Who's Afraid of Leadership?

Jacqueline Boaks
The University of Western Australia

‘Leadership’ has become one of the most used and little defined buzzwords of our time. This article explores what one might think of as the sceptical position against accounts of leadership through the lens of ‘fear and loathing’. It explores what we are and should be concerned about regarding notions of leadership in contemporary culture and discourse. This article begins with an account of why we should be interested in the concept of leadership and the roles it plays in our culture. It then examines what we might call the case against leadership, that is, the range of concerns and fears we have about what is presented as ‘leadership’ as well as the legitimate fears that leadership theory can mask. These are some of the difficulties any successful theory of leadership must avoid. The article then outlines a proposed solution that captures essential aspects of what we want from the concept of leadership (and from leaders). Finally, it outlines and addresses a potential problem that this theory of leadership faces.

‘Leadership’ has become one of the most used and little defined buzzwords of our time. We often call for politicians or others to ‘show leadership’. Business, education, sports—there is not any area or profession that does not discuss issues pertaining to leadership eventually. Discussions of leadership raise numerous important issues and reveal a variety of questionable commitments and assumptions. These are often expressed when we ask everyday questions such as: What is leadership? Is leadership a skill some people have or is it a trait of some persons? Are leaders born or made—and if the latter is true, can we teach people to be leaders? Must leaders be good? Was Hitler a good leader? What do we mean by ‘good leaders’-effective? Morally good? Or both? Can a good leader fail? (Would Churchill be regarded as a good leader if the allies lost WWII?). Two key questions raised and often begged in the leadership literature are, firstly, whether there is a univocal concept that answers to the term ‘leadership’ and, secondly, what is the relation, if any, between leadership and ethics. This article explores what one we might think of as the sceptical position against accounts of leadership through the lens of ‘fear and loathing’ and what we are and should be concerned about regarding notions of leadership in contemporary culture and discourse.

The article begins with an account of why we should be interested in the concept of leadership and the roles it plays in our culture. I then examine what we might call the case against leadership, that is, the range of concerns and fears we have about what is presented as ‘leadership’, as well as the legitimate fears that leadership theory can mask, which are some of the difficulties any successful theory of leadership must avoid. I then outline my own proposed solution to the concept of leadership, which captures essential aspects of what we want from the concept of leadership and from leaders. Finally, I outline a potential problem that my theory of leadership faces, addressed separately because it is different in an important way from the other problems. Namely, it may be that saving leadership from the first list of fears and problems itself raises this last problem for leadership.

Why Leadership?
It matters deeply to us that power is held and used legitimately, in other words, that it is justified. The trope of the usurper—the illegitimate heir or the thief of power who wrongly takes power from its rightful holder-underscores this. The issue of power and legitimacy is often outlined by the idea of the ‘rightful king’ and his usurper. Think, for example, of Richard the Lionheart and his evil brother, Prince John, who usurps the throne from him in the Robin Hood tales; of Hamlet’s uncle, King Claudius, who obtains the throne by murdering his brother; and more recently, of Dolores Umbridge who wrests power from Professor Dumbledore in the Harry Potter series. Moreover, there is a connotation of moral endorsement when we call a person a leader. Arguably, as Joanne Ciulla notes of America, ‘the word leadership is an honorific’ in all Anglo-Western cultures. We call for politicians and others to ‘show leadership’ on issues in ways that suggest they must rise above the fray of mere political interests and act, instead, for that which is good, fair, right, and just. Attributions of leadership generally suggest that the person is acting in ways that promote the ‘good’. But leadership is also often a supererogatory term that describes actions that are normatively good or exceed what is required, or identifies actions that would be wrong not to do. A politician is regarded as a genuine leader when, for example, he or she delivers a policy that enhances the wellbeing of his or her constituents. Politicians we regard as genuine leaders may not only perform expected requirements of their role well, but also ‘go beyond’ such expectations. Additionally, the term ‘leadership’ is also employed as an honorific when we describe a child or young person as ‘a real leader’. By this, we do not mean to say ‘she really dominates others’ or influences them disproportionately, rather, that she is doing something on behalf of, or for the good of, others.

Thus, in the case of leadership, important questions about power and those who hold power might be overlooked by such assumptions, which I argue often undermine an adequate understanding of the notion of leadership in terms of what we mean by ‘leadership’, what we expect from leaders, and, specifically, what we fear about some uses of ‘leadership’. Indeed, the concepts fear and loathing are especially appropriate when discussing leadership, given the nature of the power of leaders and their potential to affect our lives. Furthermore, as I describe below, in some cases, the constructions of leadership function to pre-empt these (legitimate) fears.

