Leadership lessons from Levinas: revisiting responsible leadership

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This essay offers a Humanities approach to leadership scholarship by viewing the practice of responsible leadership through the lens of the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas's ethics is phenomenologically inter-subjective where in temporal human encounters the face of the Other commands responsibility. Levinas's philosophy has been utilized in business ethics scholarship, but has limited presence in leadership studies. Through an interpretive analysis, this essay first demonstrates the connection between ethics and leadership, and then illuminates six primary leadership lessons from Levinas in order to philosophically orient and enlarge the contemporary practice of responsible leadership.

Keywords: *ethics, humanities, identity, Levinas, Other, responsible leadership*

This essay offers a Humanities approach to leadership scholarship by viewing the practice through the lens of the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas (1969) attributes ethics as the 'first philosophy' where responsibility to the Other is primal and immediate. Levinas's ethics is phenomenologically inter-subjective, not correlative to normative ethical philosophies such as virtue ethics, utilitarianism, or deontology. In temporal phenomenological encounters with the Other, the face of the Other commands responsibility. Levinas's philosophy has been utilized in business ethics scholarship, but has limited presence in leadership studies. Contemporary scholars Maak and Pless (Maak 2007; Maak and Pless 2006a; 2006b; 2009; Pless 2007; Pless and Maak 2009; 2011; Pless et al. 2011; 2012) write extensively on the topic of responsible leadership, yet the idea of responsibility, central to Levinas, is not part of their theoretical development. They assert that their scholarly endeavor began with Ciulla's (1995) profound statement, 'Ethics is located in the heart of leadership' (p. 6). Levinas, whose philosophy *is* ethics, provides an efficacious ethical foundation particularly relevant to phenomenological human encounters in which leaders find themselves.

Through an interpretive analysis, this essay will illuminate leadership lessons from Emmanuel Levinas. Six lessons are identified and organized in a particular manner to demonstrate how responsible leaders come into relations with an ethical attitude and ultimately develop identity by encountering and responding to the Other. Guiding all of these lessons is the presupposition of ethics as first philosophy, which conveys that ethics cannot be separated from leadership; that is, leadership *is* responsibility to Others. Overall, this essay seeks to respond to the question: how can Levinas's responsibility to the Other provide an opportunity to hermeneutically build upon the understanding of responsible leadership?

This interpretive analysis will utilize the primary work, *Totality and Infinity* (Levinas 1969), which has the most potential to inform the practice of leadership. Moreover, this text speaks to the individual level of analysis, which frames the discussion for practices of

responsible leaders. The idea of responsible leadership has been extended to organizational and transnational levels (Pless et al. 2012); however, the scope of this essay will remain at the individual level, or primordial level in Levinasian terms. The conclusion of this essay will point to future research at other levels of analysis, to which Levinas's text, *Humanism of the Other* (1972 [2006]) may provide additional insight. This essay seeks to add to the emerging discussion of responsible leadership to enlarge (Arendt 1958) and orient an understanding of leadership theory from a Humanities perspective. A hermeneutic approach (Arnett 2007; Ciulla 2006; Palmer 1969; Putnam and Pacanowsky 1983; Ricoeur 1991) is used for this analysis to open up understanding of Levinas's philosophy, which provides texture and depth to the study of responsible leadership.

1 EMMANUEL LEVINAS: A BRIEF BACKGROUND

Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995) was born into a Jewish family in Lithuania, and later became a French citizen after studying in France under the guidance of phenomenologist Edmond Husserl. Levinas was devoted to the analysis of Husserl's work in his thesis, 'The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology,' and also attended lectures by Martin Heidegger. Levinas wrote on 'Hitlerism' in 1934, describing fascist totalitarianism. When the Nazi invasion began in 1939, he became a French soldier, and a year later was captured and sentenced to a prisoner of war encampment. His wife and daughter survived the war through the help of his close friend, Maurice Blanchot, who hid them in a seminary, although tragically, his other family members were murdered among the 60 million who perished during the Second World War. Returning to Paris after the war, Levinas devoted his work to reorienting phenomenology with ethics. His dissertation, *Totality and Infinity*, was published in French in 1961 (as *Totaite et Infini*; the English edition was published in 1969), followed by other seminal works spanning his long life, such as *Difficult Freedom* (1963 [1990]), *Humanism of the Other* (1972 [2006]), *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence* (1974 [1998]), and *Alterity and Transcendence* (1995 [1999]). He taught at the Université de Paris with Paul Ricoeur, who shared his scholarly interest in hermeneutics. Living during an historical moment that was rife with turmoil and horror, Levinas's philosophy emerged as an exhortative call to the primacy of ethics in philosophy and everyday human relations.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: LEVINAS IN CONTEMPORARY SCHOLARSHIP

This essay seeks to more broadly demonstrate the relevance of Levinas's philosophy in leadership studies. While Levinas has been an integral part of the conversation in philosophy, theology, political theory, and recently in business ethics and human resources, his presence in leadership scholarship is limited. In 2007, the journal *Business Ethics: A European Review* published a special issue on Levinasian contributions to business ethics that range in topics including corporate ethics, pedagogy, intellectual property rights, international trade, and advertising. This issue also published a translation of Levinas's work, 'Sociality and Money,' originally written in 1987. In his other works, Levinas talks about the totality of the material world, but in this essay, he specifically speaks to the economic reality of human life.

Levinas's idea of 'the third' extends beyond the Self–Other encounter to the larger public sphere of 'my neighbor's neighbor,' which lends to a more universal conception

of justice. Levinas's philosophy in this respect may be helpful for understanding business and marketplace ethics at the organizational and transnational levels; however, at the individual level, Levinas's idea of the obligation to the immediate Other, among other themes in *Totality and Infinity* (1969), are particularly relevant to leadership studies. With this said, the larger environment of organizational culture and business in society must be kept in mind, as the encounter between Self and Other does not exist in a vacuum, but is situated, or embedded, within larger contextual narratives. The interaction between the Self and Other within the narrative space of subjectivity is an interesting topic for further explication in a future paper. This essay attends only to the immediate Self–Other encounter with hopes of spurring continued conversation of how Levinas's philosophy extends to the interplay of individual, organizational, and transnational responsible engagement.

