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Introduction

“**THE CHIEF EMERGES** from his tent to face the leaden morning light,” begins an article in the *New York Times*. The topic is not an expedition to an ancient village but a settlement of homeless people in Providence, Rhode Island, called Camp Runamuck. The rules of the community of about fifty people are made by a rough form of democracy, but there is no doubt that Chief John Freitas is central in the governance of the camp. “I was always considered the leader, the chief,” Mr. Freitas says. “I was the one consulted about ‘where should I put my tent?’” When someone questioned why he should be the guy bossing others around, Freitas immediately stepped down. But then, “arguments broke out. Food was stolen.” As one resident puts it, “there was no center holding. So everybody voted him back in.”[1]

During the 2008 financial crash, before the U.S. government had taken any steps to address the crisis, newspaper headlines regularly referred to the “failure of leadership” or “absence of leadership” in both the White House and the Congress. In the same vein, in his campaign for renomination as governor of

New York in 1930, Franklin Roosevelt challenged Herbert Hoover on the grounds that "lack of leadership in Washington has brought our country face to face with serious questions of unemployment and financial depression."[2] In each case, the meaning was that nobody had stepped up to provide a solution to collective problems and those charged with leadership in this area had failed to live up to their responsibilities.

How Should We Think about Leadership?

As these very different examples make clear, leadership occurs in many contexts. It can be notable for its absence or crop up in situations where we might not look for it. Like pornography for Justice Potter Stewart, we may assume that "we know it when we see it," but how should we think about leadership in a more systematic way?

Leadership has something to do with power—but it cannot simply be a synonym for holding power. A bully or a mugger with a gun wields power, in the sense of making us do something we would otherwise not want to do or preventing us from doing something we would like. But we would not think of such a person as a leader. Leadership often involves exercising authority, and some leaders hold formal positions in organizations. Yet many men and women we would want to call "leaders" do not hold positions of formal authority; and some authoritative persons are not engaged in anything we would want to call "leadership." As John Gardner notes, "We have all occasionally encountered top persons who couldn't lead a squad of seven-year-olds to the ice cream counter."[3]

Often, in expressing a desire for leadership, we are assuming that the leadership we get will be beneficial, admirable, and effective. It is easy to idealize leadership, to assume that leaders bring salvation and set commendable examples in their behavior. But we are also well aware of the ways in which power can corrupt those who possess it, the temptations as well as

the opportunities leadership can bring. Leaders perform their functions in a variety of ways, from the straightforward to the arcane, admirable to deplorable, ineffective to superbly competent.

Leaders are part of the fabric of all human organizations, the spaces where we work and play, learn and worship, build and destroy. Many of us exercise leadership in our work or in informal contexts that include volunteering or ephemeral problem solving. Yet, in thinking about leadership, our first mental references are often to figures on a larger stage—presidents, prime ministers, governors, or CEOs. We associate leadership with the possession of significant power, a highly institutionalized context, multiple lieutenants and subordinates, and control over significant resources. Subjects of autocratic rulers have often regarded their monarchs as akin to inscrutable gods or powerful but dangerous animals. Shakespeare's line "such divinity doth hedge a king" captures a sentiment shared by many people across the centuries, including both those who regarded their king as the source of all earthly beneficence and those who believed their best course was to steer as clear as possible from any royal attention.[4]

Even in modern democratic states, most citizens are followers of distant powerful leaders. How can we understand the way such men and women see the world and what they do? And what, if anything, does formal leadership in highly complex organizations have in common with the informal leadership we provide and encounter every day?

These are the kinds of questions that occupy our attention in this book. I argue that leadership is central to almost all collective social activity. Not surprisingly, such a pervasive and multifaceted activity generates unclear thinking and complex emotions in followers, ranging from fear or hatred through affection and awe, from envy or anger to denial and condescension. We hope for and should support leaders who strengthen their communities and do their jobs honestly and competently, and we should not be resigned to misbehavior or neglect. Over the

years, a great deal of attention has been paid to establishing effective institutional and cultural barriers to the misuse of power, through work by political theorists and drafters of constitutions as well as ordinary folks. This is an important area in both theory and practice. But in addition to figuring out how to curb the potential misbehavior of leaders or to use their skills, we should also try to think ourselves into the position of those who are providing leadership to gain a better understanding of both the opportunities and challenges they may face. And we should avoid either idealizing or demonizing our leaders if we are to understand what they do in society, and how leadership might be exercised effectively and responsibly.

