

The Contributions of Presocratic Greek Moral Philosophy to Contemporary Educative Leadership

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ABSTRACT

This paper identifies the contributions of Presocratic Greek moral philosophers to educative leadership. Educative leadership is defined as leadership that is educative in intent and outcome, thereby including deontological and teleological ethics. Forms of educative leadership used to trace the impact of Presocratic ethics include transformational, instructional, distributed, ethical, adaptive and culturally responsive theories of leadership in education. Four themes are identified in contributions: the transition from mythology to rational thought, the development of diverse ethical approaches, understanding the cosmos and human nature, and adopting degrees of relativism and Sophistic thought. It is argued that, by integrating these Presocratic themes, educative leaders can develop a more holistic, inclusive, and ethically grounded approach to leadership, ultimately enhancing the educational experiences and outcomes for all members of a learning organisation. It is concluded that Presocratic ethical frameworks can inform educative leadership by emphasizing rationality, virtue, and evidence-based decision-making, guiding leaders to navigate diverse contexts, model ethical behaviour, and foster inclusive environments.

Keywords: Presocratic ethics, educative leadership, transformational leadership, instructional leadership, distributed leadership, ethical leadership, adaptive leadership, culturally responsive leadership.

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores how the moral philosophies of the Presocratic Greek thinkers—emerging in the 6th century BCE as a shift from mythological to rational explanations—can inform and enrich contemporary educative leadership by offering basic insights into ethical reasoning, human nature, and the conditions for inclusive and reflective leadership practice.

To begin with two limitations, ethics or moral philosophy in the Western world reflects the development of Western cultures from their Hellenistic roots, which tends to marginalise the rich heritage of non-Western thought (e.g. Huntington, 1996). And, before Socrates, Archaic Greek cultures drew structured moral lessons from myths and legends, although they were not presented in a philosophical manner. To explain, the Ancient Greek word for happiness, *eudaimonia*, originally meant being favoured by the gods or good spirits, indicating that it was once believed that divine forces controlled human life. From about 600 BCE, however, a new mode of rational argument started to emerge, laying the foundation for Western philosophy as a distinct way of thinking.

The Presocratics were diverse thinkers whose original works were often lost but referred to by Plato and Aristotle, with inevitable inaccuracies. Socrates was born in 469/470 BCE and died in 399 BCE. The following discussion examines major examples of Presocratic moral philosophy. Reconstructing these early traditions presents inherent historiographical challenges, as much of the surviving material is fragmentary, mediated through later authors, and subject to interpretive controversy. Moreover, the necessary brevity of this paper risks further compression of complex and often disputed ideas. To address these limitations, the analysis is anchored in established scholarship, drawing principally on Graham's (2010) monumental study of Presocratic fragments, Barnes' (2001) authoritative overview of Presocratic philosophy, and the recent synthesis provided by Wikipedia contributors (2024).

The Milesian Philosophers

Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes were from Miletus in Ionia (modern day Turkey). They all developed positions on ethics independent of the poetic and

mythological traditions handed down by Homer and Hesiod. Thales (c. 624-c. 545 BCE) is often considered to be the first philosopher in Western philosophy. He is reputed to have been politically active, a military and business genius, a predictor of natural events, responsible for introducing Egyptian geometry to Greece, and having an interest in the beginnings of the cosmos. He stressed the role of water as an *arche* (organising principle). He apparently exemplified the benefits of integrating practical and theoretical wisdom and is primarily remembered for his contributions to natural philosophy, before the development of modern science, rather than to ethics.

Anaximander (c. 610-c. 545 BCE) may have been Thales's student. He reputedly invented a simple sundial, travelled extensively and distributed knowledge about the calendar and geography, theorised about the components of matter, most especially the role of the *apeiron* (the boundlessness of the cosmos), and reflected on human evolution, all without factoring in divine intervention.

Similarly, Anaximenes (c. 546-c. 528/5 BCE) focussed on the boundlessness of the cosmos, giving air a central role, and started to reformulate religious thought with quasi-scientific and naturalistic explanations of the world.