Three of the essays in the special issue, *Business Ethics: A European Review*, attend to the individual level of analysis and open the conversation to Levinas in leadership studies. While all touching on different topics – teaching otherness (Lim 2007), egoism in marketing and management (Desmond 2007), and managerial ethics (Bevan and Corvellec 2007) – all agree that ethics does little when codified into corporate regulations of behavior. From a Levinasian point of view, ethics goes infinitely beyond such codes of conduct, which also makes teaching otherness and enacting managerial ethics beyond egoism all the more complex and difficult, but at the same time, all the more worthwhile. Additionally, these authors call attention to the primacy of individual ethical encounters – suggesting even that corporate ethics is an impossibility. While not in full agreement with this assertion, this essay does presuppose that individual leaders who enact a Levinasian ethic of responsibility are salient to enhanced stakeholder relationships and consequently contribute to the development of ethical corporate cultures.

Outside of this special issue, two other articles discuss Levinas's philosophy in relation to leadership. Rhodes (2012) utilizes Levinas to re-evaluate dominant approaches to leadership justice, such as masculinist rationality, to develop an alternative perspective of organizational justice that is centered on affirmative other-informed hospitality and generosity. Knights and O'Leary (2006) bring Levinas's ethic of responsibility and MacIntyre's virtue ethics together to offer an alternative perspective that helps remedy the overemphasis of the Self in traditional normative philosophy. They argue that such traditional approaches have limiting effects on the ethical leadership practice of business leaders and educators. Interestingly, these essays on leadership discuss Levinas's 'ethic of responsibility' but neglect to make a connection to the works of Maak and Pless, whose leadership theory specifically speaks to responsibility. This essay seeks to make a contribution to the leadership literature by offering Levinasian insight into responsible leadership.

3 LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM *TOTALITY AND INFINITY*

The following theoretical background includes Levinas's view of the fundamental responsibility to the Other and how identity of the Self is created through responding to the call of the Other's face. The essay begins with a general premise of ethics as first philosophy, which is followed by a discussion of the meaning of Otherness as fundamentally *alter*. The essay then moves into the topic of responding to the call of the Other's face and the derivative identity formation from this response. Levinas's

Table 1 Leadership lessons from Levinas

<i>Totality and Infinity</i>		Leadership Lessons
Ethics as first philosophy		Ethics cannot be separated from leadership. Leadership is responsibility to Others
Ethical attitude	The Other cannot be defined	Others have multiplicity in their being, which cannot be ascribed to a single role
	The Other maintains alterity	Distance is needed in interacting with Others
Encounter	The Other teaches from a height	Others provide understanding for leaders to learn what they could not know otherwise
	The face of the Other commands responsibility	The appropriate response emerges in unique human encounters
Response	Responding to the Other is an obligation	Leaders need to be directed toward positive social change
Identity	Identity is derived from the Other	Engagement with Others opens a leader's consciousness and identity formation

philosophy, derived from his primary work *Totality and Infinity* (1969), provides readers with a foundation of his philosophy for an edifying contribution to leadership. Table 1 depicts major themes in *Totality and Infinity* that guide understanding for leadership practice. At the top, the table positions ethics as first philosophy and the corresponding leadership lesson of ethics as being integral to leadership and responsibility to Others. Thus, this is the guiding premise for all of the themes and leadership lessons that follow.

Leaders must come into relation with others with an ethical attitude, which includes understanding that Others have unique consciousnesses that cannot be defined, and distance between Self and Other needs to be maintained to avoid colonizing another, even with good intentions. Positioning the Other at a height transitions from attitude to encounter because it involves an attitude of this relationship, but it is also an encounter when the Other is actively teaching the leader. The face of the Other is fundamental to the encounter because it invites opportunity for the appropriate response. From a leadership perspective, this involves enacting positive social change. The phenomenological experience described so far leads to an opening of a leader's consciousness and identity formation. The leadership lessons identified in the table links philosophical themes in Levinas's work to the practice of responsible leadership, which will be discussed later in this essay.

4 ETHICS AS FIRST PHILOSOPHY

Morality is not a branch of philosophy, but first philosophy. (Levinas 1969, p. 304)

As the title of the work suggests, Levinas works to distinguish the nature of totality and infinity where infinity, the ethical, involves the Other, and totality, the theoretical, seeks to define. The ethical relationship between the Self and Other is not a subject-object

encounter, but a social relation of transcendence (Levinas 1969, p. 109). In the midst of the phenomenological encounter, something transcendent emerges that cannot be quantified. Attempting to know the Other moves toward totality; responding to the Other moves toward infinity. Ethics involves possessing the idea of infinity, which is an attitude that has already welcomed the Other (p. 93). This attitude is nonjudgmental and open to be infinitely receptive to the Other. Murray (2002) describes this attitude as moving away from reducing all meaning to the Self in order to de-center one's consciousness.

5 THE OTHER CANNOT BE DEFINED

To think the infinite, the transcendent, the Stranger, is hence not to think an object. (Levinas 1969, p. 49)

Levinas insists that one's relation with an Other always exceeds one's ability to know or contain the Other. People often think of Others as extensions of themselves, or conversely, as objects that may be used for some instrumental purpose (Levinas 1969, pp. 38–39). The Other has infinite value as a human being. Murray (2002) offers that we should not seek to define or characterize that which is other within our own conceptual scheme or confines of understanding; the Other is simply Other as such (p. 40). Levinas argues that the Other is beyond comprehension and cannot be presumed under a category. The Other 'has no quiddity' (Levinas 1969, p. 69). Here, Levinas points to infinite being of the Other's consciousness that cannot be reduced to facts. In her study of Levinas, Perpich (2005) also asserts that 'each human being is a unique and irreplaceable self, irreducible to any of the attributes that could be used to describe her ... each singular being has moral worth and dignity not in view of some shared universal property but *simply as such*' (p. 107). Even with good intentions to empathize with the Other, a person will never understand what it feels like to be in another's shoes. Rather than a feeling or sentiment, which deprives the Other of otherness, responsibility for Levinas is an action, a response that respects the Other's alterity.

