THE LEADER-SERVANT
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Awareness, foresight, and listening are celebrated and encouraged in those who practice servant-leadership.

In his ancient work, the *Republic*, Plato recounts the wisdom of Socrates as well as others. One embodiment of this philosophical exercise is the concept of the "philosopher-king" (Ferrari & Griffith, 2000). This role is viewed through a prism delineating the boundaries of justice or goodness. There are descriptions of those who know only of the substance of shadows and assume that these represent reality. There are allegories which explain how light (the sun) brings an external prerequisite to the process of perception and how this may be analogous to the beholding of truth in the light of virtue. In imagining an idyllic city—giving form to these utopian ideas—the thinkers considered not only the idealized construction, but also the baser side of human nature. That is, the thinkers examined how an individual would: a) rise to power; b) consolidate this position; c) adapt to the maintaining of the position; and d) ultimately succumb to the weight of the task. The results of this analytical process have endured for millennia and have been adopted by many modern theoreticians, sometimes unknowingly. Therein lies the native wisdom of the writings: that the concepts endure and are understood and applied on a visceral or instinctual level as often as not. Robert K. Greenleaf's ideas concerning Servant-Leader Theory (SLT) have roots in Plato's account (1970).

BACKGROUND

Greenleaf's essay, "The Servant as Leader," was written in the context of business administration. It was initially presented as an exposition of this concept for a student

audience. As a business executive for AT&T, Greenleaf understood the stratified composition of a big corporation and the insulated compartmentalization of job descriptions concretized by policy and procedure manuals. His ideas have been compared to modern adaptations aimed at establishing new laws of evolution (Greenleaf, Spears, Beggs & Beazley, 2003). These concepts have been taught in college courses to prepare students for roles in business and government, most particularly in leadership positions. He illustrated this approach in the academic setting by applying the idea to the instructor role, using the term "Teacher as Servant." Efforts to bring a pragmatic sense to the theory at Butler University's Hampton House mimic Plato's city of Kallipolis, provoking some of the same advantages and challenges present in the putative engineering of this ancient, idealized city (McClellan, 2007).

Social science research examines the external validity of SLT in an empirical sense. Although some studies have focused on the health effects of this concept (Rivkin, Diestel & Schmidt, 2014), much of the research is based in an ethical perspective founded on spiritual and metaphysical assertions and observational case studies of various types. Bringing practicality to philosophical ideas is often difficult from the vantage point of science, but the weight of the basic hypothesis with reference to a leader taking a servant's role is at least partially validated by the continuing attempts to do so (Howatson-Jones, 2004).

Servant-First

Greenleaf's ideas on servant leadership take the presumptive position that a person first chooses to serve and subsequently is inspired to lead. His writings include a degree of analysis of the personality types and the psychological make-up of persons who choose leadership roles. Greenleaf clearly favors the servant-first approach and believes that this is the most effective method in having both the leader, and those who are led, reach their optimum performance in terms of human potential. In his words, "The servant-leader shares power, puts the needs of others first and helps them develop and perform as highly as possible" (Greenleaf, 1979). Awareness, foresight, and listening are celebrated and encouraged in those who would practice this type of leadership.

In Greenleaf's view, a society, group, or corporation will be better led by individuals who are trusted by those who follow. In an idealist frame of reference, this makes sense—if bars are not raised but continually lowered in the context of labor/management relations, then the race to the bottom is already accomplished. It is no wonder that many have responded to his call to service and to placing the interests of others before their own. Accordingly, SLT philosophy has yielded certain structures and parameters by

which to measure the effectiveness of this technique for leading. These metrics are based upon whether the objects or followers of this route experience increase in the following effects: health, wisdom, freedom, autonomy, and exemplifying service. Observing how the process affects the least privileged in the group may also yield important results.

Selected examples of this type of leader profile are typified in Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi. Dr. King was the son of a Baptist preacher and, consequently, had an understanding of service and the Christian ethic. He also understood various prejudices and some of the more unenlightened aspects of leading as well as following. His approach to leadership is emblematic of the SLT principle. Gandhi was a lawyer from a middle-class social background. He was drawn to address the plight of farmers and others of a lower socio-economic status in India. In SLT ideology, he was a functional and productive individual who chose to be a servant of people less fortunate than himself (Brown, 1991). Both he and Dr. King represent restatements of the philosopher-king of Kallipolis' ethic.

Leader-first

The leader-first attitude is, in essence, the antithesis of the servant-first concept. By Greenleaf's description, this manner of leadership is self-focused. It seeks its own, and the recipients of this controlling influence are but a means to an end. This type of leader is using the acquisition of power to compensate for other self-imbued doubts or shortcomings (Greenleaf, 1970). Oddly, he refers to this arrangement of psychosocial motivations as atypical rather than ubiquitous. Material possessions are symbolically linked to the insecurity being manifested in the exploitation of others (Greenleaf, Spears, Beggs & Beazley, 2003). There are many examples of this type of character both historically and at present. These leaders experience success and are often influential within their own groups and in broader contexts.

If the parameters which Greenleaf applied to the servant-first analog were applied to the leader-first version, it would be inferred that followers of this regimen affirm the inefficacy of it by illustrating the inverse effects; thus becoming: less healthy, less wise, less free, more dependent, and less likely to exemplify service. Again, how the process affects the least privileged in the group demonstrates this version's ineffectiveness. Particular attributes are difficult to quantify: being less wise; the likelihood of providing service; and the degree of freedom. The argument begins to devolve in reason, for how can wisdom be measured in the deficiency of understanding, or more to the point, when goodness is absent?