In sum, the Milesian philosophers made relatively modest contributions to moral thought, but they did establish a foundation for rational inquiry that later shaped educative leadership. By shifting explanations of the cosmos and human existence from myth to reason, they demonstrated the importance of questioning, observing, and theorising—qualities that remain central to reflective leadership in education. Their emphasis on practical wisdom combined with theoretical insight suggests an early model of leadership that values both evidence-based decision-making and a vision of broader possibilities for human development.

Xenophanes and Pythagoras

The first explicit critique of traditional ways of thinking about divinity was made by Xenophanes (c. 570-c. 478 BCE). He also questioned the glorification of athletes arguing that wisdom should be preferred, implying an ethical role for virtue. He noted that, although opinion prevents absolutely trustworthy knowledge claims, it is possible—by rejecting dogmas—to advance understandings. He rejected the human habit of attributing human characteristics or behaviour to the gods instead of locating blame for disgraceful behaviour with people, thereby opening the door to a critical and rational theology and additional virtues.

Pythagoras of Samos (c. 570-c. 490 BCE) founded a religious and philosophical school in Croton, southern Italy, which advocated a way of life that combined rigorous intellectual pursuits with specific ethical practices aimed at achieving purity of the soul. Pythagoras and his followers believed in the

transmigration of souls (reincarnation), which greatly influenced their ethical views. Their ethical framework was deeply intertwined with their metaphysical and cosmological beliefs, positing that the soul's purity and harmony were essential for a virtuous life. Their framework focussed on harmony, order, and the pursuit of the divine.

The Pythagoreans believed that the cosmos was structured according to mathematical principles and that, by understanding these principles, one could align their soul with the cosmic order. There were four key principles of Pythagorean ethics (Huffman, 2005):

1. **Harmony and Balance:** Just as the cosmos is governed by harmonious mathematical ratios, human life should be lived in harmony and balance. This involves moderation in all things and avoiding excess.
2. **Purity and Asceticism:** The Pythagoreans practiced various forms of purity and asceticism, such as dietary restrictions (e.g., abstaining from meat), wearing simple clothes, and maintaining a disciplined lifestyle. These practices were believed to purify the soul and prepare it for its eventual release from the cycle of reincarnation.
3. **Justice and Reciprocity:** Ethical behavior was also seen in terms of justice, often interpreted as giving each their due and maintaining fairness in interactions. The principle of reciprocity, treating others as one wishes to be treated, was fundamental.
4. **Reverence for the Divine:** Pythagorean ethics emphasized piety and the importance of rituals and ceremonies that honoured the gods. This reverence extended to the belief that ethical living was a form of worship and alignment with the divine order.

Four strengths of Pythagorean ethics are:

1. **Holistic Approach:** Pythagorean ethics offers a holistic approach to living, integrating physical, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions. This comprehensive view encourages individuals to strive for balance and harmony in all aspects of life.
2. **Influence on Later Thought:** Pythagorean ideas profoundly influenced later philosophical and religious traditions, particularly Platonism and Neoplatonism. Their emphasis on mathematical principles and the idea of a cosmos governed by order resonated through centuries of philosophical thought.
3. **Community and Discipline:** The Pythagorean community model fostered a strong sense of belonging and mutual support among its members. The disciplined lifestyle promoted by

Pythagorean ethics can lead to personal growth and a strong moral character.

4. **Focus on Justice and Reciprocity:** The emphasis on justice and treating others fairly remains a cornerstone of ethical theory. The Pythagorean commitment to reciprocity prefigures the Golden Rule found in many ethical systems.

Conversely, four limitations of Pythagorean ethics are:

1. **Esoteric and Exclusive:** Pythagorean ethics, being closely tied to specific religious and mystical beliefs, can seem esoteric and inaccessible to those not initiated into Pythagorean thought. This exclusivity limits its broader applicability.
2. **Rigidity of Ascetic Practices:** The ascetic practices advocated by Pythagorean ethics, such as strict dietary restrictions and other forms of self-denial, may be seen as too rigid and impractical for many people. These practices can sometimes overshadow the broader ethical principles and make the philosophy less appealing.
3. **Lack of Flexibility:** The emphasis on strict adherence to a set of rules and the focus on purity may lead to a lack of flexibility in ethical decision making. This rigidity can make it difficult to adapt Pythagorean ethics to complex or evolving moral situations.
4. **Mystical Elements:** The mystical and religious elements of Pythagorean ethics, such as the belief in reincarnation and the transmigration of souls, may not be convincing or relevant to those who do not share these metaphysical views. This reliance on specific metaphysical beliefs can limit the universality of Pythagorean ethical principles.