6 THE OTHER MAINTAINS ALTERITY

The idea of Infinity requires this separation. (Levinas 1969, p. 102)

Levinas (1969) makes very clear that alterity is fundamental to the Self–Other encounter. Alterity can be defined as consciousness of the unique phenomenological delineation of Self and Other (Roberts 2007, p. 5). The Other maintains alterity and cannot be manipulated or contained; exteriority is absolute (Murray 2002, p. 41). Encounters may lead to better understanding of the Other, but the Self needs to recognize that the Other maintains alterity and can never be fully understood. Rather than attempting to know the Other, alternatively, Levinas offers that the encounter with the Other provides an opportunity for the Self to learn what it could not know otherwise. The absolutely foreign and the strangeness of the Other provides a 'touchstone of reality' (Friedman 1974) that instructs the Self in its development of ethical identity. Encounters with very different Others are needed to enlarge one's mentality and to grow relationally and intellectually. Alterity also resists colonization or overly nurturing another, which risks the loss of the Other's identity.

7 THE OTHER TEACHES FROM A HEIGHT

His alterity is manifested in a mastery that does not conquer, but teaches. Teaching is not a species of a genus called domination, a hegemony at work within totality, but is the presence of infinity breaking the closed circle of totality. (Levinas 1969, p. 171)

Levinas (1969) positions the alterity of the Other at a height. In this orientation, the Self is not dependent on the Other, nor is the Other dependent on the Self, and there is no expectation of reciprocity (p. 101). The Other is ‘not on the same plane as myself’ (p. 101); on the contrary, the Other reveals from a height (p. 103). Integrity for both remains intact, and neither controls (p. 17) nor maintains power over each other (p. 39). The height of the Other brings about humility of the Self, which arouses goodness, and creates a relation of responsibility, which is the ethical condition (p. 200). Meaning is derived from what the Other provides (p. 97), which is ‘transcendence itself’ (p. 171). Teaching is an opening-up of infinity, which cannot be defined. Levinas associates domination with totality and teaching with infinity. Domination closes off the possibility of transcendence touching human existence. Thus, Levinas offers an ethical alternative of positioning the Other at a height that involves teaching beyond what the Self can know.

8 THE FACE OF THE OTHER COMMANDS RESPONSIBILITY

The relation between the Other and me, which dawns forth in his expression ... his face in which his epiphany is produced and which appeals to me breaks with the world that can be common to us. (Levinas 1969, p. 194)

Levinas defines the relationship between the Self and Other as existing through language, but not the typical verbal communicative form. Rather, language is communicative through a glance, the presentation of the face, which ‘brings a notion of truth’ (Levinas 1969, p. 51). The face of the Other, ‘his truth’ (p. 291) speaks to the Self and invites the relation (p. 198). Perhaps the most quoted reference to Levinas is the primordial expression that speaks, ‘you shall not commit murder’ (pp. 199, 216). Here he provides understanding for why murder is unethical. For example, if a person raises a knife in an attempt to kill another, the expression of the face of the Other conveys ‘show mercy!’ However, Levinas commands the necessity of going beyond simply avoiding harm to the Other; the Self is responsible for the life of the Other and alleviating the Other’s suffering. The Self is called to be hospitable to those in need, the ‘widow, stranger, and orphan,’ and not to judge or attempt to define them.

9 RESPONDING TO THE OTHER IS AN OBLIGATION

To recognize the Other is to recognize a hunger. To recognize the Other is to give. (Levinas 1969, p. 75)

Rather than an agency-based view of character where the Self possesses certain internal value structures, character is viewed in practice through responding to the Other. As such, Levinas offers that there is no reason to respond to the Other; obligation instead calls for a response that originates in the face of the Other, not through psychological motivational

factors within the Self. Moreover, the Self responds prior to any interior reflection (Katz 2005, p. 100). Each presentation of the face is inimitable, which requires a unique and spontaneous response (Levinas 1969, p. 43). Moreover, there is no rationality of the obligation since responsibility is an immediate response (ibid., p. 207). The relation with the Other is one of generosity, hospitality, service, and peace – ideals that are realized in concrete situational encounters. If the Self determines a reason for responding beyond ‘I must,’ then the invitation to infinity is lost and one remains in the realm of totality.

Responding to the Other’s suffering is unconditional. By calling attention to the impoverished, ‘the poor one and the stranger,’ Levinas challenges us to respond to those who are most often ignored and to reorient the value of human life, which is not what one has, but what one gives (ibid., p. 77). Murray (2004) illustrates this by writing that ‘more primary than one’s ability to know or understand a beggar on the street, for example, is the way in which that Other calls upon one to respond’ (p. 336). Seeing the Other and responding cannot be separated. The gaze of the Other calls for immediate response of generosity. Additionally, what one gives cannot be planned, nor will a previous encounter inform the next; the appropriate response emerges in each phenomenological encounter, which Levinas describes as being *present* (Levinas 1969, p. 69).