Why Write Yet Another Book about Leadership?

Over the years, a huge amount has been written on the topic of leadership. Management consultants provide "how to do it" manuals one can pick up in the airport. Articles on leadership appear regularly in newspapers and business journals; multiple blogs are written each day on leadership of all kinds. Novelists and playwrights give us insights into the situations and characters of leaders across the centuries. There are countless biographies, historical reflections, memoirs, and autobiographies. Scholars from history, public policy, sociology, political science, psychology, organizational theory, and what has come to be called "leadership studies" have provided diverse perspectives. Some of these scholars—including, in my own discipline of political science, James MacGregor Burns, Robert C. Tucker, Richard E. Neustadt, James David Barber, Fred I. Greenstein, Barbara Kellerman, Joseph S. Nye, and James G. March—have explored this topic with great care and shed a good deal of light on leadership.

Why then write yet another book on leadership? What distinctive contribution do I hope to make?

In approaching the topic of leadership, I combine two rele-

vant types of experience: service as president of two institutions of higher education (Wellesley College and Duke University) and my training, teaching, and research as a political theorist. My intention is to bring together my experience in both these capacities—active leadership and philosophizing about politics—to capture aspects of leadership that might not be noticed by someone who lacks either sort of background.

One of the most influential, vilified, and thought-provoking books ever written about leadership is a small volume by Niccolò Machiavelli published almost five hundred years ago, called *Il principe* (*The Prince*). In a presentation letter to Lorenzo de' Medici, Machiavelli said: "Just as men who are sketching the landscape put themselves down in the plain to study the nature of mountains and highlands, and to study the low-lying land they put themselves high on the mountains, so, to comprehend fully the nature of the people, one must be a prince, and to comprehend fully the nature of princes one must be an ordinary citizen."[5] He was asserting that one can best understand leadership from the "outside" perspective of the follower, rather than the perspective of the leader.

Machiavelli's insight is surely on target, in some dimensions. If we observe leaders from the outside, we may often have a better sense of their accomplishments and limitations than they can grasp from their perspective on the inside. Dr. Seuss's stories about the young page boy Bartholomew Cubbins begin with Bartholomew standing outside his family's small house down in the valley below the towers of the nearby city, with the king's palace at the very top. As he looks up toward that palace, he feels very small; but during the course of *Bartholomew Cubbins and the 500 Hats* and *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*, Bartholomew shows that he understands old King Derwin of Didd better than the king understands himself and thus can deal with a disaster for the kingdom brought about by the king's selfish desire for glory.

As this story illustrates, an outside observer is likely to be more aware of the impact of a leader's activities, to see more

clearly how what a leader does affects other people. Thus, some aspects of leadership may indeed be best understood by those whose lives are shaped by decisions the leader makes. Yet there are also important features of leadership that you are better placed to understand if you have spent some time as a leader or worked closely with powerful leaders for an extended period. Machiavelli himself had held several significant diplomatic posts and observed many leaders carefully. Leadership has to be seen from the inside as well, to have a well-rounded appreciation for what it involves.

It is rare for anyone who has experienced leadership to write about it as a trained historian, political scientist, or philosopher. Leaders often write memoirs or autobiographies, and their accounts provide material for reflection by scholars and other observers. But these practitioners have not usually had the time, training, or inclination to write about what they are doing in any systematic way.

In addition to Machiavelli, a few other political philosophers or social scientists who have held power, or been close to those who wield it, have also written about leadership. Max Weber is one of the most perceptive of these; Marcus Tullius Cicero is another example. These authors used their own experience to good effect in their writings, and they are quoted often in this book. But other political theorists who had some experience of leading—Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Alexis de Tocqueville—did not write at any length about leadership as such. They came to power after having written their significant works of political theory and did not return to reflect on leadership systematically in later life. And few of the other philosophers who have written thoughtful treatises on politics over the centuries have exercised leadership or been close to those with such responsibilities. Thus, when political theorists consider leadership they are generally viewing it from the "outside"; they focus on controlling the behavior of the leader for purposes they consider worthy. What leaders actually do, what it feels like to hold power, what that does to you as a person, how leaders work

as they accomplish their purposes or pervert their mandates, how they relate to those who join in implementing decisions— all this becomes a kind of "black box" in political philosophy.