Bearing in mind the power wielded by leaders, it is no accident that many accounts of leadership focus on a leader’s good character. In some ways, our use of leadership as a concept captures the commitment we have to the idea of a rightful holder of power: someone who can be trusted with power because of their wisdom and goodness. But the term leadership may also have a falsely reassuring effect insofar as it distracts us from or closes off questions about, for example, the exercise of power in terms of legitimacy and employment. Questions about leadership often focus on who should hold power at the

3 ‘The Usurper’, Tv Tropes, [web blog].
expense of questions about the nature and exercise of power. Focusing on such questions risks incurring the problem that Karl Popper refers to in *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, that is, questioning who should rule, rather than how power should be used. In his ‘theory of unchecked sovereignty’, Popper focuses on institutional political power and how it can and should be checked. A problem arises, according to Popper, in assuming ‘that political power is essentially unchecked’. This assumption is often, in practice, coupled with the assumption that the main question to be answered is to whom power should be entrusted: ‘They assume that political power is, essentially, sovereign. If this assumption is made, then, indeed, the question ‘Who is to be the sovereign?’ is the only important question left.’

Beyond this question of the problematic focus of leadership theory, there is the question of what we mean by ‘good leadership’. This is not exhausted by the question of whether we are to take ‘good leadership’ to mean ‘ethically good leadership’ or ‘effective, proficient’ leadership. Even once we have specified that we mean ethically good leadership, thus, eliminating despots as leaders in the relevant sense, there remains ambiguity-exploited by Machiavelli-in what we mean by ‘ethically good’. The most commonly accepted method of teasing out the various questions obscured by this ambiguity is put forward by Ciulla. Ciulla notes the three main possible senses of ‘good’ leadership by identifying ‘three general, obvious and completely interlocking categories for the moral assessment of leadership’. Ciulla lists, firstly, ‘the ethics of leaders themselves’-their ‘intentions … [and] personal ethics’; secondly ‘the ethics of how a leader leads or the process of leadership’; and thirdly ‘the ethics of what a leader does-the ends of leadership’. In short, these three criteria of ethically good leadership (what I refer to as ‘normative’ leadership) are the criteria that focus on the methods of leadership, the character of leaders, and the ends of leadership-that is, respectively, the questions of leadership done in an ethical manner, done by an ethical individual (leader), and leadership aimed at an ethical end.

**The Case Against Leadership Stated**

There are many concerns and/or fears we have about leadership. Some of these are prudential while others are ‘in principle’ or conceptual concerns that the assumptions and assertions of leadership might not reflect the way we think a just world and just relations between persons should go. In many cases, concerns about leadership have both prudential and conceptual aspects. I use both real world examples and fictional tropes to outline such concerns.

One such concern we have about the use of the term leadership is, I believe, attributable to its association with the creeping (rampant) ‘managerialism’ in capitalist

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6 Popper, *The Open Society*, p. 126.
7 Popper, *The Open Society*, p. 126.
8 Ciulla, ‘The State of Leadership Ethics’, p. 332. In Ciulla’s outline of these three ‘categories’, effectiveness (so central to virtue ethics) is omitted. Ciulla lists, firstly, ‘the ethics of leaders themselves’-their ‘intentions … [and] personal ethics’; secondly, ‘the ethics of how a leader leads (or the process of leadership)’; and thirdly, ‘the ethics of what a leader does-the ends of leadership’. None of these, however, refer to the effectiveness, that is, the skill level of the leader qua leader.
culture to which we are increasingly subjected. We fear and, at times, loathe the thinking and popular wisdom that comes from the managerial paradigm, and are wary of it colonising everything from our spheres of private as well as public life. The term ‘leadership’ is often used in the leadership literature as a stand-in for ‘management’ at the expense of the former, which is seen as more old fashioned, less flexible and less productive than the latter—despite so much of this literature focusing on the distinction between ‘management’ and ‘leadership’. Vernacular uses of the term ‘leadership’ can appear cut from the same cloth as the kind of business jargon that can so often be meaningless or pernicious. Now commonplace in universities, schools, hospitals, and our personal lives, examples of this jargon include ‘synergies’, ‘out-of-the-box thinking’, ‘win-win solutions’, and popular psychological applications of received wisdoms, such as Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, which form the basis of many an introduction to workplace supervision textbook or three-day seminar. It is this kind of impoverished and impoverishing managerial language, and the world-view that comes with it, that leads to talk of elected governments as merely managers of the economy. This language is also used to encourage parents to be ‘CEOs’ of the company that is their family, and that encourages persons to use their social media profiles as their own personal branding statement.