10 IDENTITY IN THE SELF IS DERIVED FROM THE OTHER

It is only in approaching the Other that I attend to myself. (Levinas 1969, p. 178)

Levinas offers a view of Other-informed identity. Infinity suggests that the soul can contain more than it can draw from itself through the relation with exterior Others (Levinas 1969, p. 180). He explores the Self–Other relationship where the relation with the Other is a relation of transcendence, which puts into question immanent destiny of the Self and introduces the Self to what it is not (p. 203). The Self cannot be in sole control of its identity because the Other can provide what the Self cannot contain. Levinas states that ‘signification or intelligibility does not arise from the identity of the same who remains in himself, but from the face of the other who calls’ (p. 96) and ‘the soul ... it is to be sure dwells in what is not itself, but it acquires its own identity by this dwelling in the “other”’ (p. 115). The Other is integral in shaping the identity and destiny of the Self. Identity follows response, not the other way around. Through welcoming the face of the Other, the being of the Self passes into another sense and, by responding, the identity of the Self emerges (p. 178). The *action* of responding, not the internal contemplation of one’s character, reveals the identity of the self. Levinas posits that to serve the Other is an expression of goodness – to serve is to be and ‘To be is to be good’ (p. 183). For Levinas, ethics is existing for another, which makes existence other than oneself (p. 261). The ethical response not only generates identity, but also one’s very existence.

Lim (2007) offers that since the Other comes to the Self from a height, identity of the Self is called into question and Arnett (2003) recognizes that in Levinasian philosophy, responding to the Other forms the identity of the Self. Consistent with Levinas’s philosophy, Arnett’s interpretation of Other-informed identity is contrary to identity as Self-informed or agency-based. Rather, the Self does not think of identity formation prior to responding; the Other ‘shapes the identity of the “I” as a by-product’ (ibid., p. 39). By starting with the Self, ‘we miss the phenomenological reality of human life’ (ibid., p. 42). Rather, in the relationship that Levinas (1969) purports, the identity of the Self can emerge or be awakened (p. 86). Identity is not ‘knowing oneself’ but

rather ‘submitting oneself to an exigency, to a morality’ (ibid., p. 86). The Self can discover more about its identity through the humble practice of being taught by the Other and taking the focus off oneself. The de-centering of the Self provides great learning, which the Self could not know otherwise. Identity grows and reshapes as the Self continues to learn; ‘it permits constant reshaping of the “I” through meeting of the Other’ (Arnett 2003, p. 40). Arnett also makes a significant observation that the Self’s identity is put at risk by not responding to the Other (ibid., p. 40). He concludes that ‘if one does not take care of the Other, there is no “I”’ (p. 41).

11 REVISITING RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP

Multiple conceptions of leadership that move away from transformational have been recently emerging in the literature (Avolio et al. 2009). Among these, responsible leadership has been posited as a new understanding of leadership that situates leaders among stakeholders and calls leaders to engage stakeholders with virtue and integrity to build better workplaces and communities. The concept of responsible leadership first appeared in the organizational literature in 2006, in the book *Responsible Leadership* and an article titled ‘Responsible leadership in a stakeholder society – a relational perspective’; both works were edited and authored respectively by Thomas Maak and Nicola Pless (2006a; 2006b).¹ Since this time, the authors have contributed to the literature through additional articles, and scholars from other fields have made contributions to theoretical development and application (see Pless and Maak 2011). Additionally, other scholars have added to the study of responsible leadership by contributing book chapters to *Responsible Leadership*. This essay seeks to respond to the call for further discussion on responsible leadership by providing a perspective from the Humanities to add to the conversation on responsible leadership.

Maak and Pless formulated the idea of responsible leadership after being introduced to the idea of ethics as at the heart of leadership through the work of Joanne Ciulla (1998) and believe that responsible leadership is necessary in a business world scathed by scandal and environmental disasters caused by irresponsible leaders. They define responsible leadership as ‘a social-relational and ethical phenomenon, which occurs in social process of interaction’ (Maak and Pless 2006b, p. 99). Additionally, they adopt a stakeholder view of business (Freeman 1984; Freeman et al. 2004) where business leaders have a responsibility beyond shareholders, including other individuals and groups who have a stake in the business – either affecting or being affected by the business. Stakeholders include employees, customers, suppliers, the community, the environment, and even future generations. They recognize that the stakeholder perspective of responsible leadership leads to creating sustainable business in which stakeholders give license for business to operate. Responsible leadership extends beyond leader–member exchange to

1. The term ‘responsible leadership’ first appeared in the essay, ‘Responsible leadership and responsible criticism’ by Frederick Cleveland in the *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science in the City of New York* published in 1918. The reference to responsibility in political theory is an important one, albeit outside the scope of this essay, but certainly relevant to Levinas’s philosophy, which emerged from his personal experience as a child seeing the Russian Revolution and as an adult as a prisoner of war in a Nazi encampment. *Totality and Infinity* (Levinas 1969), utilized in this essay, as well as other writings such as *Difficult Freedom* (1963), are vital for political discourse; however, his philosophy in the context of this essay remains in the realm of leadership.

multiple leader–stakeholder exchange relationships. By ‘reaching beyond traditional leader–follower concepts’, Maak and Pless (2006b, p. 100) propose a leadership concept that is focused on many stakeholder Others. Responsible leadership embeds leaders within a stakeholder community. Levinas provides a seminal perspective for the learning and growth of business leaders who seek to develop a more ethical understanding of responsible leadership. By contributing a Levinasian perspective, responsible leadership may garner a deeper philosophical standpoint.

12 ETHICS CANNOT BE SEPARATED FROM LEADERSHIP – LEADERSHIP IS RESPONSIBILITY TO OTHERS

Business often engenders what many would say is utterly opposed to ethics with frequent scandal, employee exploitation, and environmental degradation; but this is precisely the reason Levinas’s philosophy is so greatly needed. Beyond scandal and misconduct by leaders, Levinas would view daily operating procedures of typical administrative practice as totalization. In this environment, epistemology is squarely focused on profitability, competitive advantage, return on investment, shareholder return, progress, and change. People, along with other assets, are managed, and business researchers often study the dynamics of management with topics of power and social exchange. However, Levinas offers a contribution to the role of responsible leaders who are tasked with differentiating between things that can be managed and living beings who deserve respect and dignity.