My purpose in this book is to open up the "black box" and shed light on leadership from this dual angle: as theorist and practitioner. There will be only a few direct references to my own leadership experience; this is not a book of memoirs. Yet that experience stands in the background throughout. Every generalization about leadership here is tested against my own experience and observations, even though that experience is only occasionally recounted in an anecdote. I use my experience as a filter for assessing generalizations or hypotheses about leadership, a way to determine which statements about leadership make sense and which seem unrealistic, superficial, or wrongheaded. In this work of theoretical exploration, personal familiarity with the countryside should allow me to bring valuable nuances and depth to the discussion. The analysis is primarily descriptive, attempting to get a sense of how things actually work in the world rather than how they ought to work. But along the way some sections are normative or prescriptive as well.

Andrew Sabl has noted that "leadership studies, generally written as advice to princes, should always evoke the question about when we should root for princes to succeed and when we should cheer their failures. When it avoids talking about the ends and principles of governance, leadership studies stack the deck in favor of the politicians it counsels."[6] I have just begun to explore the field called "leadership studies"; but political theorists throughout the centuries have discussed "the ends and principles of governance," and their works shed much light on these fundamental issues. As a political theorist, I have learned a great deal from these discussions, and they provide the background for my argument throughout the book. The ends we seek through governance encompass the coherence, aspirations, stability, moral character, and creative vision of our communities, and the protection of the rights and liberties of individuals.

My claim is that for societies to achieve these valuable ends, people (including leaders) need a deeper understanding of what leaders actually do, how they define their goals and go about their work, the pitfalls and challenges they face. My purpose is neither to root for princes nor to cheer their failures but to provide a fuller sense of the aims and activities of leaders and suggest how we might judge their performance.

Some students of leadership have deplored the lack of a grand theory of leadership and asserted that we should get on with the business of constructing such a theory. Although the arguments in this book have some theoretical dimensions, constructing a comprehensive system that would explain everything about leadership is not my goal. Instead, I hope to emulate the methodological approaches of John Locke, in clearing away some of the underbrush to permit a clearer view of the subject we are exploring, and of Socrates, in posing some of the questions we need to answer.

Purposes and Characteristics of Leadership

Human organizations are notable for the range and variety of the purposes they are supposed to achieve. Aristotle, one of the most perceptive of all political theorists, said that "all associations aim at some good" but that the associations differ in terms of the particular good they are intended to achieve.[7] It follows that the role of leaders in these associations differs accordingly. Consider the CEO of a multinational corporation, a warlord in Afghanistan, the president of the United States, and the head of a community organizing association. The purposes that the organizations are established to pursue are quite different. As a consequence, the challenges to the leader, the expectations of the followers, and the sets of skills that will be most valuable are also distinctly different.

Thus, one of the problems we face in thinking about leadership is that there is such a large variety of instances that seem,

on the face of it, to have little in common. Does it make any sense to use the same term to connote a four-star general in the armed forces, the mayor of a small town in Iowa, the president of a university, and the chief of a homeless community? There are very significant differences among these examples of leadership, differences that become even starker if one includes leadership in the Junior League, a Cub Scout troop, a teenage gang, a garden club, or the council of your condominium. Essays on leadership often focus on leadership in specific contexts—in corporations, in government, higher education, or international organizations. Yet we use the same term to refer to the activity we call "leadership" across these different contexts. How do we understand this multifaceted phenomenon in such different situations?