Discussion

In the world as it exists, those who would accumulate power normally must seize it and hold on to it. Others are waiting to subvert the status quo for the purpose of satisfying the self-assurance that they are more worthy and qualified for leadership positions than those presently in power. Accordingly, some personality-types are applicable to this role, and often there is little room for soul-searching during the strategic and resource-consuming effort. It may be asked whether Machiavelli made his suggestions out of necessity or for sport. As he put it, "The first method for estimating the intelligence of a ruler is to look at the men he has around him" (Machiavelli, 1532). Does the personality which strives to have influence upon people and events do so from a mindset of self-serving gamesmanship, or as a Darwinian response to the necessity for establishing structural functionalism as posited by Émile Durkheim in the early 20th century (Alan, 2005)? There are three general themes for leadership examined here, though many alternate variations to its nature may exist. Those themes include tyranny, benevolence, and servant-hood.

The choice between tyranny and benevolence has to do with inherent levels or deficits of goodness. As explained by Plato in the Analogy of the Sun, a third modifier must be in place for the seeing eye to perceive the object which is beheld. This additional influence is light—or the sun—in this case. The sun must illuminate the object in order for the eye to present to the brain the neural information necessary to accomplish perception. Without this, there is only darkness, the absence of perception. The allegory proceeds, and compares sight to the understanding of truth. Goodness, that elusive characteristic which, while nearly defying definition, is most noticeable in its absence. Virtue may be an appropriate word to use in this context, and the understanding that in order to perceive truth we must cast the light of goodness or virtue upon it.

The tyrant has no concept of nuance in this analogy. He sees, and if what he sees pleases him, he takes. The sun sheds its light on the objects of his desire so that he may perceive for the purpose of possessing them, and there is sufficiency in this alone. The prevalent quality of personality witnessed in the despotic tyrant, a perceptible evildoer, is not so far removed from the simply ambitious leader who also views those he rules as means to an end. In his worldview, there may be lip service given to the interests or rights of his people, but his aims may be, at the same time, transparently self-serving. He also seeks his own, yet perhaps without bloodshed. This inference may belie Greenleaf's hypothesis. To make the leap from the ego-centrism of the ambitious or despotic ruler to the application of benevolence in the ruling of human beings requires

insight into the experiences of others. This comprises elements of Theory of Mind (Sodian & Kristen, 2010) and the ability to empathize with what another is thinking or feeling. With regard to leadership, motivations may be questioned concerning the purity of the objectives. It may be that the benevolent type comprehends that more flies may be caught with honey than vinegar; if his kingdom is content and prosperous, the coffers of the treasury are more likely to be filled. Correspondingly, the despot may also be gratified, in a psychopathological sense through the enslaving and subjugation of his people. The waging of war may satisfy deficits in character and goodness; whereby, the sacrifice of those ruled in battle instills a sense of accomplishment.

There is a fine line between the despotic and the simply ambitious chieftain. However, the line is a bit broader as the frontier delineating benevolence is broached. Most certainly, this type of ruler must retain power as well. There are others ready and waiting to subsume the position, and sentinels must be set to ensure the rightful state of things (by subjective determination). It would seem a very difficult course for a genuinely humble servant to navigate. In this setting, it is evident that the first order of importance is the business of the Machiavellian prince—or more precisely the retention of power. This may be particularly true if the benevolent ruler has been required to compete for the position, as the lessons learned in those contests are not soon forgotten. While the superiority of benevolence—in terms of virtue—when contrasted with despotism—and plain ambition—is apparent, the motivations as applied to ruling may not be quite contrary to one another.

CONCLUSION

While the qualities of productive leadership as explained by means of a SLT formula will be attractive to many people, there are implicit shortcomings in this epistemology. First among criticisms must be the impracticality of the enacting of the philosophy. The sequence and logic of any imputed implementation do not apply to the world as it is presently comprised. Plato's group recognized this and explained the forces at work in the context of philosopher-kings who might rule with impunity that is, not being subject to competition. To attain to leadership requires some degree of ruthlessness; it is the nature of Man's method of socialization at this point in the evolutionary arc. The mantle of leadership is not simply placed upon the shoulders of the leader without at least some indication of conflict. Thus begins the process of exercising authority and the potential presence of concomitant negative social and personal costs.

Each human being who takes up the task of functioning as a controller of others' actions and destinies begins with the drive to accumulate power at the heart of the

endeavor. The degree to which this is true may be small or great, and the lengths to which they might go to attain the objective vary as well. Conversely, the leader who is in possession of substantial or even absolute power and who chooses to forsake the narrow, prototypical enacting of it comprises an antitype by doing so. Here is truly transformative leadership, which is contained within the Leader-first narrative. The most vivid example of this counter-intuitive positioning of power, leadership and servanthood would be Jesus Christ. "For though He was rich, He became poor so that you through his poverty might become rich" (Paul, 2 Cor. 8:9). By means of a literal interpretation of the story as told, this represents an illustration of SLT in its ultimate expression. Most specifically, that the agent of the creation—this being the penultimate Leader of not only Man, but of all things—chose to debase Himself to the point of being nailed to a cross. This choosing of weakness or poverty, giving form to obedience and other natures not quite amenable with the human nature, has yielded the largest religious following the world has known to date, and He is the Leader of this group.

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