In sum, Pythagorean ethics presents a unique and comprehensive approach to ethical living that integrates metaphysical beliefs, mathematical harmony, and disciplined practices. Its strengths lie in its holistic view of life, its lasting influence on philosophical thought, and its focus on community and justice. However, its limitations, such as exclusivity, rigidity, and dependence on specific mystical beliefs, can restrict its appeal and applicability in a broader context. Despite these limitations, the core principles of Pythagorean ethics, particularly the emphasis on harmony, balance, and justice, continue to resonate and offer valuable insights into ethical living, and potentially, educative leadership.

Heraclitus and The Eleatic Group

Heraclitus (c. 540-c. 480 BCE) made heavy use of aphorisms, which created ambiguities, and criticized others for their ignorance or lack of genuine understanding. He saw reality as

comprising contradictions that were kept in balance by constant change. Nevertheless, he was one of the first philosophers to make a distinction between having information, understanding how it all fits together, and its overall significance. He was also first to use the Ancient Greek term *logos* (traditionally meaning word, thought, principle, or speech) to describe the cosmic order.

Heraclitus was centrally interested in ethical questions about how human beings should live and how wisdom is essential for living well and yet concluded that most people lack the kind of fundamental insight into the nature of reality in which wisdom is found (Johnstone, 2020). His greatest contributions to ethics were therefore more about understanding the cosmos and human nature rather than direct moral prescriptions. He relied heavily on the supposed unity of opposites and the importance of understanding *logos* for living a good life.

There were other Presocratic philosophers of note although they tended to have interests in areas other than ethics. The Eleatic Group were a case in point. Parmenides (c. 515-c. 450 BCE), for example, focused on the nature of being or reality and believed in monism – that all things in existence are part of the same essential oneness or whole, as opposed to dualism which believes that the mental and physical realms are fundamentally different. He is regarded by some as the father of metaphysics.

Zeno of Elea (c. 490-c. 430 BCE.) gained fame by identifying conceptual paradoxes, such as plurality, dichotomies, infinite divisibility and motion.

Melissus, an admiral who led a battle against the Athenians (c. 441 BCE), followed Parmenidean on monism, although differed on the temporality and limitations of what-is. He extended Eleatic monism by emphasizing the eternal and unchanging nature of being.

Heraclitus and the Eleatics contributed only indirectly to the development of educative leadership, since their focus was primarily on metaphysics and the nature of reality rather than ethics or practice. Heraclitus' notions of constant change and the unity of opposites can be seen as faint precursors to the adaptive and reflective dimensions of modern leadership, but his insights were expressed in ways too ambiguous to guide leadership directly. Similarly, the Eleatics' emphasis on being, unity, and paradox sharpened rational inquiry and logical reasoning, but their influence on educative leadership was comparatively limited to reinforcing the value of disciplined thought rather than offering concrete ethical or practical guidance.

Anaxagoras, Democritus and the Sophists

Unlike the Eleatics, Anaxagoras of Clazomenae (c. 500-c. 428 B.C.E.) was almost exclusively concerned with

cosmology and the true nature of all that is around us. He allowed for change and natural processes to take place, without reducing these processes to sensory illusions. Although he advanced purely naturalistic explanations of the world, he gave *nous* (the mind) an active and organizing role in his cosmology.

The Atomist Democritus (c. 5th century BCE) theorised principally about the nature of matter, perception, and knowledge. His moral philosophy primarily comprised aphorisms about well-being based on contentment, freedom from disturbance and doing what is of personal benefit. His measures of benefit were pleasure and pain, or joy and sorrow, although with intellectual pleasure set above the sensual as the best measure of the best sort of life.