In the same way—especially if we are using political theorists across the centuries among our sources for understanding leadership—we must ask how "leadership" in modern times is related to depictions of the "prince" in Renaissance Italy, the "chief" of a tribal group, the "king" in early modern times, "rulers" or "governors" in many languages and many eras. Do these words refer to the same phenomenon, or to something different in each case? And what about all those people in the middle levels of power in large organizations, officers who provide leadership for groups within a bureaucracy or corporation and leaders in smaller organizations? At a commonsense level, one might say that these instances must share some features because we routinely use the same word to cover all these different roles or offices; but what can those shared features be?

A good way to think about this was suggested by Ludwig Wittgenstein. In musing about why we use the word "game" to denote such activities as board games, card games, and ball games, Wittgenstein says that is it fruitless to search for some element they all have in common, because no single feature is common to them all. Instead, there are "similarities, resemblances, and a whole series of them at that." Instead of a single common feature, we find "a complicated network of similarities

overlapping and criss-crossing."[8] His preferred term for these similarities is "family resemblances," a concept I use in thinking about leadership. Just as we recognize common features among members of a family related by blood so we might find overlapping similarities among instances of leadership, even though the examples differ profoundly. Pointing out such overlapping similarities is one of the main purposes of this book.

Joseph Rost notes that the word "leadership" did not appear in dictionaries until the nineteenth century. It follows, in his view, that "leadership, as we know it, is a twentieth-century concept, and to trace our understanding of it to previous eras of Western civilization (much less other civilizations) is as wrong as to suggest that the people of earlier civilizations knew what, for instance, computerization meant." Others have observed that both Greek and Latin—and consequentially, modern Romance languages as well—lack a single word that can easily be translated as "leadership." But, as Rost also notes, "leading" has its roots in the Old English word *loedan* meaning "to make go," or "guide," or "show the way."[9] And although Plato and Aristotle lived in a context quite different from twenty-first-century nation-states, when they discussed governance, authority, and ruling, they described human behaviors that have many recognizable features in common with the leadership we observe today.

In this book, I often note that the character and challenges of leadership vary significantly with context. The size and culture of an organization, the expectations of followers, the purposes the organization is intended to pursue, and its history and tradition are all relevant in considering what kind of leadership is most likely to succeed. Behavior by a leader that seems perfectly appropriate in some contexts may appear quite out of place in another. The cultural styles of countries and regions also differ and can prove important in determining success. "The bearing, presence, and tactics of Bismarck that proved so effective in mid-nineteenth-century Prussia," as John Gardner puts it, "would not have gotten him elected mayor of Los Angeles."[10] Gardner

goes on to note that "Bismarck might be relieved to know this"—and so, one assumes, would the people of Los Angeles.

However, I also argue that it is possible to identify "family resemblances" so that we can make meaningful general statements about leadership as an aspect of human social life. "Leadership" can be recognized across different contexts, cultures, and historical periods even though the precise language used in describing it may be different in each case. My focus will be primarily on leaders of large organizations, particularly the heads of modern nation-states. But I also refer occasionally to leaders from other periods in history and other fields, including corporations and institutions of higher education as well as leaders in smaller and less formal organizations and those who take initiatives to provide leadership informally.

How Much Difference Do Individual Leaders Make?

Magisterial theories of history put forward by a number of nineteenth-century writers including Hegel, Marx, Spencer, and Tolstoy included several varieties of historical determinism in which life flows along inexorably in a direction preordained by God, by class struggle, by social evolution, or by history itself. In this world-historical view, leaders are epiphenomenal, bobbing along in the tide of events: they believe they are making a difference but are simply reflecting forces far more powerful than they.[11] For many observers in the early nineteenth century, Napoleon Bonaparte was the archetypal example of a man who shaped the fortunes of the times by his own will and vision. For Leo Tolstoy in *War and Peace,* Napoleon was a small figure overwhelmed by the mute power of ancient Mother Russia and the commonsense patience of General Kutuzov. In a very different vein, Marx's theory was notoriously weak in exploring the role of human individuals as actors in the great struggles he described (a deficiency Lenin addressed in his little treatise *What Is to Be Done?* and in his own actions as a leader).