Levinas invites business leaders to gaze beyond totality into the realm of infinity. When ethics is first philosophy, ethics cannot be separated from leadership and leaders’ responsibility to Others. This is a guiding premise throughout the following discussion, which begins with leaders maintaining an ethical attitude of stakeholder multiplicity and necessary distance in encounters with Others. During the encounter, Others provide understanding for leaders to learn what they could not know otherwise and invite appropriate responses from leaders. While each response will be unique to particular encounters, appropriate responses are directed toward positive social change. Finally, through this engagement, a leader’s consciousness opens and identity emerges. The following sections will articulate these Levinasian leadership lessons in relation to responsible leadership with hopes of bringing to light new understanding from a Humanities perspective.

13 OTHERS HAVE MULTIPLICITY IN THEIR BEING, WHICH CANNOT BE ASCRIBED TO A SINGLE ROLE

In their 2006 article, Maak and Pless identify employees, clients/customers, business partners, the social and natural environment, and shareholders as organizational stakeholders (2006b, pp. 100–101). The idea of stakeholders may be reoriented to Arnett’s observation of ‘multiple voices’ who each need attending and who provide learning in each unique encounter (Arnett 2004, p. 87). Negotiating stakeholder relations should not involve technique or strategy, for the phenomenological encounter cannot be predicted. Primarily, business leaders need to uphold the imperative that ‘I am my brother’s keeper’ (Arnett 2008). Levinas (1969) writes that ‘infinity opens the order of the Good. It is an order that does not contradict, but goes beyond the rules of formal logic’ (p. 104). Later in *Totality and Infinity* he contends that ‘the relationship between me and the Other does

not have the structure formal logic finds in all relations. The terms remain absolute despite the relation in which they find themselves. The relation with the Other is the only relation where such an overturning of formal logic can occur' (ibid., pp. 180–181). Hendley (1996) purports that Levinas rejects mediating universal principles for responsible care giving. In his analysis of Levinas's relationship to business ethics, Aasland (2004) offers that 'being responsible is not a consequence of being rational. According to Levinas, as humans we are responsible not "because of" anything, but from the encounter with the other' (p. 3). This may seem contrary to business organization of stakeholders, but the inversion is exactly what the philosophy of Levinas does in every respect.

Stakeholders are very real Others; they are neighbors of business, who call for business-leader responsibility. Envisioning stakeholders from a Levinasian point of view, they are part of the social relation, 'the Transcendent, infinitely other, [that] solicits us and appeals to us. The proximity of the Other, the proximity of the neighbor, is in being an ineluctable moment of the revelation of an absolute presence' (Levinas 1969, p. 78). By thinking of stakeholders as neighbors, business leaders can reorient their relationships with them. A Levinasian perspective provides a response to the question of why responsible leaders should engage and appreciate a multiplicity of stakeholders – an answer that transcends the 'people, planet, profit' (Fry and Slocum 2008) motif. While profit is often the result of caretaking of multiple stakeholders, Levinas's primordial attention does not focus on this totalizing aspect; rather, the 'face' of each stakeholder calls the leader to be responsible. Through Levinas's philosophy, each unique stakeholder may be viewed as having a face that calls the leader to respond responsibly. Stakeholder faces are dynamic and temporal. For example, an employee may also be a customer and community member. Even within this multiplicity, the needs of a stakeholder, in any facet, emerge in unique encounters, which cannot be predicted or attributed to a role. Thus, Levinas would caution the use of the term stakeholder because it totalizes others' being into ascribed roles. Leaders will always be working in the midst of certain contexts, but the leadership lesson here is to understand that Others have multiplicity in their being, which cannot be ascribed to a single role.

Levinas reorients the idea of the stakeholder by stating: 'that all men are brothers is not explained by their resemblance, nor by a common cause ... paternity is not reducible to a causality in which individuals would mysteriously participate' (Levinas 1969, p. 214). Even though people perform certain tasks, who they *are* should not be assigned to those roles. For Levinas, their being is infinite. Furthermore, he states that 'the best way of encountering the Other is not even to notice the color of his eyes! When one observes the color of the eyes one is not in social relationship with the Other' (Levinas and Nemo 1985, p. 85). Levinas reorients an understanding of stakeholders as those who are in relation with leaders in particular contexts, but who cannot be categorized as such.

14 DISTANCE IS NEEDED IN INTERACTING WITH OTHERS

Alterity exists in this inter-subjective relationship where there is a 'moral understanding of stakeholders as being ends in themselves – individuals/groups with their own interests that the firm was constructed to serve' (Freeman and Gilbert 1989, cited within Maak and Pless 2006b, p. 102), rather than viewing stakeholders as a means to a corporate end. Levinas (1969) writes that 'the Other is not initially a fact, is

not an *obstacle*' (p. 84). Therefore, stakeholders are not entities to be managed, but are neighbors who should be treated as such. Responsible leadership is social-relational rather than descriptive and instrumental, which parallels Levinas's philosophy. Responsible leadership moves from 'instrumental, theoretical constructs such as agency theory, transaction cost and contract theory ... [to] ... ethical ways of explaining stakeholder relations' (Freeman 2004, cited within Maak and Pless 2006b, p. 102). However, the authors use the term 'agents for world benefit' in the title of their essay (Pless and Maak 2009). Additionally, Maak and Pless (2006b) purport that responsible leadership is normative philosophy (p. 102); however, considering the failure of normative philosophy to stop the genocide that Levinas witnessed firsthand, his phenomenological perspective may provide a better orientation for responsible leadership.

Levinas's phenomenology opens up understanding where listening and learning from the Other is primary. Listening, for Levinas, is not a communicative process, but, rather, being present for and attentive to the Other. It involves de-centering the Self in order to truly experience the needs of Others. This interruption in one's being is necessary to prevent colonizing or imposing on another, even with good intentions. Additionally, listening creates space between the Self and Other, which is necessary to receive the Other (Lipari 2004, p. 137). Listening also involves engaging without judgment or interpreting through the Self. In communicating on a global scale, responsible leadership involves intercultural communication that at times may be quite difficult. Eliciting a Levinasian standpoint, Lipari (*ibid.*, p. 138) provides guidance:

In my dialogic encounter with you, I will not only listen for your radical alterity but I will open and make a place for it. It means that I do not resort only to what is easy – what I already know, or what we have in common. It means that I listen for and make space for the difficult, the different, the radically strange.