With the term ‘leadership’ now tainted by its association with such discourses, there is much to fear because the concern is not just one of guilt-by-association. In its omnipresent form, this discourse deploys the same unclear and opaque language that George Orwell described as impeding clear communication in politics. It can close off and cause us to overlook important questions about the nature and use of power, such as whether the kinds and nature of power that some persons have over others in large corporate organisations is to be regulated, accepted in its current form, questioned and conditioned, or admired as a force for good.

In some cases, claims about ‘leadership’ in the workplace seem nothing more than management in a different guise. In other cases, claims made emphasise the differences between management and leadership. Abraham Zaleznik, in his seminal article distinguishing managers from leaders, argues that leaders have more in common with artists than with managers who are focused on stability and order; and while both leaders and managers are required, it is clear that, in Zaleznik’s view, it is the leaders who are needed to solve the real challenges that organisations face. Keith Grint, in his survey of accounts of leadership, makes a similar point. He notes that leadership is a distinct and qualitatively different form of power from either of the formal power positions of both command and management. In the literature on management and leadership, Grint notes, ‘Traditionally, leadership is defined by its alleged opposite: management’. Whereas

management, in these accounts, is concerned with the known and what has come before-maintaining the status quo and using routines to maintain stability-leadership is the domain of the new. It is ‘concerned with direction setting, with novelty and is essentially linked to change, movement and persuasion’.\(^\text{16}\)

Thus, in many cases in the literature is a very clear claim that leadership is not merely management by another name or a more modern, preferred form of management. Of course, the question remains whether in practice, despite such explicit claims, leadership is, indeed, being tasked with the role of management by another name. Though it is not a primary focus of this article, exploring the reasons we have to be wary of leadership and the available accounts of it will help clarify whether we do, indeed, approach leadership as something new or whether leadership is management by another name. As such, the next section will outline what we fear in any model of leadership, including those that are popularly used.

**Bad Leaders**

One of the most obvious and justifiable fears we have when it comes to leadership is fear of the bad or even wicked leader. The ones that immediately come to mind include Hitler, Mussolini, and Pol Pot-those leaders who, through a mix of populism and bad rule, have led their countries and their citizens either to ruin or to inflicting grave crimes on others.\(^\text{17}\) There are also the smaller scale leaders who lead others to self-ruin or bad acts. Cult leaders, Jim Jones or Charles Manson, may be viewed as prime examples of such leaders, but other examples abound, from common and small-scale sect leaders to those such as David Koresh, who disorder the thinking of their followers and lead them to ruin. Arguably similar are those leaders of terrorist organisations, such as Shoko Asahara, who engineered the subway killings in Japan, and Osama bin Laden. In all such cases, the leader is depicted as using charisma to undermine a person’s own critical thinking and reason to convince them to undertake horribly immoral actions.

Most of the fears expressed about bad leaders and the concern for protection against them, such as how to detect and pre-empt would-be bad leaders, are prudential. Many of the responses to such bad leaders are to treat them as cautionary tales, favouring the kind of checks on power that are so central to democracies and echoing those suggested by Popper. John Stuart Mill argues for representative government as the best form of government partly because ‘that each is the only safe guardian of his own rights and interests—is one of those elementary maxims of prudence’.\(^\text{18}\) Similarly, Robert A. Dahl’s argument for this is based on


\(^{17}\) The question of whether we should consider types such as these-persons who might be very effective ‘leaders’, but far from ethical-is what Ciulla succinctly refers to as ‘the Hitler problem’ in J.B Ciulla, ‘Leadership Ethics: Mapping the Territory’, *Business Ethics Quarterly*, vol.5, no. 1, 1995, pp. 5-28. The reference is to the familiar idea outlined above, that is, the concern over whether we must categorise Hitler as a leader or even a great leader.

the contingent, historical fact that ‘the preponderant weight of human experience informs us that no group of adults can safely grant to others the power to govern over them’.19

The mob

Another aspect of leadership that we fear is that of the mob, not in the sense of the mafia, but in the sense of the unthinking crowd. We fear both being caught up as a member of and being caught up by the mob as a victim. These types of mobs may be seen in the mindless hordes that populate science fiction and dystopian novels and films in the form of zombies and scared and brainwashed villagers at the gates with burning torches.20 There is an element of this fear when we lament the foolishness of so many voters in a democracy, who we might think are being led astray by fears (e.g., fear of immigrants), and wish merely that all voters would be as sensible, critical, unselfish, and unmoved by the appeals to self-interest (e.g., tax cuts) as we ourselves are.