Another version of the belief that leaders do not matter, more familiar in our own time, emphasizes the crucial role that followers play in transactions we usually define as leadership. In this view, followers are actually doing most of the work, and those we call "leaders" are responding to the impetuses and desires of others, reflecting what their followers want or advocate. This perspective is a reaction to another nineteenth-century approach, the "Great Man" theory of history in which a few talented, powerful, charismatic figures shape our lives, a view most notably expressed by Thomas Carlyle, in *Heroes and Hero-Worship*. The Great Man theory of history is clearly unacceptable as an explanation for human events. Yet rejecting this approach should not commit us to ignoring leadership. Institutions shaped by history channel and constrain leaders, and the activities of followers surely play a role in shaping and influencing the actions of the leader. But individual leaders matter also.

To illustrate this point, consider the closely contested U.S. presidential election in 2000. Several minor factors could easily have been different. Palm Beach County, Florida, could have used voting arrangements other than butterfly ballots. Al Gore could perhaps have won Arkansas if he had been willing to let Bill Clinton's popularity work for him. A few more voters could have decided not to pull the lever for Ralph Nader in one or two crucial states. The possible counterfactuals go on and on; pondering them is a familiar game in thinking about any decisive moment in history. My point is that any one of a set of minor changes would have led to a different outcome in 2000. Al Gore would then have been president during the first four years (and perhaps the first eight years) of the twenty-first century, including September 11 and its aftermath.

We cannot know exactly what would have happened; but things would surely have been different in many significant ways. Gore might well have pursued a course in Afghanistan not too different from that of George W. Bush. But he would almost certainly not have invaded Iraq, and on this score alone the world today would be a different place. Beyond this, there is

ample evidence that he would have pursued a very different set of goals in office, particularly in environmental policy but also in international and domestic policy more generally. He might or might not have been able to accomplish much, given the constraints of a Republican Congress; but he would surely not have followed exactly the paths chosen by Bush.

On other occasions, the individual leader does not seem to have had much effect, and it seems clear that things would have happened pretty much the same way if someone else had held the office. Context, situation, fortune, opportunity, the desires and capacities of followers—all these things and others matter. But the temperament and capacity, goals and experience of individual leaders matter as well.

Argument of the Book

My purpose in writing this book is to invite readers to join me in thinking through some of the dilemmas we need to sort out to understand leadership more fully. In the chapters that follow, various questions about leadership are explored. The first chapter discusses the basic issue: How can we define leadership? What do we mean by this term? The definition I offer shares a number of features with those put forward by other writers, though it has some distinctive aspects. One of the main themes in chapter 1 is answering the question, What do leaders do? We will look at various kinds of behaviors and attempt to identify what is particularly distinctive about leadership. The chapter also addresses both the effectiveness and the moral status of our leaders. How do we determine what counts as "good" leadership, in terms of either successful or morally praiseworthy leadership?

In chapter 2 we explore the connections between leaders and followers. There cannot be leaders without followers, but the linkages among them vary across organizations and cultures. I consider the connections between leaders and followers on the

model of a concentric circle, first discussing the closest associates of the leader, then ordinary rank-and-file followers, and finally what I call "non-followers" and those who actively resist the directives of a leader. The term "relationship" is often used these days to describe the connections between leaders and followers. The term makes sense in considering leaders and their closest associates, but it is not the best way to think about linkages between leaders and followers in large institutions, men and women unknown to each other personally. Nonetheless, the ways in which followers at all these different levels of an organization influence the actions of leaders are of significant importance in understanding what leaders do.

In light of these discussions about the work that leaders do, chapter 3 identifies some of the personality characteristics and skills leaders demonstrate in different contexts and explores why such qualities are helpful. Although it is not true that all leaders possess a single set of characteristics that prepare them for their tasks, some people take on the work of leadership more readily than others and find it easier to engage in leadership. What distinctive features can we identify among many of these individuals, and how can we recognize such qualities in men and women we consider as possible leaders? In chapter 3, I pay particular attention to the faculty of "judgment," arguing that it is important to successful leadership in almost any context.

Chapter 4 takes up a more specific issue: Does gender makes a difference? Do women lead differently from men? Unlike the other questions we consider, this is not a question that would have been asked by political philosophers (or most other people, for that matter) before the nineteenth century. Leadership—in the sense of wielding official power, making decisions for the entire community, guiding a group of other adults of both sexes—was men's work. Women might have great influence or have power in a more diffuse fashion; but females in authority have been sufficiently anomalous in most cultures that they have always excited comment, much of it negative. In our own time, many more women are providing leadership in multiple con-

texts, and the dimensions of this topic have become quite different and much more complex.