Echoing Heraclitus, Democritus argued that the best sort of person sees greater value in thinking than in polymathy, and greater value in good action than in words about goodness. A wise person, he claimed, does not leave things to chance but thinks, learns, and plans according to intelligence. By this he apparently meant that if the soul is a configuration of atoms, then teaching, learning, thought, and wisdom can help to refigure the soul and free us from the tyranny of chance. More broadly, his ethical teachings emphasized moderation, intellectual pleasure, and a harmonious and cheerful life.

The Sophists were a group of itinerant teachers who negotiated contracts to teach the wealthy on a variety of subjects, with legal and political rhetoric given pre-eminence. Their reputation for being able to argue from both sides or to the advantage of their benefactors resulted in them being regarded as moral and epistemological relativists. A less simplistic evaluation would acknowledge their explorations of various philosophical themes, including rhetoric, epistemology, and ethics, and the varying degrees to which individual Sophists like Protagoras and Gorgias embraced relativism (the belief that the truth, morality, and values are not absolute but are relative to the perspectives, cultures, or individual preferences).

Protagoras of Abdera (c. 490-c. 420 BCE) was the most famous of the Sophists. His most remembered claim is that "Of all things the measure is Man, of the things that are, that they are, and of the things that are not, that they are not." This was taken to mean that the truth or otherwise of how things are is entirely dependent on individual perception and opinion. This assumption ruled out any role for other forms of evidence, knowledge and divine intervention, and systematically favoured Protagoras' primary business purpose of teaching persuasion through rhetoric, rather than arbitrating the truth. Protagoras's moral philosophy is therefore a variant of ethical relativism (Velasquez, et al., 2024). It assumes that morality is relative to an individual's perception or the norms of a culture. An action is considered right or wrong depending on the morality of the individual or the moral norms of their host culture. This means that the same action may be morally right

for one person but not another, or rightness in one society but morally wrong in another.

Gorgias (c. 485-c. 380 BCE) was another Sophist with a more extreme rhetorical and poetic style. It is unclear if his recovered works were sophisticated exercises in argumentation or advocacy for scepticism, relativism, or even nihilism - which rejects widely accepted aspects of human existence, such as morality.

Another Sophist, Antiphon, advocated justice as obeying the laws and customs (*nomos*) of the host city, when others are able to witness it, otherwise obeying what he referred to ambiguously as the laws of nature (*physis*). His moral code verged on hedonism tempered by a practical wisdom about what was advantageous for himself.

Prodicus of Ceos (c. 465-c. 395 BCE), another Sophist, challenged theistic thinking that attributed god-like status to benefits and considering gods as being independent of human judgement about them. Kouloumentas (2018) pointed out that fragmentary evidence shows that Prodicus theorised about the rise of civilisation where humans initially regarded whatever was useful for their survival as gods, later deifying cultural heroes such as Demeter (goddess of the harvest and agriculture) and Dionysus (god of winemaking, orchards and fruit, vegetation, fertility, festivity, insanity, ritual madness, religious ecstasy, and theatre).

Anaxagoras, Democritus, and the Sophists had only a restricted influence on modern educative leadership, as their primary concerns lay elsewhere. Anaxagoras's focus on cosmology and the organizing role of *nous* offered little direct ethical guidance, though it faintly anticipated the value of reason in leadership. Democritus's emphasis on moderation, intellectual pleasure, and planning provided some moral insights, while the Sophists' relativism and focus on rhetoric highlighted the importance of persuasion and context, but their lack of commitment to universal ethical principles restricted their long-term impact on educative leadership theory.

Anonymous Presocratic Philosophers

Finally, Graham (2010) provided an analysis of two anonymous Presocratic texts of Sophistic thought, *Anonymous Iamblich* and the *Dissoi Logoi*. The former advocated an education in virtue from an early age, a lifetime of self-control and an indifference to money. Given how love for money reflects fears, and how rivalries and competition generate greed, it called for laws to ensure that money remains a good for the entire community and the community remains workable. Since lawlessness and greed beget tyranny, virtue and law must be intimately connected.