Obedience and Paternalism

It is not just the mob that we fear-our fear of the mindless mob raises a fear of obedience itself. Indeed, many of these fears and concerns about leadership are interconnected. In part, this is a phenomenon of concern directed at our ideas of the behaviour of others, but it is also about our autonomy. It reflects a concern, often empirical and consequentialist in nature, over the obedience that others, as well as ourselves, tend to display, especially in extreme circumstances. This concern over obedience echoes the fears raised by Hannah Arendt over the capacity of humans to do evil for mundane reasons, such as obedience to a ruler or a guiding group principle. Arendt writes of Eichmann:

The trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that the many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal. [...] [T]his normality was much more terrifying than all the atrocities put together, for it implied [...] that this new type of criminal, who is in actual fact hostis generis humani, commits his crimes under circumstances that make it well-nigh impossible for him to know or to feel that he is doing wrong.21

This fear of obedience described by Arendt is, perhaps, best expressed and most accessibly articulated for many in the role of the Stanford Prison and the Milgram experiments of the twentieth century. However discredited some aspects of these studies may be, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century Western mind, they loom large as evidence contrary to the vision we might prefer of humans as essentially rational and, at least, somewhat compassionate creatures for whom the claim to have ‘just [been] following

20. Recent, real world examples of the fear of the mob, as well as of the police, may be seen in riots in England and the USA after police shootings of young black men.

‘Hostis generis humani’ is defined as ‘enemy of mankind’.
orders’ should cut no moral ice. The Milgram experiment depicted subjects who were all too ready to submit to authority, and who, at the direction of experimenters performed the most terrible acts against fellow humans from whom they were separated by nothing more than an allocated role or a uniform. The narrative taken from the Milgram experiment suggested that rather than the autonomous and ethical individuals we prefer to think of ourselves as being, humans of the twentieth century Western liberal democracies would readily obey authority to commit terrible acts. Thus, as Milgram himself offered,

[O]rdinary people, simply doing their jobs, and without any particular hostility on their part, can become agents in a terrible destructive process. Moreover, even when the destructive effects of their work become patently clear, and they are asked to carry out actions incompatible with fundamental standards of morality, relatively few people have the resources needed to resist authority.22

However, there is another facet to our concern over obedience. This concern, I suspect, stems from a feeling that the kind of deferral to the judgment of ‘leaders’ is somehow not fitting with our modern, egalitarian idea of how human beings should be. It challenges notions of humans as autonomous beings, where autonomy is seen as necessary to moral agency. This kind of deferral is marked by substituting another’s judgment in place of our own critical, rational engagement that fits our idea of the autonomous, thinking, post-Enlightenment individual. It lacks the critical reflection and critical thinking that is imperative to making one’s own decisions.

This, too, is echoed in the Milgram experiment. It is unsettling to think that individuals across a spectrum of locations and demographics would abdicate responsibility and defer to authority so quickly, so completely, and in such contradiction to their own misgivings. As Milgram writes on obedience, ‘a person comes to view himself as the instrument for carrying out another person’s wishes, and he therefore no longer regards himself as responsible for his actions’.23 And, according to Milgram again, in such situations, the individual’s morality shifts focus towards obedience and obligations to the authority. This obedience takes on its own moral value, which overrides that of moral obligation towards the individual.24 One fear with respect to leadership that this makes apparent is that the very term ‘leadership’ naturalises authority and turns obedience to it into a normative value of concepts such as ‘loyalty’, ‘duty’ and ‘discipline’—what Milgram describes as ‘terms heavily saturated with moral meaning and [that] refer to the degree to which a person fulfils his socially defined role’.25

This, then, is the fear we have about leadership in this context.26 It is the idea that leadership not only normalises and elevates authority—often informal and personality based—over others to a morally neutral or normatively good one, but, moreover, that it

23 Milgram, ‘Perils’, p. 76.
26 Notwithstanding the recent debunking of Milgram’s experiments, the popular perception of it as legitimate and telling of something about human nature is sufficient to ground this particular wariness of leadership.
normalises and justifies deferral to such persons on the part of followers. That is to say, that the primacy and emphasis given to the leader’s ideas and ideals, referred to in expressions of leadership as the ‘vision’ or the ‘strategy’ of the leader and which is often held to be so constitutive a characteristic of leadership, is not fully compatible with the dignity and autonomy of the individual. Much of our modern idea of what serves the good of persons is the ability to choose and pursue their own idea of the good. This dignity and autonomy of the individual, a key ingredient in our ideals of liberty, is, perhaps, best expressed in the view Immanuel Kant outlines in What is Enlightenment?: ‘Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one’s own understanding without the guidance of another’.27