Chapter 5 deals with leadership in democratic communities. This issue is particularly pertinent at this time, as more and more nation-states adopt the structures of democratic government and numerous citizens in other countries aspire to this condition. Many democratic theorists ignore leadership altogether or regard it as a dangerous anomaly that should be kept under control to protect popular sovereignty and popular participation. Some would even argue that in a properly functioning democracy of a manageable size, there would be no such thing as leaders or followers. Yet leadership is as important in a democracy as in any other collective group. One familiar challenge in the United States is opening up a path for leaders to take effective action amid the barriers and obstacles that have been set up to prevent the abuse of power. An equally important dilemma is to figure out how leadership in a democracy can do its work without some people perpetuating their power or accumulating privileges, becoming "more equal" than other citizens. This is what I call "the conundrum of democratic leadership," and in chapter 5 I ask how we might resolve it.

Chapter 6 expands our perspective once again to consider the complex interactions among character, ethics, and leadership. I discuss the diverse impacts that holding power can have on leaders, list some of the attractions of power holding, and consider the pitfalls and downsides that come with power. The chapter also deals with the distinctive temptations that leaders face and explores Lord Acton's familiar dictum about the corrupting effects of power. I ask whether public and private morality are different kinds of ethical codes. I argue that virtues such as courage, integrity, and trustworthiness are valuable to leaders in many contexts and mention a few examples of leaders who have been elevated rather than corrupted by holding power.

The conclusion returns to the theme of questioning and attempts to clarify some issues that have been only briefly raised

in earlier chapters. I also discuss two topics intended to be of particular interest to two sets of readers. The first of these sections, on whether leadership can be taught and learned, is directed especially at would-be leaders and those responsible for identifying and preparing leaders. The second discusses how we might design research that will give us better answers to some of the questions in this book. This second section is intended for my colleagues in political science, including political theorists. In discussing these two topics, I bring together a number of the most significant points made in this book and look to the future—both for individual leaders and for improved understanding of the issues raised here.

How Will My Argument Be Supported?

Each of these chapters includes definitional material, theoretical observations, quotations from political theorists, and examples of leadership. Throughout the book there will be brief discussions of real-world leaders whose experiences illustrate my argument. There are no formal case studies; instead, I use anecdotes to underscore points I want to make. Sometimes I draw directly on my own experience; more often, I refer to the careers of other leaders. Following Machiavelli's example in *The Prince*, I generally cite leaders who will be familiar to most of my readers so that I do not have to provide a great deal of background information. In Machiavelli's case, the leaders were figures like Cesare Borgia and Louis XII of France or familiar leaders from history or myth such as Hannibal and Achilles. He could expect his readers to recognize these men without additional context, even though today most of us require footnotes to place these figures. Similarly, I refer most often to Abraham Lincoln, Lyndon B. Johnson, Margaret Thatcher, Nelson Mandela, Elizabeth I of England, and Franklin Roosevelt.

Most of my illustrations are drawn from the work of leaders at the top of large complex hierarchies. I cite primarily leaders

of nation-states rather than leaders of corporations, universities, military leaders, or those who lead in more informal arenas. There are several reasons for this choice. This is the area I know best as a political scientist; leadership of nation-states is the domain where social scientists have the fullest evidence about how leaders operate, evidence provided by both practitioners and observers. Several of my illustrations are drawn from the careers of U.S. presidents, because there has been a good deal of interesting analysis in recent decades about the way many of them approached leadership. And, as I mentioned, these examples are likely to be known to most of my readers without lengthy biographical explanations. Occasionally, however, I refer to leaders in other contexts, including those not at the head of major formal organizations.

I have written this book with the hope that it will be useful to a variety of audiences: leaders or would-be leaders, and followers attempting to understand and assess their leaders. It is also written as a contribution to the centuries-long conversation about human life in social groups that began before Plato and Aristotle and continues vigorously into the present day.