Overall, the *Anonymous Iamblich* has intimations of virtue

ethics, Stoicism, a critique of materialism, social contract theory and communitarianism, and the interconnections of virtue and law. It provides a vision of a society where moral education, self-control, communal welfare, and just laws are all crucial for achieving a harmonious and sustainable community.

The *Dissoi Logoi* or Twofold Arguments focussed on the relativity of opposites and contended that what is good in one situation might be bad in another, or good for one person, but bad for another. The relativity of right and wrong was then extended to cultural norms but failed to consider that certain activities could be universally wrong or right on other grounds.

Together, these anonymous texts offered only partial contributions to educative leadership theory, as their influence was largely confined to reinforcing the importance of moral education, self-discipline, and critical reflection on cultural norms, without providing a systematic framework for leadership practice. Nevertheless, a deeper analysis of Pre-Socratic philosophy reveals a few important contributions.

The Four Themes of Presocratic Moral Philosophy

The Presocratic period in Ancient Greek philosophy, spanning roughly from the 6th century BCE to the advent of Socratic philosophy, marks the emergence of systematic ethical thought distinct from mythological traditions. As noted above, it was prefaced by Homer (c. 850–750 BCE), author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and Hesiod (c. 750–650 BCE), author of *Theogony*—about the myths of the gods—and *Works and Days*—about peasant life. They offered very different models of conduct or virtues. Homer's code glorified heroic individualism, while Hesiod's work valued collectivism and work-related values, reflecting socio-political tensions in Ancient Greek societies.

The first theme in Presocratic thought was the transition from mythology to rational thought, in two phases:

1. **Mythological Foundations:** Before the rise of rational philosophy, Ancient Greek ethics were deeply rooted in mythology and legend. Homer and Hesiod provided moral frameworks through epic narratives. In Homer's works, virtues such as bravery, honour, and loyalty were exemplified through heroic individualism. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* illustrated an ethic centred on personal glory and a heroic code of conduct. Conversely, Hesiod's *Works and Days* emphasized collectivism, hard work, and justice, reflecting the socio-economic realities of peasant life and promoting communal values.
2. **Emergence of Rational Philosophy:** Around 600 BCE, thinkers began to challenge mythological explanations, seeking rational and naturalistic accounts of the world and human existence. This shift laid the groundwork for Western philosophy, marking a move towards systematic

ethical inquiry based on reason rather than divine intervention.

The second theme was the development of diverse ethical approaches, for example:

1. **Milesian Philosophers:** The Milesian philosophers—Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes—focused primarily on cosmology and the principles underlying the universe. While not explicitly ethical, their inquiries contributed to the rational framework within which ethical thinking evolved. Thales' emphasis on practical and theoretical wisdom, Anaximander's concept of the *apeiron* (the boundless), and Anaximenes' focus on air as a fundamental element all reflect a move towards understanding the natural world in ways that indirectly inform ethical considerations.
2. **Xenophanes:** Xenophanes critiqued traditional anthropomorphic depictions of gods and argued for a more rational theology. He emphasized the value of wisdom over athletic prowess, suggesting that ethical living involves critical thinking and rejecting dogma. This laid the foundation for a more rational and introspective approach to ethics.
3. **Pythagorean Ethics:** Pythagoras and his followers developed a comprehensive ethical framework grounded in their metaphysical and cosmological beliefs. Central to Pythagorean ethics were principles of harmony, balance, purity, justice, and reverence for the divine. Their belief in the transmigration of souls (reincarnation) and the pursuit of soul purity through ascetic practices highlighted the integration of spiritual and ethical living.

The third theme in Presocratic thought was understanding the relationship between the cosmos and human nature:

1. **Heraclitus:** Heraclitus' ethics were deeply intertwined with his metaphysical views. He introduced the concept of the *logos* (cosmic order) and emphasized the unity of opposites. Heraclitus suggested that understanding the constant change and balance in the cosmos was essential for living well. His aphoristic style underscored the importance of wisdom and understanding over the mere accumulation of information.
2. **Eleatics:** The Eleatic philosophers, such as Parmenides and Zeno, focused more on metaphysics than ethics. Parmenides' monism—the idea that all existence is one unchanging reality—challenged traditional views of diversity and change. Zeno's paradoxes, which explored the nature of plurality and motion, contributed to philosophical discussions that

indirectly influenced ethical thought by questioning the nature of reality and human perception.

