that might determine when a particular moral foundation will be endorsed and when it will not. Existing research suggests systematic and predictable differences in when followers will moralize their leaders’ actions, highlighting important issues for researchers to consider. At the dispositional level, Graham et al. (2009, 2011) demonstrated that liberals primarily emphasize the care/harm and fairness/cheating foundations, whereas conservatives more equally emphasize all six moral foundations (see also Iyer et al., 2012). Thus, future research might wish to explicitly consider followers’ and organizations’ political orientations when assessing the moral foundations of ethical leadership. Several studies have also reliably documented correlations between MFT and the Big Five personality traits (Hirsh, DeYoung, Xu, & Peterson, 2010; Iyer et al., 2012; Lewis & Bates, 2011), suggesting that organizations and their leaders might be able to draw inferences about followers’ moral foundations from these traits.

At the contextual level, several studies have linked compassionate organizational cultures (Fehr & Gelfand, 2012) and compassionate
action (Dutton, Worline, Frost, & Lilius, 2006) to the health care industry (Lilius et al., 2011). The U.S. military seems to particularly endorse the loyalty/betrayal and authority/subversion moral foundations (Department of the Army, 2006; Hannah et al., 2013), whereas purity is strongly associated with religiosity (Koleva et al., 2012) and is often linked to food (Rozin, 1999). At the organizational level, culture and climate research suggests that organizations differ in their endorsement of the fairness/cheating moral foundation (Whitman et al., 2012), the care/harm moral foundation (Weber, Unterrainer, & Schmid, 2009), and the liberty/oppression moral foundation (Wallace et al., 2011). Thus, future research can leverage an understanding of a particular industry or organization to predict which moral foundations are most likely to be relevant in that context.

Beyond these contingencies, it is important to consider the limits of moralization—the circumstances under which moralization might not lead to value-consistent behavior. Followers might forgo moral behavior when they morally disengage from their behavior at work (Moore, Detert, Treviño, Baker, & Mayer, 2012) or decouple their personal identity from their work identity (Bhattacharjee, Berman, & Reed, 2013). Furthermore, in contexts with overwhelming job demands, followers might lack the self-control resources needed to carry out value-consistent behavior (Gino, Schweitzer, Mead, & Ariely, 2011). We encourage future research to examine these issues in depth.

The automaticity of ethics. In this article we have primarily focused on the content of MFT—the types of behaviors an individual might perceive to be morally relevant in a given place at a given point in time. It is important to note that MFT also encompasses discussions of the process of ethical decision making, suggesting that individuals’ perceptions of moral issues are simultaneously driven by deliberative (e.g., Mayer et al., 2012) and intuitive (Haidt, 2001; Sorenson, 2007) processes. A detailed discussion of these issues is beyond the scope of this article. Nonetheless, we note that the dual-process approach favored by MFT holds significant potential for future research, especially in its call for research that complements but moves beyond the cognitive-developmental tradition (Rest, 1986). For instance, the automaticity of moral judgment suggests that followers might find it difficult to explain their moral responses to their leaders, creating a barrier for leaders seeking to better understand their followers’ moral concerns. Likewise, the intuitive component of MFT suggests that emotions play an important role in how followers respond to their leaders’ moralized actions. Detailed discussions of the relevance of this aspect of MFT for the organizational sciences can be found in Weaver and Brown (2012) and Weaver et al. (2014).

Critiques of a Moral Foundations Approach

The theory developed in this article is not without limitations. Most notably, it is important to recognize that MFT has been criticized on several grounds (Gray, Waytz, & Young, 2012; Suhler & Churchland, 2011). A principal criticism is that the set of foundations MFT proposes is incomplete. For example, Suhler and Churchland argue that “both the theory’s proposed number of moral foundations and its taxonomy of the moral domain appear contrived, ignoring equally good candidate foundations and the possibility of substantial intergroup differences in the foundations’ contents” (2011: 2103). In its nascent form MFT proposed only four foundations (Haidt & Joseph, 2004), which later were expanded to five (Graham et al., 2013) and now six foundations (Haidt, 2012). Haidt and colleagues acknowledge that their taxonomy of moral foundations is only a starting point and that revisions are likely (Graham et al., 2013). They have discussed the potential of including wastefulness as a moral foundation and of revising the fairness/cheating foundation to explicitly include an equity principle but exclude equality and need principles. In our opinion MFT’s ability to be revised is one of its most important strengths, since it enables researchers to expand and revise the theory when new evidence becomes available. These potential revisions suggest exciting new directions for ethical leadership research. If and when new moral foundations emerge, they can provide new opportunities for an enhanced understanding of what it means to be an ethical leader. Nonetheless, we note that even when the moral foundations are revised and expanded, the underlying mechanisms of our model will remain unchanged. Moralization remains at the core of the perception of ethical leadership, and value consistency remains at the core of its effects.
Other critics have argued that MFT, in its descriptive approach, risks becoming overly relativistic (Jost, 2012). In this criticism it is important to distinguish between moralization and morality. As John Stuart Mill once said, "Nature cannot be a proper model for us to imitate. Either it is right that we should kill because nature kills; torture because nature tortures; ruin and devastate because nature does the like; or we ought not to consider what nature does, but what it is good to do" (quoted in Jost, 2012: 526). Put differently, a predisposition to view a given issue or behavior as moral does not imply that it is desirable. We make no normative arguments in this article, nor do we suggest that a perception of ethical leadership based on sanctity/degradation is any more or less legitimate than a perception of ethical leadership based on care/harm. However, the empirical question of how these different types of ethical leadership influence organizational outcomes is intriguing. Is purity-based ethical leadership just as effective at facilitating organizational citizenship as care-based ethical leadership? Do counterproductive work behaviors subside to the same degree under fairness-based ethical leadership as they do under loyalty-based leadership? Do followers expect certain types of leaders (e.g., politicians) to be purer than others (e.g., managers at retail stores)? These questions are beyond the scope of this article but represent important avenues for future research.

CONCLUSION

Morality is a vital force. It brings individuals together and motivates them in a way that few other forces can. At the same time, morality is enigmatic. The broad array of moral domains identified by MFT presents unique challenges for leaders. Best practices may need to be tempered with an understanding of the moral foundations that are most important to a given follower or in a given organization. By taking the full range of human morality into account, ethical leadership research stands to make an even more effective and powerful contribution to the organizational sciences.

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