The concern with respect to leadership is that it representative of Kant’s description of those who, rather than seeking enlightenment, on the contrary, gladly remain immature for life; and for the same reasons, it is all too easy for others to set themselves up as their guardians.28 Leadership, in part, involves choices in the area of the good, or to use Ciulla’s term, ‘good ends’. Normative leadership needs to be compatible with this freedom of individuals, however, our fear is that leadership is not (always) compatible just as it is incompatible in the brainwashing charisma of cult leaders or the kinder paternalism of an Atticus Finch or a Dr Who character who claims he ‘knows better than we do’. Of course, recognition of the superior insight of another and being rationally convinced of desirable goals and methods through discourse marked by appeal to evidence and reason are, importantly, distinctive from obedience per se. An acceptable model of leadership needs to be marked by this kind of rational discourse to avoid mere obedience, be it explicit or hidden behind charisma or other forms of influence.

Charismatic Leadership

Another aspect of leadership we fear is that leadership is a kind of instinctive giving-over to the will and goals of another. This, too, involves an abandoning of (moral) autonomy, but in this case, it happens unwittingly (or subconsciously), as a consequence of our orectic natures. This concern is best described in accounts of group psychology and neurosis by early authors, including Weber29 and Cox, Levine, et al.30 In some ways, this is best seen not as a separate fear, but as a component of our fear of bad leadership. It is one of the mechanisms by which leaders can lead followers to bad ends. We might also think of it as violating one of Ciulla’s three criteria for good leadership outlined above, that is, that charismatic leadership might be a violation of the criterion of ethically good leadership if we hold that charismatic leadership is itself unethical. It is not and cannot be ethical towards followers.

27 I. Kant, ‘An Answer to the Question: “What is Enlightenment?”’, Konigsberg, Prussia, 30 September, 1784.
28 Kant, ‘An Answer to the Question’.
Weber described charisma as a kind of non-rational attachment in which followers’ critical faculties are switched off. Robert Tucker, discussing Weber’s charismatic leader, tells us that because the charismatic leader is seen as a ‘messianic’ deliverer of salvation,

in a genuine case of charismatic leadership, it would be virtually inconceivable for a follower to contradict or disagree with the leader or to question his infallibility in any way.31

It need hardly be said that this, similar to the obedience that the Milgram narrative was taken to represent, is the antithesis of the critical, rational engagement that fits our idea of the autonomous, thinking, post-Enlightenment individual who critically interrogates others’ claims to power and avoids allowing others to decide what is in his or her interests. Rather, it is much closer to the mob, the mass obedience that we fear. It correctly describes the kind of ‘mass, irrational support’ of the masses for a charismatic leader that E.B. Portis describes,32 and that on some accounts (e.g., Tama Pataki’s Against Religion33), is the cornerstone some cases of religion and religious experience—what Pataki calls the ‘religiose’, that is, a character who has an affinity with fundamentalist religious experience.34

Leadership as a Distraction

Another thing we fear about leadership is that the focus on those at the head of an organisation or those who function as its face can distract one from exactly the kinds of questions that are appropriately addressed to the organisation as a whole—for example, questions regarding its legal or moral responsibilities, its policies, and its actions. One recent powerful case of this is that of Jorge Mario Bergoglio, elected Pope Francis and head of the Catholic Church in March 2013. Francis was depicted as a humble man of the people in the media and by the Vatican, a change from the removed authority of his predecessor, Joseph Ratzinger, with his perceived aloofness and penchant for expensive, red, Prada shoes. The underlying tone was that this Pope somehow ‘got it’: he pays for his own accommodation, rejects luxury, takes selfies, and is even on Twitter. Indeed, Time named him Person of the Year for 2013:

[W]hat makes this Pope so important is the speed with which he has captured the imaginations of millions who had given up on hoping for the church at all. People weary of the endless parsing of sexual ethics, the buck-passing infighting over lines of authority when all the while (to borrow from Milton), ‘the hungry Sheep look up, and are not fed’. […] Francis has elevated the healing mission of the church […] above the doctrinal police work so important to his recent predecessors. John Paul II and Benedict XVI were

34 Pataki, Against Religion, p. 34.
professors of theology. Francis is a former janitor, nightclub bouncer, chemical technician and literature teacher.\textsuperscript{35}

However, the much-remarked upon progressiveness that is noted in almost every profile of the Pope never seems to go further than personal, rhetorical statements and expressions of personal sympathy, such as ‘who am I to judge?’\textsuperscript{36}, while always then reaffirming the orthodoxy of the Church:

I want the Church to be in the streets; I want us to defend ourselves against all that is worldliness, comfort, being closed and turned within. Parishes, colleges, and institutions must get out, otherwise they risk becoming N.G.O.s, and the Church is not a non-governmental organization. But, of course, the Church is an N.G.O.—the largest in the world. Roman Catholicism is the only worldwide institution that crosses boundaries of north and south, east and west, affluence and abject poverty.\textsuperscript{37}

Meanwhile, his own and the Church’s stance on pertinent issues remains orthodox. There is, thus, a disjunct between the image of the progressive that he projects and the Church’s actual positions on issues:

Not that his position on abortion, or homosexuality, or women priests, differs substantially from Benedict XVI. He remains socially conservative. But the mood music is altogether different and not just because of his personal charm and the decision to eschew all the fancy ecclesiastical haberdashery and grand palaces.\textsuperscript{38}

It certainly remains to be seen whether such actions will, indeed, go beyond these gestures and lead to specific actions against offenders who are part of the Catholic Church. Thus, the public actions of a ‘leader may produce a symbolism that distracts us from real issues. To the extent that some evils and problems are caused by organisations, bureaucracies, and power structures, and need solutions that converge precisely on these structures, focusing on the perceived patina of goodness of the leader, often aggregated out from the putative character of the leader, distracts from and undermines our ability to address these problems and implement or demand the requisite solutions. The fear in this context is that focus on the leader and his or her leadership might distract us from these important questions.

To some extent, we can recognise the same phenomenon of the image of a leader eclipsing and pre-empting discussion of the goals, merit and methods of an organisation as well as its responsibilities in the case of Wikileaks. Discussions on the merits or otherwise


\textsuperscript{37} Carrol, ‘Who am I to Judge?’.

of the group, its operations, and stated objectives of transparency become subsumed and obfuscated by discussions of the likeability, potential criminality, and motivations of leader, Julian Assange. Echoing the case of the Pentagon Papers, the cases of Wikileaks, and of Edward Snowden, more recently, raise questions about power, transparency, democracy, and privacy. All three cases stake claims against the right of governments to keep secrets and the trustworthiness of governments who do so, however, especially in the case of Wikileaks, the attention remains on the occasionally circus-like personal situation of its nominal head. This focus on leadership thus prevents or replaces and distracts from the discussion of policies that support specific state actions, such as extrajudicial killings, and the secrecy around such policies.

Our Own ‘Will to Lead’?

The problems with leadership that I have discussed so far have been other-focused, that is, they are concerns we have largely about the behaviour of others, be they leaders or followers or, in the case of Pope Francis, those who potentially wrongly evaluate the organisation based on an overvaluation of his role as its head. The last two fears about leadership that I will outline are things we might fear about ourselves. This section explores our own desire for power, and the next will look at the pull we can feel towards strong leaders.

The first of these is the drive to power within individuals, which we know most intimately in ourselves, and which, sometimes, comes from hubris, insecurity, narcissism, and other less that admirable motives. Many of us have experienced a sense that if only we were in charge, things would be different—a sense that we could be trusted with power to be used for the good and where we would not feel the corrupting effects of power ourselves. Literature is full of examples of just this, and it is, arguably, one of the wellsprings of Plato’s contention that, alone amongst all humans, philosophers like him (or, at least, ‘true’ philosophers in the form of philosopher-kings) could be trusted with power.39 The wise person knows that this is most likely illusory and that the truism that ‘power corrupts’ applies as much to herself or himself as to anyone else, yet the use of the term ‘leadership’ can falsely assuage these concerns. Across the globe, those appointed to management roles and have doubts about their fitness to have power over others are assured in frontline management courses that they are not mere managers, but ‘leaders’, given power over others because of their good character and vision, and in a way that benefits those they ‘lead’.

The concept of leadership may function to normalise these cases of power, yet many of us acknowledge the part of us that would like to be in charge; that thinks that this world / state / academic department / tennis club would run better if we were running it; and we are all too aware that others might share just this same belief about their own capacities to be in charge. For those who know or suspect that their own desire for power can be fallible or poorly founded and cloaked in the normative garb of ‘leadership’, this can be a sign to be wary of our own will-to-power as much as to be wary of the will-to-power of others.