3. **Anaxagoras and Democritus:** Anaxagoras introduced the concept of *nous* (mind) as a fundamental organizing principle of the cosmos, emphasizing naturalistic explanations over divine ones. Democritus, known for his atomistic theory, offered ethical teachings centred on achieving contentment and intellectual pleasure. He advocated for a life of moderation and intellectual fulfillment, echoing Heraclitus' emphasis on understanding over mere knowledge accumulation.

The fourth theme was relativism and Sophistic thought:

1. **The Sophists**, including Protagoras, Gorgias, Antiphon, and Prodicus, were itinerant teachers who explored various philosophical themes, including ethics, through rhetoric and relativism. Protagoras' assertion that "Man is the measure of all things" encapsulated the idea of ethical relativism, where moral truth is contingent on individual or cultural perspectives. This relativistic approach challenged absolute notions of right and wrong, emphasizing the variability of moral judgments.
2. **Anonymous Texts:** The *Anonymous Iamblich* and *Dissoi Logoi* texts further explored ethical relativism and the interconnections between virtue, law, and societal well-being. The *Anonymous Iamblich* advocated for virtue ethics, communal welfare, and just laws, suggesting an early form of social contract theory. The *Dissoi Logoi* highlighted the relativity of opposites, arguing that ethical judgments depend on context and perspective.

Presocratic ethics represents a critical transition from mythological to rational explanations of moral conduct, the development of diverse ethical approaches reflecting changing socio-political contexts, and an emphasis on understanding the cosmos and human nature to inform ethical living.

The Contribution of Presocratic Ethics to Educative Leadership

The four themes of Presocratic moral philosophies identified offer valuable insights for understanding and enhancing educative leadership. Each theme, when examined through the lens of leadership theories in education, provides a rich framework for developing more effective and inclusive leadership practices.

The transition from mythology to rational thought in Presocratic philosophy underscores the importance of moving from traditional, unquestioned practices to more rational and evidence-based approaches in educative leadership. Similarly, educative leaders must encourage critical thinking and the use of research-based strategies to improve learning, teaching and

leadership. The shift towards rational philosophy, marked around 600 BCE by thinkers challenging mythological explanations, reflects the need for school leaders to foster an environment where reflective practices and data-driven decision making are prioritized. Supporting professional development that equips educators with the skills to analyse and apply educational research reflects how Presocratic philosophers applied reason to understand the world.

The development of diverse ethical approaches among Presocratic philosophers, such as the Milesian philosophers, Xenophanes, and the Pythagoreans, highlights the value of diverse perspectives in leadership. Early philosophers developed various ethical frameworks, each contributing to the rational framework within which ethical thinking evolved. Educative leaders should be open to different leadership theories—transformational, instructional, distributed, ethical, adaptive and culturally responsive—that I will come back to below. Emphasizing wisdom, critical thinking, and ethical living, as these philosophers did, can guide leaders in creating a balanced and inclusive school culture.

Understanding the cosmos and human nature was another central theme in Presocratic philosophy. Philosophers like Heraclitus, the Eleatics, Anaxagoras, and Democritus explored the complexities of the universe and human existence, intertwining their metaphysical views with ethical considerations. This theme parallels the need for educative leaders to study the complexities of human behaviour and learning processes. Leaders should strive to create environments that respect individual differences and promote holistic development. Emphasizing the interconnectedness of knowledge and the importance of a balanced approach to education, as these philosophers did, can lead to more effective and meaningful teaching and learning experiences.