Leaders cannot assume they know what is best for stakeholders; this is determined by stakeholders themselves. Pless and Maak (2009) acknowledge problems that have arisen from not adequately listening to the Other where the Other did not want the 'help' that leaders were providing. They state: 'it was very clear that we all need to listen to the perspective of others and suspend our judgment' (*ibid.*, p. 64). In this example, leaders were attempting to 'control or master the other' (Lipari 2004, p. 123) instead of truly listening and responding to the Other's call. Here, Lipari (*ibid.*, p. 128) would contend that the leaders were not following what Levinas commands:

We are called upon to never lose sight of the otherness of the other. That is, we are asked to never mistake our understanding of the other for the other, never to impose our meaning and understanding upon the other, never to attempt to absorb, assimilate, or appropriate the other into ourselves.

Levinas provides guidance for the edicts of 'advancing humanism on a global scale' and 'business leaders as citizens of the world' (Maak and Pless 2009, p. 537) with an ethical imperative to respect difference and not lose sight of individual human encounters.

15 OTHERS PROVIDE UNDERSTANDING FOR LEADERS TO LEARN WHAT THEY COULD NOT KNOW OTHERWISE

By positioning the stakeholder Other at a height in the Levinasian sense, stakeholders may teach the business leader 'Self,' thereby developing the leader's identity. Maak and Pless (2006b) offer a diagram of 'the roles model of responsible leadership' (p. 107).

They acknowledge that traditional leadership research focuses on traits and personality attributes of the Self and the utility and effectiveness of exchange processes, rather than paying attention to the significance of leadership roles and their ethicality and multiplicity in a stakeholder environment (ibid., p. 106). They identify that 'having a good character and being a moral person are at the core of being a responsible leader' (ibid., p. 105); however, from a Levinasian perspective, this identity is a result of the ethical response to the Other – recall that Levinas does not permit time for internal reflection or introspection, only action in response to the Other's face. For example, believing one has an honest character has little meaning until honesty is portrayed through action. Murray (2000) contends 'the ethical imperative from which ethical deliberation and decision-making proceeds comes from the Other' (p. 146). Levinas may prove to be more germane to 'practiced morality' (Maak and Pless 2006b, p. 105) as the showcase for a person's integrity. Levinas professed the importance of other-informed learning prior to the growing use of 'service learning' (Pless et al. 2011) that businesses have employed to develop responsible leaders.

By positioning the Other at a height who teaches and responding to the call of the Other, responsible leaders gain 'relational intelligence' (a combination of emotional intelligence and ethical intelligence), not the other way around as Maak and Pless purport (2006b, p. 105). Relational intelligence is acquired by being taught what the Self cannot know on its own; the faces of stakeholders teach the leader how to be ethical. Thus, from a Levinasian perspective, Maak and Pless's diagram, which positions character in the center, may be alternatively envisioned as character formed by the leader's response to the face of stakeholders. Their diagram is leader-centric, which is problematic for responding appropriately to stakeholder needs.

16 THE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE EMERGES IN UNIQUE HUMAN ENCOUNTERS

Clearly, with the misconduct that has taken place in business, leaders have ignored the face of many stakeholder Others who would call leaders to respond differently. Even leaders with good intentions are leader-centric if their responses originate in what they believe to be best for stakeholders. If business leaders would turn outwardly toward Others, they would see that 'the face opens the primordial discourse whose first word is obligation, which no "interiority" permits avoiding' (Levinas 1969, p. 201). Espousing a Levinasian ethic of responsibility, leaders will escape their Self preoccupation where 'in patience the will breaks through the crust of its egoism and as it were displaces its center of gravity outside of itself, to will as Desire and Goodness limited by nothing' (Levinas 1969, p. 239). If leaders truly face the stakeholders who are before them, they will be able to respond more responsibly.

Leaders need to have real encounters with stakeholder Others, rather than perceiving them as abstract entities of a singular category. This was a realization for Levinas in a short, yet profound, story he conveys in *Difficult Freedom* (1963 [1990]). A dog that wandered into the prisoner of war encampment treated the prisoners with more humanity than their captors. Levinas writes, 'He would appear at morning assembly and was waiting for us as we returned, jumping up and down and barking in delight. For him, there was no doubt that we were men' (ibid., p. 153). The lesson for responsible leadership is that there is a risk of depriving people of their humanity and individual uniqueness when categorizing them into stakeholder roles. Again, for Levinas, needs emerge in temporal encounters that elicit an appropriate response.

Stakeholder Others guide appropriate response; encounters cannot be predicted or determined prior to engagement.

Maak and Pless (2006b) discuss an appropriate response of business leaders as 'regular communication and transparent reporting' (p. 101). With regard to this openness, Levinas (1969) uses the metaphor of nakedness, or to be without adornment (p. 74). Lack of transparency has been a notorious issue in the past with businesses like Enron that had an impeccable ethics code, but whose leaders failed to enact it (Seeger and Ulmer 2003). The ethics code was merely a dressing to hide the unethical business practices of company leaders. Loacker and Muhr (2009) discuss the limiting effects of codes of conduct and propose a practice-based ethic of responsiveness developed partially from Levinas's philosophy. In addition, the idea of a dressing relates to an organization's vision and mission statement, which further supports the emphasis that Levinas puts on action: 'inner feelings and thoughts cannot be observed. They are private and unstable. So men are judged by what they do' (1969, p. 17). It follows that business leaders are to be judged by how they embody their credos.