The desire for strong leadership

There is another aspect of leadership and the conceptual work it does that we fear, and it comes from the part of us that is drawn to strong leadership. As in the case of charismatic leadership, this kind of strong or wise and powerful leader at once knows what is good for us, and has awareness of and command against the often malevolent forces of the universe or history that can threaten us. But he or she also has a special interest in us. This kind of leader is often best expressed in fictional forms. For example, J.R.R. Tolkien’s Gandalf, who is aware of and more in command of the forces outside the Shire than the central Hobbits, but who, nonetheless, has a special affection for the Hobbits and wishes to protect them. Harper Lee’s Atticus Finch stands in a similar role—a wiser, more capable protector who rallies against the injustices of the outside world and has a special interest in Lee’s main characters, that is, his children and the neighbour’s child. Of course, in some ways, this is exactly the stance that a theistic God has towards believers: being not just more powerful and more knowing, but all-powerful and all-knowing, yet specially interested in humans as their creator and protector. Zaleznik himself hints at this when he asks whether what he calls ‘the leadership mystique’ is ‘merely a holdover from our childhood—from a sense of dependency and a longing for good and heroic parents’.  

We fear or are wary of this part of ourselves that is drawn to such leadership or such constructions of power. Indeed, much of liberal democracy is constructed against such claims to power. Mill’s warning against the benevolent dictator on the basis that it will create a passive citizenry is, in part, a reflection of just this concern. That is to say, even if a perfectly good ruler could be found (a benevolent dictator), such rule undermines autonomy and leads to intellectual and moral passivity in a population. We want to avoid leadership models that espouse this because it might be that even if guarantees could be made that such rulers would remain good and benevolent, its undermining of autonomy would yet make the model undesirable.

The charge sheet—what any acceptable account of leadership must avoid

Thus, an acceptable account of leadership avoids these fears and concerns, and excludes those we think of as ‘bad leaders’—those who are effective at marshalling others towards their goals, but who either do so in an ethically problematic manner that we fear, through charisma alone, manipulation of the facts or the brainwashing and undermining of the critical faculties of individuals, which results in mindless hordes of followers. It must not require a level or kind of obedience that violates our conception of that which is proper to rational, enlightened humans or, at least, the state of critical, enlightened, autonomy that we hold to be the ideal for capable adults and modern, liberal democratic states. It cannot be the kind of leadership that serves as a distraction from the interrogation of the structures of, use of, and checks on power. It cannot feed into our own untrustworthy desires for power for its own sake or a hubristic idea of what we could achieve were we to hold power ourselves nor.

40 Zaleznik, ‘Managers and Leaders’, p. 75.
to our less than adult and autonomous desire for a paternalistic protector who removes the burden of being ‘the guardians of our own interests’ from our own shoulders. Fear of leadership or, rather, of leaders, is often a reflection of a justified fear that we have of ourselves giving away our own autonomy or that of the kinds of goals that leaders can influence us to accept through the means of conviction that make us vulnerable to them.

**My proposed solution**

As I have argued elsewhere, to make sense of the term ‘leadership’ and to allow the term to serve the normative functions that we so often demand of it, leadership must be grounded in a sense of the good. This grounding involves knowledge of what is needed for the flourishing of both leaders and their followers. It also involves servicing that need and advancing those interests, which result in an understanding of leadership as a broadly Aristotelian master virtue. This is what is required to ground the sense of ‘leadership’ as distinct from mere populism or from those who would use personal and charismatic power for evil.

What does it mean to conceive of leadership as a virtue? The term ‘virtue’ in the Aristotelian context belongs to the conception of ethics known as virtue ethics, traceable to the ancient Greeks. This conception of ethics and the virtues that are a constitutive part of it is grounded in the idea of ‘eudaimonia’ or human flourishing. Eudaimonia can be loosely translated as a state of wellbeing in which human beings become what they should by living as they should. It is the end or proper goal of the master art of living virtuously and it is also the only way, in Aristotle’s account, to achieve real happiness. Paul Taylor describes it as:

> [T]he good of man as man. Happiness (eudaimonia, well-being) is the kind of life that is suitable or fitting for a human being to live, and a human being is one who exemplifies the essential nature (or essence) of man. Thus happiness is not to be identified with any kind of life a person might actually want to live. Instead, it characterizes the kind of life we all would want to live if we understood our true nature as human beings. Happiness, then, may be defined as that state of the ‘soul’ or condition of life which all human beings, insofar as they are human, ultimately aim at.\(^43\)

The virtues are those traits of persons that serve human flourishing. Unlike the ethical rules or duties that ground other systems of ethics, these virtues are traits of persons (excellences) that make human lives go well. Having the virtue involves elements of skill, disposition, and judgment. Virtues lie on a golden mean between two extremes and judgment is what allows the virtuous person to act correctly. For example, the virtue of courage lies between the extremes of foolhardiness (too much) and cowardice (too little), and involves acting with the correct amount of courage, in the correct manner, at the correct time, where ‘correct’, in this sense, is that which serves human flourishing.