Relativism and Sophistic thought, represented by figures such as Protagoras and texts like the *Anonymous Iamblich* and *Dissoi Logoi*, can inform educative leaders about the importance of cultural competence and adaptability. The relativistic and context-dependent nature of Sophistic thought emphasizes that ethical judgments can vary based on individual and cultural contexts. It suggests that educative leaders should promote an inclusive environment that respects diverse viewpoints. Encouraging open dialogue and critical debate, akin to the practices of the Sophists, can help build a school culture where ethical considerations are thoughtfully examined and respected.

Integrating these Presocratic themes into educative leadership theories suggests a potentially comprehensive approach. An introductory list includes:

1. **Transformational leadership** that encourages critical thinking and reflective practices, values diversity in thought and approach, fosters a deep understanding of individual and collective needs, and promotes cultural competence and ethical relativism (Shields, 2010a).
2. **Instructional leadership** that prioritizes evidence-based practices and rational decision making, develops professional knowledge and skills through continuous learning, understands and addresses the diverse needs of students and staff, and supports ethical considerations in curriculum and instruction (Robinson, et al., 2008).
3. **Distributed leadership** that recognizes the value of diverse perspectives and shared responsibility, encourages collaborative problem solving and democratic decision making, understands the importance of balance and harmony in organizational dynamics, and respects and integrates the cultural and contextual variations within the school community (Spillane, 2006, Liu, et al., 2022, Tian, 2022a; 2022b).
4. **Ethical leadership** that promotes integrity and fairness, fosters a culture of trust and respect, emphasizes the importance of ethical behavior and decision making, and upholds the moral and ethical standards of the educational community (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Ko, et al., 2022).
5. **Adaptive leadership** that emphasizes the ability of leaders to adapt to changing environments and effectively address complex challenges by mobilizing people to tackle tough issues and thrive in the face of change (Heifetz, et al. 2009).
6. **Culturally responsive leadership** that focuses on creating inclusive educational environments that respect and incorporate the diverse cultural backgrounds of students and their communities, recognizing and valuing cultural differences, promoting equity, and implementing practices that are responsive to the cultural contexts of all students aiming to foster equity and inclusivity (Khalifa, et al. 2016).

By integrating these Presocratic themes, educative leaders can develop a more holistic, inclusive, and ethically grounded approach to leadership, ultimately enhancing the educational experiences and outcomes for all members of the school community.

CONCLUSIONS

Presocratic philosophy, with its shift from mythological to rational explanations of moral conduct, significantly shaped the ethical frameworks evident in all six forms of educative leadership theories; transformational, instructional, distributed, ethical, adaptive and culturally responsive. Early Greek philosophers, seeking rational foundations for ethics,

laid the groundwork for leadership theories that emphasize reason, virtue, and evidence-based decision-making.

Transformational leadership aligns with the Presocratics' focus on rational inquiry and ethical living, advocating for moral values and adaptability in diverse contexts. Instructional leadership reflects Presocratic ideals through its emphasis on virtue, character, and evidence-based practices, while distributed leadership values diverse perspectives and collaborative responsibility. Ethical leadership, informed by Presocratic thought, underscores the importance of rationality, virtue, and inclusive decision-making to address the needs of diverse educational communities.

Similarly, adaptive leadership resonates with the Presocratic commitment to navigating change through reasoned inquiry and moral discernment. It emphasizes flexibility, problem-solving, and leadership as a process of mobilizing people to tackle complex challenges in uncertain environments—paralleling Presocratic themes of questioning, seeking balance, and adapting to the nature of things.

In turn, culturally responsive leadership aligns with Presocratic pluralism by recognizing the value of diverse worldviews and local knowledge systems. It emphasizes ethical engagement with culturally diverse communities, drawing on relationality and respect for difference—principles that echo early Greek efforts to understand *physis* (nature) through multiple lenses. These leadership frameworks, when viewed through a Presocratic lens, demonstrate the enduring relevance of early philosophical commitments to virtue, inquiry, and respect for the complexities of the human condition.

In sum, Presocratic ethical frameworks inform educative leadership by emphasizing rationality, virtue, and evidence-based decision-making, which underpins transformational, instructional, distributed, ethical, adaptive and culturally responsive leadership theories, guiding leaders to navigate diverse contexts, model ethical behaviour, and foster inclusive environments.

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