Maak and Pless (2006b) and Pless (2007) describe responses of responsible leadership as being a steward, citizen, servant, and visionary. While correlations to Levinas's philosophy exist with the first three responses, Levinas does not offer a parallel to the idea of a leader as a visionary. Maak and Pless (2006b) describe this response as 'developing and having a vision of a desired future and ways and means to get there' (p. 109). This is not a surprise because they even note that visionary leaders can be ethical like Ghandi, or unethical like Hitler (Ciulla, 2004). In addition, Levinas works from a phenomenological standpoint that does not involve envisioning a desired future or strategy for how to achieve it. Moreover, visionary, charismatic, or transformational leadership has recently been noted as a trend of the past (Avolio et al. 2009; Tourish 2008). Perhaps the responses of steward, citizen, and servant could be described as 'generosity,' which Robbins (1999) argues is salient to Levinas because it is a non-totalizing way of relating to the Other (p. 6). Generosity recognizes the importance of being present to the face in each unique encounter and respond appropriately to needs as they emerge.

17 LEADERS MUST BE DIRECTED TOWARD POSITIVE SOCIAL CHANGE

Business leaders as agents for world benefit calls for ethical responsibility to enact humanness (Pless and Maak 2009); however, it is focused on this practice as a business 'opportunity' ('About – core concepts' 2013). Alternatively, Levinas would command leaders to consider it as a practice of 'responsibility' instead and caution the use of 'agency.' Opportunity and agency are focused on the Self, while responsibility is focused on the Other. This idea can be correlated to Arnett's (2004) discussion of the difference between pursuit (opportunity) and response (responsibility) where 'pursuit suggests a Western story of accumulation, and response suggests a call of responsibility that embraces burdens in responsible action in an unfinished world of infinity, not a world of totality and accumulation' (p. 83). In another essay, Maak and Pless (2009) state that finding a win-win solution is imperative for business and society, but 'if no win-win solution can be realized the leader would give priority to developing solutions for the benefit of people in need' (p. 60). Levinas claims that 'the foreign face calls to my fraternity of the human race, my position as brother' (1969, p. 214). In addition, Levinas quotes Rabbi Yochanan who says: 'to leave men without food is a fault that no circumstance attenuates; the distinction between

the voluntary and the involuntary does not apply here' (ibid., p. 201). Levinas plainly makes a polemic call for leaders to respond to the suffering of Others.

Maak and Pless (2006b) refer back to Plato, 'whose main task was to weave together different kinds of people into the fabric of society' (p. 104). From this viewpoint, globalization can change from an agency-driven mechanism to building a human fabric of world community while respecting alterity. While this embraces an ethical ideal, Levinas would caution to maintain the unique phenomenological aspect of the Self–Other encounter. Through ongoing inter-subjective encounters, a transcendental trace remains, which forms a fabric of an ethical community; however, for Levinas (1969), it is important that this does not become totalized:

The relations proceeding from me to the Other – the attitude of one person with regard to another – must be stronger than the formal signification of conjunction, to which every relation risks being degraded. This greater force is concretely affirmed in the fact that the relation proceeding from me to the other cannot be included within a network of relations visible to a third party. If this bond between me and the other could be entirely apprehended from the outside it would suppress, under the gaze that encompassed it, the very multiplicity bound with this bond. The individuals would appear as participants in the totality: the Other would amount to a second copy of the I – both included in the same concept. (pp. 120–121)

This idea is important to reconsider in Maak's (2007) conception of the emergence of social capital in relation to responsible leadership and stakeholder engagement. Levinas would caution against the use of the term 'capital' in describing social relations. One should not choose to act 'as a weaver or broker of social capital' with the purpose of generating a network as Maak purports (ibid., p. 331), but allow the fabric of the human community to emerge through responsible leadership. Reorienting the perspective of social capital moves the concept away from totality and toward infinity.

18 ENGAGEMENT WITH OTHERS OPENS A LEADER'S CONSCIOUSNESS AND IDENTITY FORMATION

Some scholars pose the question, 'why be moral?' (Hendley 1996; Plant 2006); this essay should have answered the question. Behaving immorally presupposes that human beings do not possess moral worth and are not deserving of dignity. Through responsible leadership, being moral provides meaning to life and forms identity. For Levinas, leaders do not partake in ethical action for the purpose of developing meaning and identity; there is no reason for responding ethically. However, identity and meaning are important implications for leaders. Business leaders cannot exist without stakeholder Others; 'phenomenologically, the Other makes an "I" possible. Ethics as responsibility for the Other is an act that makes possible human life – without the "Other" there is no "I"' (Arnett 2004).

Leadership rooted in hierarchal structure, where a leader is positioned at the top and determines the fate of his or her followers either through transformational/inspirational means, or through authority, positions followers as passive in the relationship. On the contrary, responsible leadership achieves legitimacy not through charisma or 'position, status, reward or coercive power. It is only in and through the stakeholder relations that leadership legitimacy can be earned from stakeholders' (Maak and Pless 2006b, p. 104). This statement concurs with Levinas's description of 'self-centered totalistic thinking that organizes men and things into power systems, and gives us control over nature and other people' (Levinas 1969, p. 17).

However, for Levinas, leaders are positioned in the midst of relationships with Others rather than at the center of these relationships.

Hendley (1996) offers that in the Levinasian response there is a sense of goodness and a realization that 'there is more at stake in my life than myself and my own fulfillment' (p. 518). Paradoxically, the Self learns more about itself and grows morally by taking the focus away from the Self and attending to the Other. Pless and Maak (2009) presented 'learning narratives' of leaders whose identity was informed by responding to the call of those in need. Sharing these stories is helpful because they convey phenomenological experiences that data cannot provide. Throughout human history, storytelling has been fundamental to revealing and developing the human condition.