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This account of leadership includes several key elements—such leadership must not be coercive and must respect the interests (i.e., the flourishing) of persons. Furthermore, being a broadly Aristotelian virtue, leadership, on this account, contains a strong sense of good judgment about the good of followers and leaders, as well as how to achieve this. Just as the Aristotelian virtuous agent shows the right amount of courage (being neither reckless and foolhardy nor timid), at the right time and in the right (skilful) manner, so the individual who displays the virtue of leadership in this broadly Aristotelian sense leads in the right way, at the right time, towards the right goals. They do so because part of what it is to have this virtue is to know how to pursue this goal, and to be motivated and able to pursue it skillfully.\textsuperscript{44} As Rosalind Hursthouse notes, the Aristotelian sense of a virtue requires not only that the possessor have the trait that makes them morally good, but also, that they correctly judge when and how best to act on the trait: ‘a virtuous person is a morally good excellent, or admirable person who acts and reacts well, rightly, as she should-she gets things right.\textsuperscript{45} In other words, the virtuous agent does the right thing in the right way—the implication here is one of skill as well as of intention.

Such a view of leadership connects well with the account of the meaning of ‘good’ leadership described above. It gives us a non-stipulative way to answer the three senses of ‘good’ that Ciulla suggests we mean when we describe ethically good leaders—the individual who possesses the broadly Aristotelian virtue of leadership leads towards ethically good ends;\textsuperscript{46} they do so in an ethically good manner, that is, pursuing the good of followers, in the right way, to the right amount, and at the right time, and they themselves have an ethically good character. Only a person with an ethically good character possesses the virtue of leadership on the Aristotelian model. The ethnically bad character simply does not have the traits and character necessary to subsume other goals to the good of persons.

\textbf{Final concern: Paternalism and Essentialism}

This broadly Aristotelian model of leadership thus answers the fears and concerns I have outlined about leadership above. I argue that leadership understood as a broadly Aristotelian virtue will not result in leaders who pursue bad ends or exploit followers for what they perceive as their own interests nor will such leaders foster a mindless mob of followers—because such a state does not serve the flourishing of followers—and they will not rely on charisma for their leadership for similar reasons. Thus, the list of concerns we have with respect to leadership that I outlined at the start of this article, the things we fear about leadership, are successfully addressed by this account of leadership.

What remains, though, is another fear, which, if not unique to this account, might, at least, be more of a fear for this account. This is a concern about paternalism. In part, this springs from just the thing that grounds the theory of leadership I have offered—the very concept of flourishing that grounds Aristotelian virtue ethics, and thus, the theory of leadership I have offered, is an essentialist one. As noted above, the concept of flourishing that grounds virtue ethics, and thus, leadership understood as a virtue, is an account of \textit{the} good of persons. To anyone who rejects the idea of an essentialist definition of the good for

\textsuperscript{44} Aristotle, \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}, Book 3, Chapter 3, vii-ix.


\textsuperscript{46} On the Aristotelian model, the flourishing of individuals is the highest good to be pursued for persons.
persons, no matter how inclusive of autonomy and self-sufficiency such a definition may be, this is problematic. A large part of what grounds my account of leadership is a knowledge of the good (i.e., the flourishing) of persons. This is what allows me to say that good leadership, by definition, knows and pursues the good of followers. It grounds leadership in a way that precludes the possibility of us correctly using the term ‘leadership’ to apply to leaders with evil intentions or goals, to purely charismatic leaders, or the leader who uses their own image as a distraction, and to the follower-relations that fit the mindless mob.

Being grounded in eudaimonia, this broadly Aristotelian account of leadership cannot, however, avoid the presence of essentialism about the good and the claim that the leader knows what this good for persons is—in some cases better than we do. This raises the concern about paternalism, for how are we to meaningfully make the case that we should all be free of interference in the realm of decisions about our own interests and views of the good in the context of a leader who, by definition, understands and pursues the good of us as well as others—at times better than we ourselves do? The answer is that we need to take a sufficiently broader view of the wellbeing of persons. Correctly understood, the theory holds that this includes a respect for the autonomy of persons, that is, their ability to reflect on, express, and pursue their own conception of the good. By including such autonomy of persons in our understanding of the good of persons, we can ensure that the broadly Aristotelian account of leadership avoids the feared paternalism as well, thus, ensuring the autonomy of persons to make such choices for themselves, including bad choices, the freedom from interference in the realm of thoughts, and pursuit of the good stands against just this paternalism. In sum, our broadly Aristotelian leader will avoid such paternalism as just one of the other things that undermines this wellbeing and as one on the list of other threats to persons’ flourishing.