19 FUTURE RESEARCH AND LIMITATIONS

This essay has identified responsible leadership as a contemporary theory where Levinas may offer a philosophical contribution. Responsible leadership was chosen due to its parallels of responsibility with Levinasian philosophy and opportunities for reorienting understanding of the theory. Responsible leadership is one of the new emerging theories in the leadership literature among many others, including ethical leadership (Brown and Trevino 2006), respectful leadership (Quaquebeke and Eckloff 2010), relational leadership (Uhl-Bien 2006), discursive leadership (Fairhurst 2008), positive leadership (Cameron 2008; Hannah et al. 2009), authentic leadership (Avolio et al. 2004), and servant leadership (Greenleaf 1977; Liden et al. 2008). The multiplicity of emerging ideas in leadership studies offers a great opportunity to study them from a Humanities perspective, whether through a philosophical lens as this essay has done, or from other approaches within the Humanities.

While this essay has sought to bring Levinas into the conversation of responsible leadership, future research may extend his ideas about responsible leadership by considering his additional works. The Self–Other encounter, albeit quite important, is also a limitation. Levinas's idea of 'the third' in his other work may extend to organizational and transnational levels of analysis. In order to respond to the needs of people in developing countries, responsible leaders elicit cooperation from governments and non-government entities to form public–private partnerships. Levinas calls leaders to respond to the impoverished, but whether he may contribute to the understanding of these collaborative partnerships is open to further research. One of the most recent articles published on responsible leadership discusses the impact on responsible leadership with firms and society (Pless et al. 2012), which may open up further opportunities for perspectives from the Humanities.

Maak and Pless have used the terms 'humanism' and 'citizens of the world,' to which Levinas's *Humanism of the Other* (1972) may offer insight. Other philosophical standpoints may also make a contribution to understanding the relationship of responsible leadership and humanism. Sartre's *Existentialism is a Humanism* (1956 [2007]) may provide understanding for how, in being responsible to the immediate Other, we are responsible for all humanity. However, considering Sartre's adversity toward social relations as he states 'hell is other people' in *No Exit* (1946) and 'pratico-inerte' in *The Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960 [1976]), Levinas may provide necessary balance in considering humanism. Writing this essay also illuminated the possibility of analysing the 'glance of the Other' in Levinas's *Totality and Infinity* (1969) alongside Sartre's 'the look' in *Being and Nothingness* (1943). Additionally, Hazel Barnes's *Humanistic Existentialism: The Literature of Possibility* (1959) and *An Existentialist Ethics* (1967)

may provide a bridge for the philosophies of Levinas and Sartre. Contrary to Sartre, Barnes views existential interpersonal relations and society in a favorable light. For example, she discusses the idea of existential love as looking-at-the-world-together. Finally, considering the socio-relational aspect of leadership, other existential dialogic perspectives such as Buber (1958) and Bakhtin (1993) may be worthwhile explorations.

20 CONCLUSION

Organizational scholars have recently turned in the direction of finding meaning and purpose in the lives of people at work (Cheney et al. 2009; Ciulla 2000; Crawford 2009; Pauchant 1994). For Levinas, 'Meaning is the face of the Other ... the Other faces me and puts me in question and *oblige*s me by his essence qua infinity' (Levinas 1969, pp. 206–207). Consequently, a leader has no other choice than to engage in responsible leadership. By doing so, leaders will leave an impression or trace in the world that is meaningful for future generations. When work takes up so much of human life, business leaders can feel their work is part of a meaningful life experience where

[e]thics, communicated in simple gestures, words of encouragement, and displays of care, guarantees that our lives have meaning. The trace we leave behind when we are gone from sight or from life on earth is something not to miss but to cherish as a model of human decency. (Jovanovic and Wood 2004, p. 332)

This essay sought to answer the call by Maak and Pless (2006a; 2006b; Pless and Maak 2011) to add to a larger discussion of the topic. Levinas provides a perspective from the Humanities that is constructive to the study of responsible leadership. Moreover, Levinas 'transformed the landscape of ethical theory' (Katz 2005, p. 100); however, his philosophy has not reached the realm of leadership where it could offer infinite hope. His philosophy provides guidance rather than prescription or normative rule for ethical decision-making. Rather, Levinas provides an understanding of the phenomenological experience of ethics. By introducing Levinas's philosophy to the scholarship of responsible leadership, a phenomenological standpoint is used to inform leadership theory.

It is time to engage multiple disciplines to inform one another. The preface to *Totality and Infinity* (1969) invites us to do this: 'the work deserves to be widely read not only by professional philosophers, for it is carefully thought out by an original mind, but by intelligent laymen as well, for it is close to life' (p. 20). As business leaders engage diverse others through a globalized marketplace and in responding to the needs of people in developing countries, Levinas becomes even more salient. Business leaders can be part of making the world a better place by understanding that their 'power, privilege, and potential' (Maak and Pless 2009) are situated in the human realm of totality but have the opportunity to open infinity with responsible engagement of the Other. Maak and Pless (2009) cite the UNCTAD data that states 'of the 100 largest economies in the world, 51 are now global corporations, only 49 are countries' (p. 537). This suggests even stronger support for the responsibility of business leaders to respond to the call of the stranger, orphan, and widow to protect and promote human rights, eradicate poverty, reduce the spread of disease, and reclaim the environment.

Scholars in other disciplines often purport that Levinas is one of the most important figures for understanding communication ethics and moral theory (Arnett 2003; Hendley 1996).

Levinas is a 'philosophical starting place' for many of us looking for answers to why the modern project dismantled itself. Levinas's work offers another view – a view contrary to modern conceptions of human life. We journey to Levinas to discover a different path, a different route, and with the different sense of hope that his corrective conversation invites. (Arnett 2003, p. 49)

As Arnett recognizes, Levinas does not provide the answer, but questions modern assumptions, which enhances the conversation about human relations. Business leaders have an opportunity to choose how they engage Others. The Other has been calling; it is up to responsible leaders to turn outwardly to the face and respond with an unconditional 'yes, here I am' (Derrida and Brault 1996).

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